

# Contemporary Antisemitism in the Political Discourse in Ireland

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Due to this lack of knowledge the term Nazism is bandied around in Ireland without knowing that it was, amongst other things, the premeditated, industrialized slaughter of six million Jews and many others that didn't suit the Nazi Regime.

A little education on what constitutes antisemitism would go a long way to correcting this problem. To that end, we would urge Sinn Féin and other political parties to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of Antisemitism.

The definition has been adopted by most countries in Europe and as Ireland is already a signatory to the IHRA we have de facto accepted it. It is now up to our politicians to adhere to it (European Jewish Congress, 2020).

—Maurice Cohen, Chair of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland

The history of modern Ireland is characterized primarily by the period of British colonialist rule, which continued for several hundred years until the creation of an independent Ireland in 1919. This period of gaining independence from British rule is still an important factor in shaping the Irish national narrative. Currently, large segments of the Irish public are opposed to colonialism all over the world, thus explaining the widespread Irish support for the Palestinian claims in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The vocal criticism of Israel's policies sometimes has deteriorated into demonstrations of hostility toward Israel and even antisemitic stereotypes. Parallel to the public discourse, members of Ireland's political system have

expressed vehement criticism of Israel's policy in the occupied territories. In February 2019, the Irish Parliament approved a law prohibiting Ireland from engaging in commercial goods and services produced in the territories by a vote of 78 to 45. The passage of the law ultimately was unsuccessful due to the opposition of the Irish government. Nonetheless, Ireland is home to an active anti-Israel community and for many years it served as a leading proponent of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which has tried to advance boycotts against Israeli organizations and products, to divest from Israel, and to impose sanctions on Israel, such as an embargo on Israeli weapons. However, despite the popularity of the BDS movement in Ireland, the proposed Irish legislation focused only on Israel's policies in the territories and its settlements rather than on all Israeli goods and businesses (Prager, 2019).

## **Background**

Ireland has a small Jewish community, numbering about 2,700 (of which close to 500 are Israelis who have moved there in recent years) and totaling about 0.05% of the country's total population. Most Irish Jews live in the capital city of Dublin. The main body of Irish Jewry is the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland, which is highly active in government circles and the media. Furthermore, the Council brings together various Jewish organizations and focuses on both the fight against antisemitism and creating interfaith dialogue, in addition to supporting and encouraging a Jewish way of life within Ireland (World Jewish Congress, n.d.c).

The most recent public opinion poll on antisemitism by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) took place in 2014. The poll, which surveyed a representative sample of the adult population about 11 antisemitic statements or stereotypes, found that 20% of the respondents agreed with the majority of the statements (see Figure 33). In that context, about 52% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "Jews are more loyal to Israel than the country they live in"; 28% identified with the statement that "Jews have too much power in the business world"; and 19% agreed that "Jews have too much control over the global media" (ADL, 2014). Compared to other European countries, Ireland has not had many antisemitic incidents in recent years, and therefore it is difficult to determine whether antisemitism is indeed widespread within Ireland. Based on data from the field, Ireland has only had a handful of

recent antisemitic incidents (Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe [OSCE], 2019a), which usually have occurred within the religious-traditional context, particularly accusing the Jews that they killed Jesus.

### Figure 33. ADL Poll on Antisemitism in Ireland



Note. From ADL, *ADL Global 100: An Index of Anti-Semitism*, 2014.

As of today, Ireland has still not independently adopted the definition of antisemitism by the IHRA, even though it is a member of the organization. Furthermore, Ireland does not have any law that relates specifically to hate crimes, their monitoring, or their prosecution. Although the Central Bureau of Statistics in Ireland and the Irish police collect information on hate crimes, the data is not accessible to the general public. Only in 2015 did the Irish police recognize antisemitism as a category of hate crimes. In 2019, the European Council against Hate, a human rights group established by the Council of Europe, called on the Irish authorities to improve their gathering of data on racist incidents in the country (OSCE, 2019a). According to reports by the Jewish community in Ireland, an average of three antisemitic incidents are reported each year, and most Irish Jews, with the exception of those who were alive during World War II, do not report that they have encountered antisemitism in their daily lives. However, despite the relatively few reports of antisemitic incidents in Ireland, an upward trend of antisemitic expression has been noted on social media.

### **Antisemitism in the Political Discourse**

As already mentioned, the extreme right-wing parties in Ireland are not very visible and in general the Irish political system tends more to the left. Furthermore, the right-wing parties sway more to the left compared to similar parties in Europe, particularly on social issues, such as abortion, LGBTQ rights, and so forth. Currently, most of the antisemitic incidents within the context of the political discourse relate to criticism of the State of Israel.

Thus, for example, Richard Boyd Barret, a member of parliament from the leftist party People Before Profit, is a fervent critic of both the State of Israel and the Jewish community in Ireland, which assumes an antisemitic tone (see Figure 34). In 2007, for example, Alan Shatter, the only Jewish member of the Irish Parliament, called on the British Parliament to deny the manager of Hezbollah’s television channel Al-Manar—known for spreading antisemitic conspiracy theories—the right to enter the country; in response, Barret referred to Shatter as “disgraceful” (Independent.ie, 2007). In other instances, Barret has called Israel “an apartheid, racist state” and was quoted as saying “from my personal point of view, Israel is not a normal state and it should not be treated as such. Israel is a racist state. The state should be called the state of Palestine in which Muslims, Christians, Jews and people with no religion should live.”<sup>32</sup> These statements were made by Barrett to the Israeli Ambassador to Ireland at the Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade in September 2014, when Barrett doubled down on calling for the expulsion of Israeli diplomats from Ireland.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 34. Antisemitic Remarks by Parliament Member Barrett**

Note. From Richard Boyd Barrett, “Israel is not a normal state and should not be treated as such,” YouTube, September 4, 2014.

The anti-Israel rhetoric is primarily found among members of the Sinn Féin party, which is currently the leader of the opposition in the Irish Parliament (Harkov, 2020). Sinn Féin is a leftist nationalist party; in the past, it had been the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and had sought to unite all of Ireland under independent Irish rule, often using violent means and terror. The party supports the unification of Ireland and Northern Ireland, although in the last elections, economic issues were at the center of the party’s campaign. Moreover, in recent years, the party has tried to distance itself from its image as a radical party in Irish society (O’Leary, 2020).

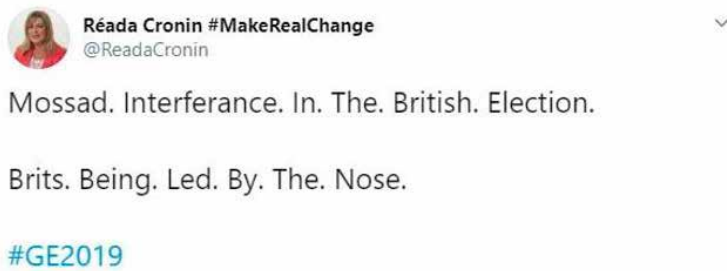
In February 2020, the Jewish Representative Council announced its intention to send letters to all members of the Irish Parliament asking them to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The announcement was in response to an item in the media about a series of antisemitic and conspiratorial tweets that were sent during the period 2012–2019 by Réada Cronin, a Sinn Féin member who was elected to the Irish Parliament in 2020. In the tweets (see Figure 35), Cronin compared Israeli policy to that of the Nazis,<sup>34</sup> wrote that Hitler was a “pawn” of the Rothschild family, and that the Israeli Mossad had intervened in the 2019 elections in Britain (Eichner, 2020).<sup>35</sup>

Figure 35. Antisemitic Remarks by Parliament Member Cronin on Twitter



She has since deleted her Twitter account Credit: Refer to Caption

Note. From Danny De Vaal, “Account axed: Sinn Féin’s Reada Cronin deletes Twitter account amid anti-semitic tweet row as Mary Lou McDonald accepts apology,” *The Irish Sun*, February 20, 2020.



Tom Harwood @tomhfh · Nov 29, 2019  
Jeremy. Corbyn. Is. An. Anti-Semite. twitter.com/ggreenwald/sta...

Note. From Mark Tighe, “Mossad ended Jeremy Corbyn campaign, tweets new Sinn Féin TD Réada Cronin,” *The Times*, February 16, 2020.

Following the incident, Cronin apologized for her comments. In addition, after the publishing of Cronin’s series of tweets, the president of the Sinn Féin party, Mary Lou McDonald, met with Maurice Cohen, the leader of the Jewish community in Ireland. McDonald condemned the comments and expressed willingness and openness to discuss the issue with the members of her party together with representatives of the local Jewish community (Press Association, 2020). Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, Cohen and the members of the Sinn Féin party had planned a discussion on the issue, but it was cancelled due to the pandemic (Judah, 2020).

Right-wing parties in Ireland have also made antisemitic statements. In the summer of 2020, an Irish right-wing group began distributing stickers that included an antisemitic caricature (The Beacon, 2020). At the moment, the extreme right does not have representatives in the Irish Parliament, despite attempts to get elected, including in the 2020 elections. The extreme right includes the National Party, which opposes immigration; the Irish Freedom Party, which supports Ireland exiting the EU; and the Anti-Corruption Ireland party, which also opposes immigration as well as the “threat” Islam is seen as posing to life in Ireland. Gemma O’Doherty, the leader of the Anti-Corruption Ireland Party, has accused George Soros, the Jewish philanthropist, of encouraging the immigration crisis in Europe. Despite having some presence on social media, the extreme right-wing parties currently have insufficient support to get elected to parliament. This can be explained partly by the fact that the Irish political discourse does not relate much to issues about immigration, in contrast to more acute issues related to the functioning of the healthcare system and the Irish economy (McDaid, 2020).