

Countering Anti-Semitism *By Harvey Blitz*



Anti-Semitism has been the bane of the Jewish people at least since the time of Amalek, who attacked us in the desert, shortly after the miracle at the Red Sea. Throughout our history, virulent hatred has resulted in exile, massacres, expulsions, banishment to ghettos, deprivation of basic human rights, restrictions on ways to make a living, quotas, restrictive covenants and other manifestations of contempt. The ugly cry of “Death to the Jews!”

has resonated throughout time.

The culmination of this hatred was the Holocaust, clearly the epitome of evil and the lowest point to which humanity has sunk.

Anti-Semitism is always with us. Even on Shabbat, when we rejoice and put our day-to-day cares behind us, we say the *Av Harachamim* prayer (except on special celebratory occasions) in which we recall those who gave their lives *al kiddush Hashem*, for the sanctification of the Divine name.

For about a half-century we Jews thought that the world had changed, that the Holocaust had, in a sense, given anti-Semitism a bad name. With the exception perhaps of David Duke and other extreme right-wing bigots, even those who made statements clearly denigrating the Jewish people felt compelled to deny that they were anti-Semites.

No more. Since the outbreak of the current wave of relentless terror against Israel, the government of Israel's necessary and appropriate actions to defend its people have brought forth a wave of condemnation of Israel that is often indistinct from condemnation of Jews. This outpouring of hatred is at its fiercest

where memories of the Holocaust and other atrocities against Jews should be strongest—in Europe. There, classic anti-Semitism has been joined by Muslim hatred of the Jewish people. This brand of Muslim hatred is manifested by attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions, including acts of terror such as the bombing of the Istanbul

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synagogues. I attended the funerals for the victims in Istanbul, and the destruction of the synagogues as well as the pain of the survivors will always be part of my soul.

In this issue of *Jewish Action*, Toby Klein Greenwald remembers the anti-Semitism that spurred the Hebron Massacre of 1929; additionally, Rabbi Berel Wein discusses Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, a movie that

many believe could further incite anti-Semitism. But significantly, the Orthodox Union has gone beyond commenting on anti-Semitism to taking active steps in confronting the phenomenon and looking for solutions.

In late April, Betty Ehrenberg, director of international and communal affairs of the OU's Institute for Public Affairs (IPA), was appointed by Secretary of State Colin Powell to be a member of the official United States delegation at the Conference on Anti-Semitism, sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OU was one of only five Jewish organizations to officially represent the United States. Tellingly, the conference was held in Berlin.

The message emanating from the Conference on Anti-Semitism was one of hope. Secretary Powell personally attended the conference and forcefully lobbied his colleagues for a meaningful response to the increasing acts of anti-Semitism. The OSCE issued the “Berlin Declaration,” a statement of commitment on the part of fifty-five countries to not only recognize the problem and causes of anti-Semitism, but to also take concrete action against this poisonous hatred through monitoring, legislation and education. The clear and unequivocal declaration demonstrated that Europe cannot deny or cover up the disease of bigotry that can only erode the very fabric of a nation.

Of particular importance, the statement addressed one of our most profound concerns—anti-Semitism under the guise of anti-Zionism—by declaring “unambiguously that international developments or political issues, including those in Israel and elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism.”

The problem, of course, is far from solved and is not going to vanish, but we have something positive on which to build; much work lies ahead of us, and we are more determined than ever to do it. **JA**