

The University of Exeter, Industrial Tribunals and Anti-Semitism

Having written the official history of the university (*The City on the Hill*, 2015), I have now been asked by five people if I have any comments on the reports in the *Times* and *Telegraph* late last year on the successful appeal in an industrial tribunal against the university by a female Jewish Physics Professor in which the Tribunal lambasted the university for sacking her and there was a mention of allegedly 'Jewish characteristics in teaching.'

I have delayed writing in order to have the time both to reflect and to speak to some individuals. Two issues I think are relevant. First, this is not the first time the university's disciplinary procedures have fallen foul of an industrial tribunal. There was for example the Pugsley case where the university was similarly found over a dismissal to be acting in a wrongful fashion. I leave it to others to decide if there is, as some allege, a bullying habit, and even possibly a contrast with the situation for the Senior Management Group: to the best of my knowledge, the only member of staff to go to prison in the last two decades was a member of the SMG and that arose from a police action, not that by the university. The university of course did not condone his vile crime, to which he pleaded guilty; but the contrast with university action against staff members for other matters is, well what can I say?

Re antisemitism, from my research for the history of the university, I was well aware that it existed, but there was nothing to compare with the furor in the 1990s and early 2000s over an alleged masonic group running much (on which see my history). As Vice-Chancellor, Steve Smith certainly opposed antisemitism and was pro-Israel. My own impression is that antisemitism has become much more active in recent years (*since* my history) as Corbynista/BLM sentiment has known few bounds in broadening the criticism of Israel. That is not the same as the university authorities themselves being antisemitic, and if the recent case raises very serious issues, I do not though see any systemic antisemitism interns of the university as a whole. However, with reference to elements within the university, the situation is more troubling.

In terms of the university as a whole, on the other hand, the situation may look less sanguine at the level of sections of it. Some might suggest that the criticism from 2020 of alleged white racism has in practice amounted to an anti-white racism from which Jews have suffered. The inroads of critical race theory at both university and sub-university levels has been pernicious. Of course, any purge of reading lists for the sake of supposed diversity is apt to hit hard at established scholarship, among which works by Jewish scholars are prominent. 'Decolonisation' of the curriculum arises from the same brittle intolerance as antisemitism, and, to a degree, tends to be embraced by the same people. Thus, it is difficult for any university to embrace one form of intolerance without tacitly sanctioning the other.

In the meantime, the University of Exeter is fast going down the league tables including I am informed falling to 98th in the student satisfaction tables. Something rotten in the state of the university since 2020? Conscientious staff let down by poor leadership and misconceived policies? The next university historian will have an interesting task.