

The Board of Deputies of British Jews
1 Torriano Mews
Kentish Town
London NW5 2RZ

25th February 2019

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

You have been criticised by a Board deputy of holding ‘secret’ meetings, particularly one with Jenny Formby, general secretary of the Labour Party.. Your defence (JC 22 Feb) is that it was wrong to use the term “secret”, as it was a “private” meeting which happens all the time. There is a difference.

Private meetings usually involve a small number of people, and very little information is given to other people, although - as one Board deputy said - it would be common courtesy to tell other elected deputies beforehand.

Secret meetings are just that: surreptitious. Secrecy is the practice of concealing information from individuals or groups who, it is decided, do not have the “need to know”. Whether your secret meetings are a matter of censure is for the Board to decide.

However, when you travelled almost a thousand miles to visit my wife’s mother in her home in Mallorca to scrutinize her private affairs, it was unquestionably secret; but it was not a meeting. A meeting would have been a planned occasion, involving prior arrangement with not just Anneliese, but principally her close family. You were not a part of the family when you took advantage of my mother-in-law’s vulnerability and imposed yourself on her by stealth. The immediate arrival of her daughter Nikki and granddaughter Kerry proved your undoing and you fled when you realised they were on the way up in the lift. You made no attempt to account for your activities afterwards, which aroused concerns as to your intentions.

You are now being taken to task - quite rightly in my view - for your inconsistency in failing to condemn extremists from political parties, in this case ‘far-right forces’ in Israel. If you will not even condemn the extreme views of your father Barry Kaye, not too much should be expected from you.

Rabbi Mark Goldsmith writes (JN 21 Feb): “The Holocaust Education Trust and others ensure Shoah education is nationwide, and we should join with others who have experienced both genocide and its subsequent denial.” These efforts obviously did not reach your father’s ears. Anyone with any awareness of modern history and the impact it had on your husband’s van der Zyl family would have considered the hate and the incendiary language contained in Mr Kaye’s letters as reprehensible and without any justification. They would have condemned him, but you and your husband’s failure to do so displayed a lack of integrity and compassion.

On becoming Board President you invoked the memory of your father and it remains a stain that you have not distanced yourself from his extremist views. The time for you to repudiate the offensive letters your father sent to me which extolled racist, anti-gentile values and promoted violence, is long overdue. Given your current senior position in the Jewish community, you should know better and I am astonished and disappointed that you have not already done so.

Rabbi Goldsmith has previously written about the Leviticus “holiness code” which is “a mandate to every Jew to be a person who stands up and speaks out when they see injustice.” The Board of Deputies publications include this message: “Politicians and officials from all parties and institutions must lead by example, use responsible language, and call out others when they do not.” If you want to disprove the accusations of moral cowardice and hypocrisy by Board deputy Tal Ofer (Tweet 22 Feb), are you brave enough to speak out and tell the truth?

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker,
Historian