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## News Briefing No. 57. May 2013

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*A Digest of Current Social Information*

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### OSBORNE'S OBLOQUY

2 April 2013: In a speech to workers at a Morrisons' distribution centre, Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, delineated his view of the government's measures to curb the excesses of our welfare state. In tune with all recent government rhetoric he heavily commended the work ethic and the urgent need to control the 'something for nothing culture' that has trapped people into dependency. He wanted the welfare system fixed, and categorised those who thought otherwise as being "on the wrong side of the argument". He predicted that those "vested interests" who defend the current system [Church of England Bishops, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, united churches and sociology professors?] would complain loudly and "with predictable outrage" about every change to a system which is failing. He then proceeded to spell out the government's well-known case.

Predictably, I am on mostly on the side of the complainants. The government's legitimate aspiration is, as far as possible, to get unemployed people back into work. My reservation is whether present policies are the best way to secure that aim; indeed whether such an aim is achievable in the present economic climate. The much vaunted Work Programme has had little success, and opportunities for even low paid work continue to be extremely limited. This is not, on the whole, because people locked into a life on benefits are work-shy. They are indeed trapped in dependency but for the most part would like nothing better than a decent job. I see the majority of working-age benefit claimants as victims rather than laggards. For one reason or another they have lost their way and have become as much unemployable as unemployed. I see the duty of government as one of straining every nerve to bolster employment and give help and encouragement to jobless people, not to brand them as shirkers, subject them to a financial blitzkrieg, and occasion their destitution.

Two days after his Sittingbourne speech, while visiting Derby, Osborne ventured into even more controversial territory. He suggested that there was a question for government and society – and the taxpayers who pay for the welfare state – about subsidising lifestyles like that of Mick Philpott. He thought that there needed to be a debate about that. Readers may be surprised that here I agree with him, but only provided the debate extends to those who are not at all like Philpott. Quite apart from the bungled plan which led to the deaths of six of his children, Philpott was clearly using the benefits system for his own ends. This convicted scoundrel is at the extreme end of a minority who have massively exploited the welfare system, and who so far - largely unchecked under successive governments – have given benefit claimants in general a bad name,



allowing some parts of the media and political opportunists to popularise the view of people as on benefits as worthless scroungers.

## A GREAT YORKSHIREMAN

There were a number of notable deaths in April, none more grievous than that of Sir Robert Edwards, who with Patrick Steptoe pioneered the development of in vitro fertilisation (IVF). They did so in the face of vehement opposition, particularly from the Roman Catholic Church. This persisted even after the birth of Louise Brown, the world's first 'test-tube baby', born on 25 July 1978. Writing in *The Sex Directory*, only a couple of years later, Ann Darnbrough observed that some people regarded the process as "against nature" and reacted to research on fertilised eggs or the disposal of surplus pre-embryos "as though a baby was being tortured and sacrificed". But the tide turned. Today around five million of us worldwide owe our lives to IVF, and the technique is generally (though still not universally) seen as one of the supreme achievements of our time, particularly by grateful parents.

A dedicated socialist and humanitarian, Edwards was awarded the Nobel prize for physiology or medicine in 2010 and was knighted in the following year. Because the prize is not awarded posthumously, Steptoe, who died in 1988, missed out, but, along with Anne Williams, is not forgotten.

## HE [OR SHE] WHO WOULD VALIANT BE

I was surprised that Margaret Thatcher chose this hymn for her funeral service. Those who know their Bunyan's will recall that elsewhere he reproved the rich for their sins of pride and greed, and their oppression of the poor. Perhaps she just liked the tune.

## GETTING PERSONAL

25 April 2013: This morning, Radio 5Live had an interesting discussion on pornography. It was spoiled by excessive delicacy about language (I nearly said pussyfooting, but - who knows - that may have a sexual connotation). The basic facts here are that both men and women want to derive pleasure and satisfaction from sexual intimacy, not necessarily in the context of marriage. Men usually get satisfaction pretty easily, often too easily; women rather less so. That is why female genital mutilation is so abhorrent. I have avoided writing about porn in the 'We Hate' series, because I think that some of it can be helpful. If I had been aware of elementary pornography in the 50s and 60s, it *might* have saved my disastrous first marriage. It was only in later years that I became aware of what was available, some of it extreme and unpleasant, and realised that it could be educationally beneficial or perniciously damaging. The question was, and remains, where a line should be drawn.

On this same day I heard that the Prime Minister had criticised Luis Suarez for setting a bad example. While a long-standing Liverpool FC supporter, I cannot defend the biting of opponents. But I have always distinguished between spur-of-the-moment and premeditated misconduct. I feel that politicians should be particularly wary of talking about bad examples. Some of them have not excelled in recent years.

While putting the finishing touches to my imperfect 'We Hate' piece on anti-Semitism, and noticing the Jewish reputation for hard work, I was reminded that the Nazis adopted the slogan 'Arbeit macht frei' and used it over the gates of their death camps. While I am not suggesting that the DWP is into a 'final solution', is there perhaps a similarity to the doctrine of work being the way out of dependency?

## DISABILITY HORIZONS

This web-based monthly magazine, which is supplemented by audio content, was founded by its co-editors Srin Madipalli and Martyn Sibley, both of whom have spinal muscular atrophy. It promotes itself as offering a 21st century view of disability (which is welcome) and seeks to provide positive, interesting and useful content to help disabled people achieve whatever they wish. It is archived back to April 2011 (I'm just catching up) and ranges over travel, news (John Pring's weekly news round-up of happenings in the disability world), sport, work, arts and culture, relationships, technology, personal stories, health and wellbeing, lifestyle and resources.

E.mail: [editor@disabilityhorizons.com](mailto:editor@disabilityhorizons.com); website: <http://disabilityhorizons.com>

## TUITION FEES

Criticism of the rise in tuition fees seems to have evaporated, lost among other financial assaults

of recent times. But some of its predicted effects are coming to pass. The first report of the Independent Commission on Fees, published on 9 August 2012, revealed that total university applicant numbers in England had dropped by 8.8 % in the first year of higher fees, some 37,000 down on the 2010-11 academic year. The decline in student applicants in England for 2012-13 was not mirrored in other parts of the UK where fees had not been increased. The drop in applicants in England could be only partly explained by falling numbers of young people in the UK population. However, there did not appear to have been any disproportionate drop-off in applications from poorer or less advantaged communities.

A further report, published on 10 April 2013, found that the gap between working class boys and girls going to university widened in the first year of the new tuition fees regime. Women are now a third more likely to enter higher education than men. And while overall the fall in acceptances did not have any disproportionate impact on less privileged areas of England, young male acceptances from these areas declined over two years, while young female acceptances increased. In those areas where university participation is lowest, when compared with 2010 the number of young male acceptances fell by 1.4%, while young female acceptances increased by 0.9%.

Will Hutton, who chairs the Commission, found these trends “particularly worrying”. The fact that women are now a third more likely to go to university than men, signals a danger that “the higher fees may be having a disproportionate impact on men, who are already under-represented at university”. He felt that the Government, universities and schools should consider whether specific measures are necessary to address their concerns.

The new report also highlights a worrying widening in the participation gap at the UK’s 13 best universities, a group which includes Oxford and Cambridge. Acceptances to these elite universities rose in 2012, in contrast with the decline elsewhere, but admissions from England’s lowest participation areas fell by 0.1% while it rose among those from all other neighbourhood groups. In the most advantaged areas acceptances rose by 4.7%. The findings indicate that students from the richest fifth of areas are ten times more likely to go to one of the top 13 universities than those from the poorest fifth.

The five members of the panel are: Will Hutton (Chair), Principal of Hertford College, Oxford University, and Chair of the Big Innovation Centre; Tanith Dodge, HR director at Marks & Spencer; Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust and Chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation; Stephen Machin, Professor of Economics at University College London and Research Director of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics; and Libby Purves OBE, writer, radio broadcaster and *Times* chief theatre critic.

**For more detailed analysis go to [www.independentcommissionfees.org.uk](http://www.independentcommissionfees.org.uk).**

## **ALL TOGETHER NOW!**

I have received the April/May issue of this excellent newspaper on disability issues. It includes a report of a visit to its offices by the Minister for Disabled People, Esther McVey, who is a local there. Despite the fact that *ATN* does not hold back on criticism of present government policy, she was magnanimous in saying that it was “really excellent” that big sponsors and partners were supporting “such a valuable charity newspaper – the only one of its kind in the country...a terrific newspaper that’s helping so many people”. “It is a fantastic brand,” she went on, “trusted by its ever-growing army of readers, and apart from all the help and inspiration it gives to families affected by disability it is also raising significant general awareness of the everyday issues that disabled people and those in poor health face in the UK”

Praise indeed, but *ATN* does not fail to notice that since Ms McVey took up the post last September she has been embroiled in rows over the government’s welfare programme and the closure of Remploy factories. “We are facing very tough times,” she admitted, “but we want to ensure that our support targets the people who are most in need.”

Here I have substantial reservations. Targeting those most in need implies that there is a hierarchy of need and that not all of it is being met. And that is indeed the case. There is a major philosophical divide between the government and its opponents. Poor people generally, and disabled people in particular, certainly feel targeted, but by cuts rather than support. *ATN* reports that a recent Scope/Demos study calculates that some 3.7 million disabled people are set to lose more than £28 billion by 2018 as a result of further cuts to the welfare system. Some individuals could lose as much as £23,000. The worst effect will be the result of the new 12-month time limit on Employment Support Allowance.

Nobody questions that action is needed to reduce government borrowing. A second agency has

recently cut back our AAA rating. What is in dispute is the direction of the austerity programme. The very word 'austerity' is itself forbidding, redolent of negativity, the hair shirt, pain and suffering. We might do better to think of economy - the husbandry of scarce resources, which many of us remember from the dark days of World War II. That implies pulling together to a common end, whereas right now it feels that those already vulnerable are being asked to bear a disproportionate share of the burden. It is strikingly apparent that many well-off citizens are scarcely affected by the drive to reduce expenditure. Indeed, *ATL* itself reports that the Payments Council's latest report, *The Way we Pay*, finds that some of us are having a lot more fun than a decade ago. Entertainment spending has risen by over 60 per cent; we have doubled what we spend in restaurants and cafés, and our outlay on cinema and shows has gone up by 60 per cent. In total, we spent £58 billion having fun last year, almost one and a half times as much as the £34 billion we were obliged to pay for gas and electricity. I would add that MPs themselves seem conspicuously immune from the frugality being heaped on poorer people.

We really should try to be more equitable in the distribution of parsimony. I include myself in this. Those pensioners who bought their first homes way back in the 1950s have had a particularly good deal. I paid under £2,000 for a first family house in Enfield. And now: no mortgage. Many others are *really* affluent; collectively they could extinguish the national debt at a stroke. They have scarcely noticed the effects of the recession. What I am saying here is no more than the familiar mantra that the broadest backs should bear the greatest burden. Yet the government appears to be pandering to a powerful elite with a selfish agenda directed at making themselves even richer, and reinforcing inequality. I would like to see an increase of, say, 2.5 per cent in all the current income tax rates. Alongside such reforms, the introduction of a decent minimum *living* wage is long overdue.

This would help to provide some sense of fairness. As to benefits, we certainly need to eliminate fraud, and I can understand the introduction of a cap on housing support, but otherwise I find the assault on the poor pernicious, redolent of Victorian thinking.

## FEEDBACK

### From Peter Salter:

I do wonder about Polly Toynbee. I saw her say on Question Time that the "average" public sector pension was £4,700. Ken Livingstone has also quoted this.

Perhaps averages should be banned! There is an average UK house price. What does that add to any debate? Living where we do [in London], compared with some Coronation Street terrace system in the north, the average is of no use to us, or to the householder up north.

What PT and KL say about public sector pensions is ridiculous. Even a clerical officer with full service would have a pension of £10k a year. I argue the average is made up by including service of those who were in the public sector for a short time at a low grade. These people will have had pension entitlement in other employments. What we should be told is the number of pensions being paid by banding. Gordon Brown, apparently, did investigate cutting public sector pensions already in payment.

But PT also claimed in the paper that someone earning £26K a year pays £5K+ tax and NI, but someone receiving £26K in dividends pays no tax. This is a gross misrepresentation, since the employer will have offset the salary against corporation tax, but dividends are paid after CT. Further, a dividend received is grossed up by 10% as a notional tax payment and added to all other taxable income. Once this exceeds the higher rate threshold, there is additional tax at over 30% on the excess, but the 10% is taken into account. It would be hard to imagine that someone receiving dividends would not also have other income that is taxed, e.g. pension or interest. Those people in the media who use companies, as I do, will have income on which we pay additional tax that is based on including our dividend income. So to say dividend income is untaxed is quite wrong.

Someone commenting in the Telegraph this week said that VAT should be paid on company profits. We do have CT. Also they said VAT should be charged on turnover. All of this shows how ignorant many people are about tax and how it works.

### From Maurice Glassman:

I imagine that you, as I did, came to atheism after much thought. Certainly so in my case, having been brought up as the youngest of eight in a fairly religious background. But many people are, so to speak, atheists by accident, with little or no conviction either way. For some of these, perhaps, Alain de Botton's.

guidance may be of value.

## UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

This refers to the UK's place in women's international rankings in politics and public decision-making. According to the *Equality and Diversity eNewsletter* (20 March) we rate 57th. In our land of all the virtues, women comprise: 22.5% of MPs, 17.4% of the Cabinet, 11.1% of bank CEOs, and 5% of editors of national daily newspapers.

By contrast, I notice, women are massively over-represented in menial, repetitive work.

Thanks to John Vincent's *Network E.Bulletin no.125* for the statistics.

## THE WORK CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT (AGAIN)

8 April 2013: I was very interested to see criticism of this assessment process from Judith Cole of The Atos Stories Collective (*Guardian*). She argues (I think correctly) that the Department of Work and Pensions has created a process that limits claimants' ability to present the full complexity of their conditions. I believe that this single factor, whether or not deliberate, is responsible for a level of successful appeals which in any other context would be regarded as scandalous. Ms Cole also cites the experience of people who have contributed to two new plays, *Atos Stories* and *The Atos Monologues*, who describe the conduct of assessments as "degrading and stressful", commenting that "the assessors acted like robots, with tick-box approach and little knowledge of the conditions they were assessing."

12 April 2013: Three disabled claimants have taken a different approach. They have launched a legal challenge based (as I understand it) on the government's failure to consult fully on the more stringent mobility rules for Personal Independent Payment. This is important in that the high-rate mobility component enjoyed under DLA was vital in being able to lead an active life, not least in being able to get to work. It is estimated that this may result in many disabled people losing mobility benefit, a restriction totally against the government's much vaunted policy of encouraging disabled people into work.

## NEW LEGISLATION ON MENTAL HEALTH

The Mental Health (Discrimination) Act 2013 became law on 28 February. The Act provides for:

- repeal of a provision of the Mental Health Act 1983 by which members of the House of Commons and other national assemblies automatically lost their seat if 'sectioned' under that Act for more than six months
- amendment of the Juries Act 1974 to remove the ban on 'mentally disturbed persons' undertaking jury service (but will allow exemption for those unable to carry out jury service for medical reasons)
- amendment of company law regulation which directed that a person might cease to be a director of a public or private company 'by reason of their mental health'.

Thanks to John Vincent's *Network E.Bulletin, no.125* for this. Go to [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) for more.

## COMMON VALUES

Human rights legislation is under threat. When, for instance, it stands in the way of expelling Abu Qatada to Jordan it can be represented as an intrusive restraint on the will of our nation state to rid itself of this radical cleric. But the Human Rights Act remains as a key protection of civil liberties. The campaigning organisation Liberty devoted most of its spring issue to this bastion of freedom, and has produced a series of new videos which challenge untruths and promote greater respect and understanding of human rights values.

Particular concern is focused on the Justice and Security Bill, about to receive royal assent despite a mountain of opposition. Liberty argues that it will allow "the government's dirty secrets to be hidden from open courts, the press and public."

Liberty is holding a members' conference and AGM on Saturday, 18 May at Senate House, London (9.15-5.00). Not too late to join.

## NHS CONCERNS (AMONG MANY)

28 February 2103: Bolton NHS Foundation Trust is to be investigated over 800 cases of septicemia – four times what is expected in similar hospitals (year to April 2012),

5 March 1913: A report by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, published in *The Lancet*, finds the UK below the average for healthy life expectancy found in similar counties.

### **NO STEPS, NO STAIRS**

This is a new, easy-to-navigate website listing both serviced and non-serviced properties with ground floor or lift access to bedrooms and living accommodation in the UK, Ireland and France, suitable for anyone with limited mobility or disability, as well as their family and friends. Its providers, Philip and Sandra Bryant, found from personal experience that tracking down suitable rooms from conventional sources proved a near impossible challenge.

The website is the result of three years work and investment. Income (at a modest level) is derived from accommodation providers, with 20 per cent being donated to the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Contact: [www.nostepsnostairs.com](http://www.nostepsnostairs.com); e.mail; philip [or sandra]@nostepsnostairs.com; tel: 01536 723542

### **THE WELLBEING LEAGUE**

A Unicef report, based on statistics from 2010, has ranked the UK 16th of 29 developed countries for overall wellbeing. Familiar problems among young people account for this low position, which are expected to worsen. On further education we come 29th; on teenage pregnancies 27th; and on youth unemployment 24th, dismal findings which Unicef UK links to government policy choices. The findings, however, have improved since a previous report (Report Card 7, based on 2001/2 statistics), when we came bottom of 23 countries. And even now we are not as bad as the USA. Top of the list, by the way, comes the Netherlands.

Go to [www.unicef.org.uk/Latest/Publications/Report-Card-11-Child-well-being-in-rich-countries/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Latest/Publications/Report-Card-11-Child-well-being-in-rich-countries/)

### **WE HATE NO.65: ANTI-SEMITISM**

*How odd/ Of God/ To choose/ The Jews*

W.N.Ewer 'How Odd'

*Oh, the Protestants hate the Catholics,  
and the Catholics hate the Protestants,  
and the Hindus hate the Muslims  
and everybody hates the Jews.*

Tom Lehrer 'National Brotherhood Week' (song)

I could, of course, have chosen to hate from a multitude of the world's irrational enmities. But prejudice against Jews is at once deeply ingrained, of long-standing and particularly perverse. Jewish history, since Abraham made his covenant with God in 1921BC, and particularly from the Diaspora, has across the globe been punctuated by pogroms, riots, accusations of killing children, banishments and, most recently, the Holocaust.

But I don't want to dwell on the wider history; not because it is not hugely significant, but rather in that it is already well known, a given. More interesting is the record in Britain, where I suspect that we generally have a certain smugness of mostly having been above such things.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I am indebted to the writing of the late John Cannon, former Emeritus Professor of Modern History at the University of Newcastle on Tyne, for an overview of our past malevolence towards Jewish immigrants. In *The Oxford Companion to British History* (1997) he notices that Jewish immigration, on any scale, came only after the Norman Conquest. He points out that because Christians were not allowed to practice usury, Jews quickly established themselves as financiers and money-lenders. But as such they were both ruthlessly exploited by monarchs and hated by the native population. During the crusades, there were attacks on Jews in London, and in 1190 some 150 Jews were slaughtered in York [many committed suicide]. As the number of Jews increased, they were confined to Jewries, and from 1218 "were obliged to wear badges, steadily increased in size." Persecution continued during the rest of the 13th century: in 1278 hundreds of Jews were hanged, followed by an edict for their wholesale expulsion from the kingdom. This ban persisted until the Commonwealth, when to his credit Cromwell ignored the measure and began to allow Jews back; but despite an elevation of the status of some prominent individuals, hatred

persisted. Jews were denied naturalization, and Catholic emancipation in 1829 left them as the only religious group still experiencing severe restrictions. Thereafter, although progress was unmistakable and not to be denied, “the obstacles facing Jews remained substantial, but they were personal and social rather than legal”.

Similar animosity, of course, was common in other parts of Europe, finding perhaps its most explicit literary expression in Germany with the publication of Richard Wagner’s *Das Judenthum in der Musik* in 1850. Despite the fact that a revised version of 1869 appeared in an English translation (by William Ashton Ellis) in 1894, I suspect that this polemic is little known today outside a limited circle of musicologists and historians.

In an explanatory note, Wagner represented himself as suffering under a yoke “of the ruling Jew-society in its crushing-out of all free movement, of all true human evolution, among its kith and kin”. In the essay proper, he certainly did not hold back. I must warn readers that even the brief extracts I have selected are grossly offensive. I repeat parts of this reprehensible text only to expose the virulent roots of his anti-Semitic prejudice. Wagner speaks of “the be-Jewing of modern art”, and saw his target as founded upon what had been called “Hebraic art-taste”. He felt impelled to explain an unconscious feeling that “proclaims itself among the people as a rooted dislike of the Jewish nature”. And although addressing this dislike primarily in relation to art, not to politics or religion, he felt it inescapable that “with all our speaking and writing in favour of the Jews’ emancipation, we always felt instinctively repelled by any actual, operative contact with them”. It was then necessary “to explain to ourselves the *involuntary repulsion* possessed for us by the nature and personality of the Jews”. Their first objectionable trait was an attachment to money: “the Jew in truth is already more than emancipated: he rules, and will rule, so long as Money remains the power before which all our doings and our dealings lose their force”. This objection was strengthened by a dislike of a distinctive physiognomy: “The Jew – who as everyone knows, has a God all to himself – in ordinary life strikes us primarily by his outward appearance, which, no matter to what European nationality we belong, has something disagreeably foreign to that nationality: instinctively we wish to have nothing in common with a man who looks like that”.

Wagner gave even greater weight to “the effect the Jew produces on us through his speech”. “In particular,” he argued, “does the purely physical aspect of the Jewish mode of speech repel us”. This was especially pronounced in song – “the vividest and most indisputable expression of the personal emotional-being”, in which “the peculiarity of the Jewish nature attains for us its climax of distastefulness”.

I will spare the reader Wagner’s nuanced distinction between “the commoner class of Jew” and “the cultured son of Jewry”. Nor is this the place for his extreme views on Jewish music. Suffice it to say that he found: “Our whole European art and civilisation...have remained to the Jew a foreign tongue”.

Predictably, the 1850 essay received a blisteringly hostile reception, a reaction addressed (for those who care) in the second edition. But as Wagner’s music came to be revered, so a legend, amounting to worship and enshrined in the Bayreuth Festival, was established – and an anti-Semitic theme perpetuated. Until, that is, one descendant broke ranks. Gottfried Wagner, the composer’s great-grandson, came to doubt the traditional narrative, turned renegade and told a different story. His impassioned and controversial autobiography, *He who does not howl with the wolf: the Wagner legacy* (tr. Della Couling), was published in 1998.

Gottfried takes us beyond *Judaism in Music*, asserting that this was “by no means the end...but the beginning of Wagner’s anti-Semitism in the sense of a politico-cultural concept”. The same ideas [in relation to Meyerbeer] were repeated in his essay of 1851, *Oper und drama*, and reiterated through later prose writings. The last of these, *Erkenne dich selbst* (Know yourself, 1881), is available on the internet. In its penultimate paragraph, it features a remarkable passage. The text is pretentious, but the intention clear: “So let us save and tend and brace our best of forces, to bear a noble cordial to the sleeper when he wakes, as of himself he must at last. But only when the fiend, who keeps those ravers in the mania of their party-strife, no more can find a where or when to lurk among us, will there also be no longer – any Jews.”

It would be extravagant to link Wagner directly to the gas chambers, but Gottfried has no compunction in saying that his great-grandfather “formulated ideas that today read like a horrifying anticipation of Hitler’s Final Solution, invoking a Germany free of Jews.” Wagner’s perverted philosophy was deep-rooted, the academic foundation of more than a century of prejudice and hatred; the beginning, Gottfried argues, of a direct line, through Gobineau and the English-born Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and embodied in the Bayreuth Festival, to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. We all know where such thinking led.

I should say a little more about H.S.Chamberlain. Although born in Southsea, the son of a British rear admiral, he came through various influences to extol all things Teutonic, marrying Wagner’s step-daughter Eva in 1908, and gaining German citizenship during the first world war. He unreservedly espoused the

doctrine of Aryan supremacy, proclaiming his distorted racial ideas in a two-volume book *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, 1899). This study was to prove one of the most baleful influences in shaping Nazi ideology. It is interesting that Theodore Roosevelt, writing in 1913, recognised it for what it was, noteworthy for brilliancy and suggestiveness, but also for “startling inaccuracies and lack of judgment”. It is instructive here to quote Roosevelt directly:

“Mr. Chamberlain’s thesis is that the nineteenth century, and therefore the twentieth and all future centuries, depend for everything in them worth mentioning and preserving upon the Teutonic branch of the Aryan race. He holds that there is no such thing as a general progress of mankind, that progress is only for those whom he calls the Teutons, and that when they mix with or are intruded upon by alien and, as he regards them, lower races, the result is fatal...but Mr. Chamberlain himself is quite as fantastic an extremist as any of those whom he derides, and an extremist whose doctrines are based upon foolish hatred is even more unlovely than an extremist whose doctrines are based upon foolish benevolence. Mr. Chamberlain’s hatreds cover a wide gamut. They include Jews, Darwinists, the Roman Catholic Church, the people of southern Europe, Peruvians, Semites, and an odd variety of literary men and historians.”

A pity that the direction of these thoughts was not better heeded. But I hope I am not being dewy-eyed in sensing that at least in Britain we have turned away from anti-Semitism – now the territory of only a few unhinged extremists. As the excellent Aish website notices, the complaints traditionally employed against Judaism have come to be recognised as excuses rather than causes. I would go further. I regard them as fallacious. It is nonsense to suggest that there are endemic grounds to despise the entire Jewish people: such charges, as Chekhov put it, are “wholesale, resting on worn-out commonplaces”. Like everybody else, some Jews are odd, some strait-laced; some benevolent, some selfish; some religious, some not; some bold, some withdrawn; some orthodox (one so much so, we are told, as to encase himself in a plastic bag when flying over cemeteries), some apostate. A surprising number have been great violinists, but relatively few in relation to the whole of Jewry. And, yes, some have great financial aptitude, a talent for making money, perhaps genetically based, but not all. If, over time, there have been some common characteristics, such as an unusual capacity for hard work, there is no longer any basis for thinking that Jews are all tarred with the same brush. In fact it has been argued that, for historical reasons, Jews have little in common with each other. In this construct the idea of an unlikable collective nationality and a nasty homogeneity are popular myths. Shylock and Fagin are fictional stereotypes. We cannot in principle defend the castigating of a community so diverse.

As Maurice Glassman implies in ‘Feedback’ (above) there has also been a modern retreat – though not necessarily a conscious one – from god-based racial/religious orthodoxies, along with a gradual shift away from insularity and endogamic tendencies. As different tribal shibboleths merge into the common social milieu, so any propensity for enmity recedes. While we may continue to deplore such excesses as the bonus culture and inordinate rewards, I don’t think they can any longer be seen as peculiarly Hebraic. Greed has become secular. While we must distinguish between racial/religious discrimination and legitimate criticism of Israel’s political policies, and uphold the right to free speech, it is time to salute diversity, and look for the continued demise of prejudice.

Derek Kinrade