

Democraphobia

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Intellectual and political fashions come and go. Enlightenment loosened the grip exercised by religious authority on free thought, but then in France the liberators became murderers. Nationalism destroyed the old European autocratic empires, but then nationalism proved to be a force for xenophobic evil and destruction. History came to an end according to the American, Fukayama, and then he changed his mind when it did not. The collapse of the USSR heralded the end of Soviet communist oppression, and then Putin brought corrupt authoritarianism back. The failure of a socialist empire left capitalism the undisputed king of financial systems, and now capitalism is shown to have been corrupt and dishonest. Every time we think we have a new and perfect system it is eventually revealed to be a failure. The only consistent shining light has been freedom, of action and thought, and the belief in democracy. But now democracy itself is conspiring in its own destruction.

We had "isms"—anti-Semitism, nationalism, socialism, Zionism. And we have "phobias", such as Islamophobia, and now what strikes me as democraphobia. A phobia can be a fear of something (e.g., arachnophobia), as well as a hatred of something. Now Islamophobia should mean irrational, unwarranted antipathy to Muslims, and there can be no place for such prejudice in any humane society. But in practice it has come to mean fear of offending or disagreeing with Muslims, a fear of Muslim violence.

Actually I think it was a gross error to create the term Islamophobia. Hardly anyone understands Islam, and it is not the religion that people have difficulty with so much as with the extremists who, as in every faith, select or emphasize elements from it to suit their ideology. The term, therefore, should be Muslimphobia. Just as the anti-Semite hates Jews as people.

Many European courts and politicians will allow behavior to go unpunished that, were it not for fear, would be dealt with—honor murder, wife beating, and polygamy, for example—because they contravene the values of free democratic societies. Freedom of speech is curtailed for fear of violence. Once upon a time Salman Rushdie was protected from a fatwa. Now he would be expected to recant.

Geert Wilders, the Dutch MP, produced the short film Fitna. It is a one-sided, but not inaccurate, portrayal of one aspect of Islam that does indeed exist (like a film about Hassidim could be a true but one-sided and misleading portrayal of Judaism as a whole). He was barred from entering England for a peaceful discussion about the rights and wrongs of his film for fear of Islamic protest, whereas preachers who call for conversion of Europe into a theocratic Muslim state which will overthrow democracy and its values are protected.

As all United Nations events, the dangerous farce of the World Conference

against Racism, the so-called Durban II, will be completely distorted in its focus and condemnation of Israel as against any and every other form of human abuse in the world today. (The first Durban Conference, in 2001, turned into an orgy of hate directed exclusively at Israel and Jews.) It will proceed out of fear of offending Islamic opinion and its salivating running dogs of the Left. Believe me, those Western free countries that profess disapproval of the bias of UN organizations and a commitment to ameliorate the distortions of the conference, will retreat from the field of battle, tails between their legs, for fear of offending too big a slice of world opinion, however primitive it may be.

I would actually welcome any and all criticism of Israel if an equal and proportional amount of time would be devoted to examples of Muslim oppression, racism, and genocide. But of course we know it will not.

So once again the free world will betray its values. Left Wing secularists will ally with homophobic, antidemocratic, theocratic fascists, rather than examine the honesty of their delusions and hatreds. They need a cause. How much easier to adopt one that brings moral and financial support from billions rather than a few million.

Under the pretext of good relations, Western democracies are now scared to stand for their values. They have all but ceded the field of play out of fear. Democraphobia is not the fear of democracy, which exists in nondemocratic countries such as China or religiously dominated societies. Rather it is the even more craven fear of fighting for democracy. It is the political lust for power that is so strong that in pursuit of fundamentalist votes it betrays its own values.

You can see this in the EU. No wonder the Czech Republic has used its presidency to decry hypocrisy and the double standard in which political leadership says the right thing in public but in practice allows a climate of antagonism toward those who try to resist the wave of monochromatic hate ideology. As Vaclav Klaus said, there is "an uncriticizable assumption that there is only one possible and correct future of the European integration. Those who dare thinking about a different option are labeled enemies" (New York Times, 02/20). That's because the diseased mindset that condemns only Israel and Jews has now infected the whole of the European body politic. Only one way of thinking is politically correct.

A genuine free society is one in which all positions are treated with respect so long as they accord respect to others in return. Human rights are paramount. But if someone campaigns to destroy human rights he has no place in a society based on them. Yet extremists who preach destruction of western values are awarded compensation if they are detained.

With such cowardice now the norm, the values of free societies are being eroded. Democracy is feared because it insists on freedom, honesty, and fairness. But democracies themselves no longer stand for those values because they are frightened. They are frightened of their own values because they may have to fight for them and it is easier to give in and give up. That is why democraphobia is leading to the collapse of Western freedoms, just as lust

for money has led to the collapse of Western finance. Recognizing the disease is the first step towards a cure.