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Mann of the Jewish people

British MP fights anti-Semitism
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MP John Mann PHOTO: BRETT M. RHYNE/TJA

BOSTON – The British Labour Party has struggled recently with charges of anti-Semitism against a number of its prominent members.

John Mann, Labour member of Parliament for Bassetlaw in Yorkshire since 2001, has been outspoken in his criticism of anti-Semitism in his own party, in Great Britain and around the world. His 2015 book, “Antisemitism: The Oldest Hatred,” is a collection of essays, policy papers and speeches from opponents of anti-Semitism throughout the English-speaking world.

The Jewish Advocate spoke with Mann recently while he was visiting the American Jewish Committee New England.



Labour MP John Mann, right, tells fellow Labourite Ken Livingstone on live television, “You’re losing it.” SCREENSHOT: 4NEWS/YOUTUBE

The Jewish Advocate: Thanks for talking with us. I’d like to start by asking what you, a British member of Parliament, is doing here in Boston.

MP John Mann: To talk about anti-Semitism and the work we do in the British Parliament, and how we do it. And our international coalition of parliamentarians. Sharing best practice.



TJA: The Pilgrims were fleeing religious intolerance.

Mann: They were in favor of religious tolerance, and religious freedom of expression. That's what my area has bequeathed to the world.
[smiles]

TJA: Tell us about Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism.

Mann: I've been doing it for quite some years. We methodically assess the situation for anti-Semitism, challenge anti-Semitism, improve systems, from the role of civil society in ensuring that if and when it emerges, we knock it back down.

TJA: Who do you work with in this initiative?

Mann: Politicians deliberately, expressly across the political spectrum, in the U.K. and internationally. We go on the basis, you go on your own backyard first. We don't concentrate on the world as opposed to the U.K., but also do stuff through international cooperation, challenging people on what they're doing and not doing all over the place, as well.

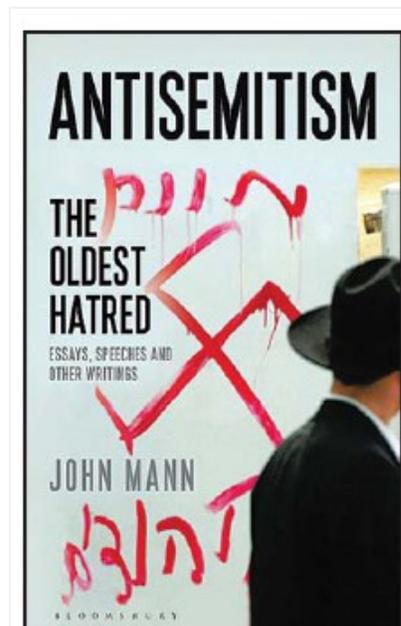
TJA: Tell us what's going on the U.K.

Mann: No different than before. We've identified three types of anti-Semitism: traditional, far right anti-Semitism; left anti-Semitism, which we don't describe as new because it was there before and has been resurrected, using the cloak of anti-Zionism-as-racism; and Muslim anti-Semitism, which by definition wasn't there in the past because there were virtually no Muslims.

Some of that's quite benign, in terms of people's general attitudes. Some of it is virulent, in terms of campaigning and, in some instances, terrorism, which of course is a threat to everyone; but what we've seen in other parts of Europe has been directed against Jewish communities. We haven't had terrorist outrages against the Jewish community that other European capitals and cities have. We're ever vigilant on that.

TJA: You've come into conflict with some members of your own party over this issue.

Mann: We don't hide from that, from anti-Semitism. We deal with our own backyard first, our own party first, our own localities. That's right and proper we do.



"Antisemitism: The Oldest Hatred," by John Mann, Bloomsbury, 2015

He claimed that the 1932 Nazi Party election manifesto was pro-Zionist. In fact, there was no 1932 Nazi Party manifesto; there were 25 principles that were established previously, and of those 25, there were five that were expressly, specifically anti-Semitic. None of them were pro-Zionist, directly or indirectly.

So he invented something on national media in order to justify his support for comments made by a new young, Muslim woman MP. She had already not just retracted her statements from the past, but fully apologized for them, and asked for assistance on further understanding why they were offensive and how they were offensive. She wanted to meet the Jewish community both in her locality and elsewhere, so she could get to grips with the impact it had on people. I was planning to work with her that very day.

Livingstone was defending the views of someone who'd withdrawn, retracted and apologized for their views. Him, a white, male, middle class man; her, a young, Muslim woman. This is all you need to know about Mr. Livingstone.

TJA: Labour has developed a rather bad reputation regarding anti- Semitism.

Mann: That's because a lot of anti- Semites who were previously out with the Labour Party have chosen to join. What I've repeatedly called on the Labour Party leader, Mr. [Jeremy] Corbyn, to do is to expel these people. We neither want nor need them in the Labour Party. There should be no room for racists in the Labour Party. These racists should be invited to leave, and if they refuse to leave, they should be expelled.

TJA: And has Corbyn acted on that?

Mann: Not sufficiently. Not quickly enough; they're still there. And not sufficiently; they're still there. It's the definition of leadership. I've called on him to show he's a leader by getting rid of these people. I think if it was any other form of racism, that would have already happened.

TJA: So it's specifically because it's anti-Semitism that he doesn't act on it.

Mann: Well, he hasn't acted on it. That's a fact.

TJA: Were you surprised that the Labour vote increased – by millions – under Corbyn in the last election?

Mann: No. The Conservative vote increased, as well, and they won the election, despite being one of the most useless governments for many decades in any country. An election we should have won easily, we lost.

TJA: Why do you think that is?

Mann: People weren't convinced on our vision for running the country. They thought we were outdated and outmoded in our vision. Anti- Semitism was just a good example of that

itself cost us the election. If the Jewish vote had stayed with us in proportion to the rest of the vote, we would have been in power now. Corbyn would have been prime minister. So his failure to act on anti-Semitism has cost him being prime minister.

TJA: That's powerful stuff.

Mann: It's factual. For other reasons, we did incredibly well in London, with the exception of those areas with a Jewish population. There are seats that we have won for the first time this year; whereas there are seats that we held for quite a number of years under Tony Blair in London that we didn't win. They're the areas with Jewish populations.

The Jewish vote voted overwhelmingly against Labour in this election, and that hasn't happened in a general election before. I don't mean there hasn't been a majority for the Conservatives in the Jewish vote; this was overwhelming. That's never happened before in history. Ever.

TJA: What does Corbyn need to do in order to fix that?

Mann: He needs to do three things. First, he needs to unequivocally come out with a proper speech on anti-Semitism, explaining how he's going to tackle anti-Semitism, and why. He needs to make a serious speech on the subject, which he hasn't done.

Secondly, he needs to lead from the front, by example, calling out the anti-Semites.

Thirdly, he needs to throw them out of the party. There's quite a lot of them who've joined who are anti-Semites, or have joined in and gone beyond reasonable discourse in what they've said. Now, whether you expel every single one or whether you do it in other ways is important: when the ringleaders haven't been expelled, no one's going to think you're serious.

TJA: Why do you think they joined Labour and not the Tories?

Mann: I think they were attracted by Jeremy Corbyn; which is precisely why he needs to show leadership and ensure they've nothing to do with him. It's exactly why it is his responsibility: they joined because of him, he's the one, therefore, who must lead.

TJA: What is it about Corbyn that attracted them?

Mann: He was antiestablishment.

He was a bit different. And he had something to say. On equality, for example. A bit like Bernie Sanders in the United States. Same kind of appeal.

TJA: Except that Bernie Sanders didn't attract racists or anti-Semites; Trump did.

Mann: That's because Bernie Sanders was unequivocal on anti-Semitism, so they were not attracted to him.

his views are. My suspicion is, from my discussions, that his views are fine, and good. But he's not put them together coherently publicly. I find that odd.

TJA: Why do you think that is?

Mann: I dunno. I keep challenging him.

TJA: And how does he respond?

Mann: There's a lot of people around him who've got a very problematic record on anti-Semitism. Perhaps he's trying to unduly placate them. But there's a great chance for him to boldly come out as a champion against anti-Semitism: back our demands, get rid of these people. People would see that as true leadership. So whether they're surprised or delighted, doesn't matter.

Here in the U.S., if Trump were to do the same – if he were to call out the anti-Semites and say, "I'll have nothing to do with them, they're not supporters of mine" – that would also be significant.

These people, you can't simply say, "I don't agree with them, I'm not responsible for them supporting me." No. You're the leader. You lead. You lead amongst your own followers. That's always been the case.

TJA: You say you push him. Do you see Corbyn doing anything along those lines any time soon?

Mann: I don't know. The only sense is, I don't know. He's got plenty of opportunity. We've offered him plenty of platforms.

I don't think he can sit on the fence. He'll either be choosing to do nothing, or he'll be anti-. He can't fudge it. He's not in a situation where we will allow him to fudge it or where he can fudge it. Livingstone's either expelled or he isn't. There's no middle ground there. And if he goes to middle ground, no one's going to accept that as middle ground. And he's a loser.

TJA: Within the party.

Mann: Oh, and outside the party. A fudge will not work when it comes to racism.

TJA: Do you think this will bring him down?

Mann: I think it will either make or break his leadership, one way or other. I think if he were to act appropriately, it would transform his leadership. He would seem as a very different person, to the critics of his, the skeptics, the people who didn't vote Labour. I think it would be very significant.

As in the same, actually, it would be for Trump. Different situation, but if he acted appropriately on anti-Semitism, I'm sure people would say, "Oh, I didn't expect that." What

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They're different politics, very different people, but it's the same principle: prove you're a leader.

TJA: Do you see a timeframe where Corbyn has this opportunity?

Mann: He doesn't have the timing of his choosing. Eventually, he'll run away with himself. This year, he has to do something very significant. Otherwise, he's by definition a fudge.

TJA: So he has a matter of months, really.

Mann: It's this year. Livingstone has to be sorted this year, as an example. Palming that off will be not seen as the middle ground, it'll be seen as acquiescence. [pause] It will be acquiescence. It's not how I will see it, it will be acquiescence.

TJA: If he does acquiesce, what happens then?

Mann: He's demonstrated he's not a leader. So he'll have a difficult time.

TJA: Within the party.

Mann: And outside.



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