

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

21st August 2018

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

Michael Desmond, a Hackney politician, writing in the Jewish News (Aug 9) said: "Hatred is bad - wherever it comes from." I do not know of anyone who would disagree with that, and I do not believe any sincere, right thinking person would. Referring to the Cable Street incident of 76 years ago Mr Desmond says "... if there's one thing we must learn from that generation, it's to be resilient. And to avoid hate." Well at least one person, Barry Kaye, took the contrary view and used the event as inspiration for promoting more hate and threatening violence.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has been much in the news recently, due - amongst other things - to the Labour Party's reluctance to endorse the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism amidst concerns about limitations on freedom of speech. Like you he went to a polytechnic, but unlike you he cut short his attendance after a year and didn't obtain a degree.

Last month Dame Margaret Hodge, the former Labour minister, confronted Corbyn in parliament and called him an anti-Semitic racist. He responded by initiating a Labour Party disciplinary investigation against her, which she likened to the persecution faced by Jews in Nazi Germany. In the Jewish News she was reported as saying she "kept thinking what did it feel like to be a Jew in Germany in the Thirties." Hodge was born in 1944 in Cairo, to Jewish refugee parents from Germany, so she had no personal experience of the Nazi horrors. But your mother-in-law Nikki and her parents knew precisely what it felt like living in the hate filled, threatening environment of Hitler's Germany - from which they miraculously managed to escape to England in 1939.

Your family was - mercifully - unaffected by the horrors of the Holocaust and that might explain your limited understanding of the lingering anguish experienced by those like your mother-in-law and her family for whom it was too personally searing to be forgotten.

Given that your father Barry Kaye would have been cognizant of the wider family history through his regular contact with you and your husband, my step-son Darrell, it is difficult to understand how he could be so insensitive of the Holocaust background in sending my wife and I hate material. It commenced immediately after the end of the 2012 Court hearing in which you and your husband opposed an application by Nikki to have contact with her grandchildren. This exacerbated Nikki's distress, because having already lost many relatives who were murdered by the Nazis, she was then denied contact with living ones.

Mr Kaye claimed that "my dear son-in-law Darrell and I have a remarkable friendship." One remarkable consequence was that Darrell, who had been lovingly raised by his mother,

inexplicably cut off all contact with her. In communicating with me, Mr Kaye said “I write to you as a member of the Orthodox community”, “the senior member of the family” and declared “I have been given complete permission by both [Marie and Darrell] to write to you on my own behalf ...” I sent you copies of his hate letters so you knew of their content and I implored you on three separate occasions to intervene and put a stop to our receiving hate mail from your father - to no avail. Inaction in the face of racism is complicity.

How far did his hate seep into the family fabric and affect your children for which he claimed he was their “mentor, teacher and guide to the children of the Holy Law of the Torah.”?

Its a pity that your father never met Michael Desmond - clearly a completely different calibre of person, who had learnt a positive lesson from the past: *to avoid hate*.

In a recent New Statesman article co-authored by you, it urges Corbyn to “honestly and fully own up to the problematic nature of some of his own past actions,”. This can be applied to all instances of hatred and racism. We need community leaders who will speak out unashamedly against any form of hatred, wherever it festers or lies dormant - whether in political parties or in families. Where are they?

It seems necessary to remind you (again) that the Board’s Jewish Manifesto emphasises the need for Holocaust awareness and supports education through survivor testimony. It encourages solidarity with all victims of Nazi persecution and recommends initiatives to enable young people to shadow survivors of the Holocaust

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker,
Historian