

Corruption

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

There is a spat going on in England over the fact that some gentlemen, amongst them a Jew or two, have given loans to the Labor Party and apparently, but not necessarily, have been given titles and honors in return.

Let's deal with the "honors" bit first. Titles have a highly disreputable past. Under the Saxons they went to whoever killed most. The Normans gave them to French gangsters who came over the Channel to make their fortunes. James I gave them to Highland cattle thieves. Charles II favored mistresses and bastards. The Georges seemed to have fancied drunkards. The Victorians ennobled industrial exploiters of the poor, racist land grabbers and financial tricksters.

The British sickness of worshipping class has meant that it didn't matter what sort of ennobled criminal you were, ermine and a coronet enabled you (and after your death, your heir), however stupid or incapable, to sit in the House of Lords. The mere whiff of a title got you better seats in a restaurant and the automatic respect of anyone who didn't have one. Often ordinary and unexceptional people would be prepared to betray their own mothers and their ideals, play the sycophant, grovel and fawn in the hope they, too, one day would get the title.

That some of these had a hand in governing Britain made it all the more preposterous. Over the years fainthearted modifications have taken place to the House of Lords, but for some reason the British are too scared of total democracy to make it completely elected. I well remember Margaret Thatcher inveighing against the evils of European culture and what Britain would lose by joining them at a time when Britain was the only European country to have an unelected Upper Chamber.

There were also other honors (gongs, they are called) that did not necessarily involve getting into the House of Lords, for time serving civil servants, generals, pillars of the Empire, and local government time servers. Every Government has used them for political purposes and to further its own agenda.

Life Peers were introduced in 1958 (previously Lords passed their titles on, although there were occasional exceptions). This was in part to ensure that a party in power had sufficient votes in the House of Lords. But to be fair, independent men and women of stature were appointed occasionally to counterbalance the Bishops of the Church of England. It was also an unashamed device that all parties used to reward donors (though it helped if you also gave to another good cause).

All this is to show that I hold honors in a degree of contempt only marginally higher than catamites. No doubt those who delight in pulling me to pieces will argue that this is only because I have not been so rewarded.

Some of this current spat is about the honors system itself. But why should giving someone an honor for donations be any different than all those ghastly plaques and dedications one sees everywhere in Jewish and non-Jewish charitable and educational institutions or, for that matter, honorary degrees?

It may be about why loans made to political parties that are treated differently to gifts. It may be because the treasurer of the Labor party wasn't notified first. Big deal! And if it was because honors and money go together, no government has ever done otherwise.

But I suspect this witch-hunt is really to do with two things. It is about political maneuvering to cover up real corruption because too many husbands and wives or mistresses of current politicians are on the make and take and it helps to distract attention. Secondly, if there is ever a sniff of a Jew involved, it automatically flushes out a whole subterranean undercurrent of odium because everywhere, not only in the Muslim world, if you need a scapegoat the Jew is still your man.

Elsewhere, real corruption continues unabated. According to the Economist, Britain is now down to number 14 on the list of honest states. The European Union is a byword for the most corrupt of practices in the Western World. Its auditors have continually complained that its findings are ignored. Billions goes to totally corrupt schemes, and even more on subsidizing fat farmers at the expense of millions of poor in the underdeveloped world, largely to keep French trade unionists happy and rich. Two years ago the European Parliament agreed that the dishonest practice of automatically compensating its Members of the European Parliament by paying tax-free first-class travel expenses, regardless of whether you actually did spend the money, had to end. It costs 60 million Euros a year, by the way. Today it is announced that out of the hundreds of European members of Parliament only 30 have paid any attention to the directive. That is scandalous, not someone getting an honorific title for supporting an arguably good cause.

Finally, as if I needed another excuse for my blood to boil, that apology for an organization, the United Nations, is reforming that even bigger joke, the Human Rights Commission. Yes, that's the one where the States with the worst records of torture, corruption and abuse sit and condemn those States they don't like for quite unrelated, and usually spurious, reasons. Now there will be a Council instead of a Commission. Yippee! And instead of 53 corrupt States there will be 47, most of whom are African and Asian! Enough said, gov'nor! Not surprisingly, voting against it as an inadequate sham were the USA and Israel. Oh yes, and Palau and Marshall Islands!! There will be a review system so that states who abuse human rights will be suspended. Ha ha. Want to guess who will be suspended first? Certainly not China, Myanmar or Zimbabwe! As for Sudan, it is both African and Muslim, so don't expect that it will be accused of anything in Darfur.

All this is what I call corrupt. This is what the press should be trumpeting about. But, as we know, it is the Golden Calf that rules and all we have left are broken tablets of stone. And that, if you wanted it, is the connection to the sedra.

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