

The 2020 Morris and Manja Leigh Lecture

Antisemitism today: Can it be combated?

**Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor
UK Government Independent Adviser on Antisemitism**

21 October 2020

The Morris and Manja Leigh lecture is an annual JPR event at which leading public figures – politicians, academics, journalists involved in contemporary Jewish affairs – share their thoughts with JPR supporters from across the world about a key issue of the day. Sponsored and hosted by JPR President Lord Leigh of Hurley in memory of his late grandfather and step-grandmother, it is one of the highlights of JPR’s annual calendar. The 2020 lecture was the eighteenth in the series and was delivered by one of the UK’s leading campaigners against antisemitism, Lord Mann. The text below is a transcript of his remarks.

The subject of antisemitism is hardly the most inspiring one. I have one of those jobs which I would like to see abolished, as we are so on top of it that it is no longer needed. However, I fear that in the five years in which I am appointed to do the role, the role will be needed because antisemitism, as we know through history, has always morphed in different ways. Understanding it and looking at its manifestations are critical to dealing with its contemporary forms. This is where JPR comes in in such a big way. One of the things I have said repeatedly, especially in other countries, is that it is vital never, ever to overstate the dangers of antisemitism. If we cry wolf, we are going to experience big problems. But likewise, we must never understate, underestimate, and ignore antisemitism.

What we need, and what this country is better at than any other in the world, is a factual-based approach. We have two organisations that are fundamental to that. First, the Community Security Trust, whose entire mantra is to say it as it is, not to overstate, not to understate. Their credibility rests on that and their credibility with government is at an all-time high. They keep the real facts. And secondly, your organisation, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, whose research far outreaches that of any other organisation. I am not just talking about this country; I am talking about worldwide. This is serious level work that you do, and therefore in thanking you, I am thanking everyone involved in JPR and everyone supporting JPR. One of the things I have learnt when I have done work on antisemitism is that people underestimate the importance of them doing their little bit. I have always said in my call to parliamentarians: do your little bit. If everyone does their little bit, we win. But I have noted that in the Jewish community, and those around the Jewish community, people often underestimate just how powerful their little bit has been. They are doing the right thing, they are motivated in the right way, they are doing it brilliantly. You are doing it brilliantly. But do not underestimate the power of what you are doing, of your little bit. It is the cumulative total of these

little bits that gives us our strength. If everyone pulls their weight and does their little bit, we will always win. Our problem is when people don't do their bit. One of the things I hope you will do, after tonight, is tell people a bit more. Be proud. Don't be shy about the bit that you contribute, in whatever way you contribute, as that brilliance is crucial. As antisemitism morphs in its different way, we will face new challenges, different challenges.

I produced a report with the All-Parliamentary Group which I chaired in Parliament for fifteen years, so we're going back nearly fifteen years, where we identified three problems. First, Islamist antisemitism, not a problem in this country much in the past. Second, left antisemitism – not a new problem even though it's called the 'New Antisemitism' but of course, that's historically nonsense. One only needs to look at some of the things that were said in the 1980s and the 1900s as the Labour Party was formed to see how the battle of antisemitism in the Labour Party was at full throttle then, as it has been sadly again in recent years. That is history re-writing itself. That is not new history. It was hidden away, it was dampened down, it was beaten for a long period of time, but it has resurrected. The New Antisemitism on the left isn't new, it has been resurgent, it is a big problem. And third, antisemitism on the right. It has been there too, but think how much education there has been. Think how intolerant we have been of Nazis and neo-Nazis and their fellow travellers and yet right-wing antisemitism remains a problem today, in this country like all others. That shows the dangers of the virus of antisemitism. It is always changing in order to try to meet the new times.

I have a report coming out tomorrow: 'The Anti-Vaxxers and Antisemitism'. And guess what? Surprise, surprise: the vast majority of anti-vaxxers manage to bring conspiracy theories, and then antisemitism, into what they say. It is extraordinary how often it comes up in the discussions that they have, which we have looked at in detail and will report on tomorrow. Wherever you find the anti-vaxxers, you don't need to scratch far, and you'll find antisemitism and conspiracy theories. It is the circle of politics: the far right and the far-left overlapping. Often, you don't know if they're coming from the far left or the far right in some of the new forms of antisemitism. The way that the anti-vaxxers have developed their conspiracy theories demonstrates this vividly and dangerously. Dangerous today and even more dangerous tomorrow, when our personal health, as well as our public health, will rely on the widespread acceptance of a vaccine to defeat coronavirus. Yet again, antisemitism will be a part of this, and our ability to battle it, expose it and beat it will be a part, in this case, of the biggest public health challenge of all our lives.

So the format of antisemitism has changed, and one other thing that has changed significantly in that fifteen years – and we have been slow to respond – is the growth of the internet; even the domination of the internet, one might say now. The internet is still new, but we have been far too slow in changing our modalities of operation to meet that challenge. The extremists have been far sharper, far quicker at using the internet. To sum up what I think it's really done: in the past you would have a little 'Billy No Mates', a 16-year-old sat in his bedroom spewing out his antisemitism and his hatred of others to himself. But now Billy No Mates is connected up with all the other Billy No Mates, not just in this country, but Hans No Mates or Jürgen No Mates across the world. And suddenly they all have a few mates and feel empowered. Tiny numbers of extremists, of hatred-filled people, brought together. The internet has given them a feeling of power, which is why it is so vital that we work through the legislation, and other action, including the very effective American advertisers boycott that we've seen recently, putting commercial pressure from the big corporates forcing the internet companies to take hatred off their platforms. We still have a long way to go and frankly, I've not been minded to join the praise of Facebook, where it's taken ten years of battling simply to get them to take Holocaust denial off their platform. It is outrageous that it was ever on in the first place. And much more of what is on there, and remains on there, is outrageous. We saw that so painfully with the pathetic utterances of Wiley that dominated one weekend for so many people on social media. We do not yet fully have our heads round the reach of social media, but we're learning and we're improving.

Let me give you an example. It's a most powerful example because I bring you good news. You see, I think we're winning. It concerns the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance – the IHRA definition of antisemitism. Or, as I call it, the IHRA declaration on antisemitism. The UK was the first country in the world to adopt it in 2016. Every political party in Westminster has now adopted it in full and is using it. All eight, every single one. That is remarkable. It's quick. It's very, very powerful and I can tell you that the way it's operating, we don't need to publicise every antisemite, or rather more likely, every ignorant politician who falls into antisemitism. We can get the parties to act, whether by disciplining them, expelling them or re-educating them, and to take appropriate action using the IHRA definition. I can tell you that is happening across the political parties in this country, more so than in any other country in the world. We should take comfort. We should keep an eye on them to make sure they are consistent. I can assure you that I will challenge publicly any party that is inconsistent in its use of the definition, whichever party it is.

But the IHRA definition is not just about politicians and Westminster. Two-thirds of the local authorities in Britain have already adopted it. I want them all to adopt it. There is no reason why any should not do so, whether they have a Jewish community of any size, or virtually no Jews living in their local authority at all. It is ethically and morally, but also practically and pragmatically the sensible thing for a local authority to do. But we have more than two-thirds already. I hope that by Chanukah this year we will be well over the 80% mark, and getting closer to the prize of 100% of local authorities. That's Britain at its best.

Our universities are slower, but it's coming. 32 now have adopted IHRA. More need to, many more. Some big ones need to, but three have signed up in the last ten days. That's very, very encouraging. They will all be given the challenge to do so, I can assure you. None will be left untouched by me, regardless of what anybody else does. We should be working together, pressuring those universities, persuading them that there is no intellectual, pragmatic, academic or legal reason why any British university, or, indeed, any university in the western world, should not be adopting and fully using the IHRA definition. And what that would give is a system to guarantee the rights of every Jewish student, individually as well as collectively, on every course, in every university. Our universities are meant to be the most tolerant parts of our country. Well, any infringement on the freedoms of a Jewish student denies that. Every university needs to be open to every student, and that means to every single Jewish student at all times. A high threshold, but one we cannot allow ever to drop below. That is a challenge for our universities. A lot of work is needed, and attitudes, structures and governance approaches in some of the bigger ones will need to change, because what they are doing is not good enough. There is not equal opportunity for all Jewish students in all our universities yet. That is intolerant in 2020 in my country.

But this is where we are going to have an unexpected success: I identified the importance of sports clubs in adopting IHRA, and football clubs in particular. Why? Well, they are part of civic society, but their reach into their supporter base is huge. They reach well beyond what any of us could do, well beyond governments, well beyond presidents. The first football club to adopt the IHRA definition, Chelsea, has a social media reach of over 500 million people. I have seen some of the results of them putting things out across the world and I can tell you it's heart-warming. Already we have case studies of Chelsea supporters in this country who have spewed out antisemitism, being invited in by Chelsea, being re-educated, and who have learnt and have apologised for their ignorance. That is powerful stuff. Now, you imagine if all our leading football clubs and sports clubs in this country do that. All doing their little bit, reaching out to that tiny minority of their supporter base, whether it's those who go to football matches or those who are sat like little Billy No Mates at home, perhaps wearing a Chelsea shirt when they're spewing out their hatred. You imagine if Frank Lampard [the current manager of Chelsea and one of its most well-regarded former players] is writing to Billy No Mates. How powerful. I am not at liberty to list all the clubs who are about to adopt the IHRA definition. At

the moment we have Chelsea, West Ham United and AFC Bournemouth. In the last week we have secured the second biggest club in Germany, Borussia Dortmund. We have Tennis Borussia from Berlin as well. But this is just the beginning. I predict confidently that when we get to the Chanukah celebrations this year, you'll be able to wear many football shirts of your clubs saying 'My club has adopted IHRA.' You will be able to say that my club is saying to its Jewish supporters 'We treat you as equals. You are welcome here.' I anticipate a lot of very, very good news in the imminent future about how our football clubs in this country, and then quickly after, many more famous clubs from across Europe, will adopt the IHRA definition and will use it in their work with their players, their stewards, and their fan bases, and from there, out further using that huge reach they have across the world.

JPR's role has to remain quantifying the situation; telling us what is happening, telling us what to look for. Your approach is so critical. Your academic standing, your integrity is so vital. There are going to be issues. I work closely with Katharina von Schnurbein, the European Union's Commission Rapporteur and Envoy on antisemitism. The UK leaving the EU, post-Brexit, is going to create some challenges in the field of academic cooperation. We as a country will need to rise to that and indeed, you may well need some very clever, well thought out support from Howard Leigh, myself and others in Parliament, to make sure the academic linkage doesn't dip down because it's been very, very successful. That's a challenge which I am confident we can face together and win through.

My message to everyone here tonight is very straightforward, and I end with this. I am Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor. You have not heard of Holbeck Moor, but you have heard of Cable Street. Well, you are going to hear about Holbeck Moor and a lot more. You see, two weeks before Cable Street, in the city where I come from, the city of Leeds, Mosley and the Blackshirts assembled in the poorest, most working-class part of the city. They intended to march, recruiting the white working-class with them, to the Jewish quarter known as the Leylands, through the city centre. It was the day that British fascism died, because on that Sunday, 30,000 local people turned out. 30,000! And they physically removed, and I mean physically, Mosley and the Blackshirts from the city of Leeds. And do you know what happened next? There was no JPR researching, sadly, at that time. There were no journalists reporting. There were no cameras, no camera crews, no artists painting pictures. It was not like Cable Street. The middle classes were not there. What happened is that the 30,000 decent people of Leeds went back to work the following day, the Monday, and carried on their lives as before. It is a powerful message. It's what normal people do. Fascists turn up in your local area wanting to disrupt it, demanding you support them. Normal people remove them. And that story is a story of encouragement for the future, because in this country, the normal people are the vast, overwhelming majority. The active antisemites are a tiny minority. The ignorant ones who join with them are our key targets in turning them around.

Please carry on working for and supporting JPR. It's a fundamental part of the jigsaw that we need to keep together in battling antisemitism in this country. And it's a model for the rest of the world in ensuring that what we do is factually based. Never overestimate the threat. Never underestimate the problem. Then we win.

/ About the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)

The **Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)** is a London-based research organisation, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom and across Europe by conducting research and informing policy development in dialogue with those best placed to positively influence Jewish life. It has undertaken numerous studies of antisemitism over many years including the two European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights surveys of Jewish people's perceptions and experiences of antisemitism in multiple EU Member States (2013 and 2018), and *Antisemitism in contemporary Great Britain* (2017), the most extensive assessment of attitudes towards Jews and Israel ever undertaken in the UK.

/ About Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor

John Mann was the elected Member of Parliament for Bassetlaw from June 2001 until 2019. Before entering Parliament, he worked for the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AEEU), the TUC and TULO. He is a former Chair of Labour Students and just prior to his election he was involved in running the family business. Since his time in student politics, John has been vocal in his condemnation of all forms of racism and intolerance and has worked tirelessly to combat it.

The campaigns and the issues that he has raised in Parliament were in direct response to concerns that had been raised by Bassetlaw residents. This led to John running high profile campaigns for example, on consumer debt and heroin and treatment for addiction. He ran successful campaigns to keep his local hospital open, and more recently highlighted the problems surrounding sexual harassment and assault in Parliament.

John was re-elected to the highly influential Treasury Select Committee in September 2017 and Chaired the Treasury Sub-Committee. In a previous period on the committee, he led the campaign for more transparency in the consumer credit industry. John has also been Parliamentary Private Secretary to Minister for the Olympics, Tessa Jowell, and for Richard Caborn, then Minister for Sport.

In the summer of 2005, he was appointed Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism (APPG). John has commissioned two major All-Party Inquiries into Antisemitism and a further inquiry into Electoral Conduct. In 2008, John established the Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism (ICCA). In May 2009, John received the American Jewish Committee's (AJC's) Jan Karski Award in recognition of his commitment and work in fighting antisemitism. In 2010, he chaired the Football Association's Task Force on Antisemitism and Islamophobia in football.

In July 2019, John Mann stepped down as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism when he was appointed the Government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism in one of Theresa May's final acts as Prime Minister. He joined the House of Lords in October 2019 as Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor.

© Institute for Jewish Policy Research 2020

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, now known or hereinafter invented, including photocopying and recording or in any information storage or retrieval system, without the permission in writing of the publisher.

Published by Institute for Jewish Policy Research
ORT House
126 Albert Street
London NW1 7NE, UK

+44 (0)20 7424 9265
jpr@jpr.org.uk
www.jpr.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 252626