

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

12th July 2018

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

There is much current debate about the IHRA definition of antisemitism and the 'laxer' version adopted by Britain's Labour Party. Other guidance as to what is unacceptable is prescribed by Number 1 of The Ten Commitments in the Board's Jewish Manifesto which says: *Oppose extremism and hate crime, including antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of hate.* It is proper for Jews to determine for themselves what antisemitism is (the so-called 'MacPherson principle') as it is for anyone who is subject to offensive language, discrimination or intimidation to determine they are a victim of hate crime.

Jews like any other people, religious or otherwise, are capable of expressing hurtful remarks, unsavoury views, tasteless 'jokes' or words intended to cause offence - directed at fellow Jews as well as those of other faiths. Recent examples include individuals from all walks of life: actors, celebrities, community leaders, comedians and rabbis.

Many people who had always thought of Albert Einstein - the world's most famous 20th century scientist - as a symbol of humanitarianism were shocked to learn he held prejudiced and stereotypical beliefs about people from other nations and used racial slurs to describe some of the people he met during his journeys in the early 1920s. He travelled throughout Asia and the Middle East and recorded (in his recently published diaries) that Sri Lankans "do little", Egyptians were "as if spewed from hell" and Chinese were "filthy and obtuse". He did not spare members of his own ethnic group - in this case ultra-orthodox Jews in Jerusalem - from his insensitive comments. He described men at the Wailing Wall as "dull-witted ethnic brethren" and a "pitiful sight." Einstein later abandoned his racist and xenophobic views and became known as a staunch advocate for civil rights while living in the United States.

Prominent business man and TV presenter of *The Apprentice*, Lord Alan Sugar, was caught up in a 'racist storm' (JNews June 20, 2018) following a Twitter post with a photo in which he disparagingly compared the Senegal World Cup football team to beach vendors. With obvious reference to their black African ethnicity his text said: "I recognise some of these guys from the beach in Marbella." In another post in response to someone who had said it was "not an OK tweet", Lord Sugar wrote: "why not it is meant to be funny ... for god sake." He was subsequently forced to delete it.

Roseanne Barr, co-creator and star of a popular US TV show paid dearly for posting a racist tweet about Valerie Jarrett, an African-American woman who was a senior adviser to Barack Obama. Ms. Barr initially dismissed accusations that the comment was racist, defending it as "a joke". In 2009 she called Israel "a Nazi state" and recently made racist comments about the Jewish financier George Soros. But it all came crashing down when the ABC network

abruptly cancelled the Roseanne show. Ms Barr's riposte was "Hey, Lefties ... I'm a Jew, Quit Lynching Me!!"

British 'comedian' David Baddiel caused outrage to thousands of BBC Radio 4 listeners with remarks that "seriously breached" editorial standards over "personal, intrusive, derogatory" sex jokes which "demeaned" the Queen. The programme called *Don't Make Me Laugh* was hosted by Baddiel and broadcast on April 20th 2016 as the country celebrated the Queen's 90th birthday and her long service to the nation. The panel made crude personal jokes about the Queen's sex life, with reference to her genitalia. In spite of a damning report by the BBC Trust, which said the programme was a "serious breach" of guidelines relating to "harm and offence", Baddiel's broadcasting career was impervious. His tweet - "sorry royalists" - demonstrated that he was unaware (or couldn't care less) how repellent his conduct was. In February this year he was considered worthy to speak at a meeting in Parliament of the Antisemitism Policy Trust.

The newly elected chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Isaac Herzog, used the Hebrew word for 'plague' to describe marriages in the Diaspora between Jews and non-Jews. He called interfaith marriage an "actual plague," and added "there must be a campaign, a solution." He later said he was using plague as a slang word and did not mean it "in any negative terms." For many, like your refugee mother-in-law, the word "solution" misuses a sensitive term from the Holocaust which can trigger traumatic memories.

Closer to home one of the Board's deputies expressed what have been described as "Islamophobic" and "anti-Arab" views. Roslyn Pine, deputy for Finchley United Synagogue, retweeted posts calling Muslims "the vilest of animals" and said Arabs were "so evil". She defended her right to hold "views against Islam", denying it was Islamophobic to do so, and said "I have views that offend people. That is what a free society is. To criticise a religion - including Judaism - I have no problem with that. In a free society you should be able to criticise a body of ideas." I understand Mrs Pine has been the subject of a number of formal complaints from fellow deputies.

The Rabbi of the Mill Hill synagogue with which you are associated has been criticised for his use of offensive language against Jews. In his weekly *Ask The Rabbi* column Rabbi Yitzchak Schochet described as "kapos" the group of Jews who said Kaddish for sixty-two Palestinians killed by IDF soldiers. 'Kapo' refers to Jewish people who collaborated with the Nazis. They were death camp prisoners who were enlisted by SS guards to help supervise the forced labour of other prisoners, for which they received extra provisions. The chief executive of Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in the UK, Olivia Marks-Woldman, was one of many to criticise Schochet's use of the term, which is widely seen as the worst thing one Jew can call another. The Jewish News (7/6/18) reported her as saying "If non-Jews described a Jew as a 'kapo' it is highly likely it would be interpreted as anti-Semitic." She said it risks "trivialising the Holocaust" and use of the word was "downright offensive." I am not aware of you having publicly rebuked the Orthodox Rabbi for his inappropriate language.

Your late father, Barry Kaye, sent several racially abusive harassing letters to your mother-in-law Nikki and me. We did not know him - having never met him or communicated with him in any way - and as such they were unsolicited. You and your husband, my step-son Darrell, were appraised of some of the gratuitously offensive hate mail at the time, in the hope that you would make it stop. (It didn't.) The letters attacked my character and integrity

and included crude insults based on my being “non-Jewish”. Your father said he wrote “as a member of the Orthodox community” and invoked ‘Jewish Law’. His odious harangues claimed that “Yiddishkeit” was “imbibed with one’s mother’s milk” and “very likely is not a tradition in the Reform community” - thereby insulting your husband’s grandfather, Rabbi Dr Werner van der Zyl. Having disrespected me by saying that I was “... entirely deficient in knowledge of the learning and tradition of the Jewish way of life” - even though I was married to a Rabbi’s daughter and ensured her two Jewish children were properly prepared for their bar and bat mitzvah’s - Mr Kaye threatened physical violence in explicit racist terms:

Had my dear grandmother, Booba Cohen (oversholem) and my dear mother (oversholem) for whom Marie is named for, would have sorted this matter out in the good old fashioned East End Yiddshe way, blood on the floor etc, as indeed my father and his brothers who fought Mosely in 1936 would have done so too, they would have made you an offer you couldn’t refuse! But then you would no [sic] nothing of these people, the Ashkenazi.

Where does such hatred come from? Worryingly, Mr Kaye said his role as ‘Zeida’ (grandfather) was one of “a mentor, teacher and guide to the children, of the Holy Law of the Torah.” You invoked the memory of your father after becoming Board President (JC 13/05/18) but let’s be hopeful that your children will not have imbibed his abominable values. The Jewish community must be bold in ensuring that regressive attitudes like his are not passed down through the generations because of the incalculable harm they do to families and the greater community.

Darrell’s grandfather believed in reconciliation and lived up to the ideals enumerated in Psalm 15. He inspired optimism and left a legacy which will have lasting benefits for the Jewish community. In the 62 years since he founded the Leo Baeck College, almost 200 graduates have been ordained, including Rabbis Deborah Kahn Harris, Maurice Michaels, Laura Janner-Klausner, Julia Neuberger, Danny Rich, Harry Jacobi and Colin Eimer (with whom I studied, albeit briefly) - and some will recall with affection their own bar/bat mitzvah service being conducted by Rabbi van der Zyl.

Ze’ev Rosenkranz, editor of *The Travel Diaries of Albert Einstein*, wrote: “The fact that not even the subsequent humanist icon Einstein did a brilliant job of seeing the Other in himself a decade before he himself became a refugee from the racist policies of the Nazis provides us with a golden opportunity to acknowledge the more disquieting aspects of our own personalities.” A lesson for us all.

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker
Historian



Psalm 15

1 A song of David; O Lord, who will sojourn in Your tent, who will dwell upon Your holy mount?

2 He who walks uprightly and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.

3 He did not slander with his tongue; he did his neighbor no harm, neither did he take up reproach upon his kinsman.

4 A base person is despised in his eyes, and he honors the God-fearing; he swears to [his own] hurt and does not retract.

5 He did not give his money with interest, nor did he accept a bribe against the innocent; he who does these shall not falter forever.