

## HISTORY REBUTTAL

► As the Oxford historians responsible for teaching the course on Nazi Germany mentioned by Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (*How Historians Remove Stains*, JC June 11) we are astonished that the JC would publish something so misleading.

This course, which Pinto-Duschinsky does not name, is clearly titled "Nazi Germany: A Racial Order". Bibliographies for every one of its weekly topics include titles directly on the subject of antisemitism and the Holocaust; three of the eight weeks of teaching are focused solely on the role of antisemitism and the persecution of the Jews in and by Nazi Germany, viz: *Antisemitism and Everyday Life*, *The Politics of the Final Solution and Perpetrators and Victims*.

That Pinto-Duschinsky accuses us of not confronting the "harrowing" events of the period, and of ignoring the view that "antisemitism was at the heart of the tragedy" would be laughable if the accusation were not so serious. The course reading includes 2,000 pages of primary sources, documenting everything from the orchestration of *Kristallnacht* to the mass murders in wartime Poland and the Soviet Union to the daily suffering in the ghettos and camps; from Hitler's pronouncements in *Mein Kampf* to Himmler's notorious speech to the Nazi leadership in October 1943; from the ghetto diary of Dawid Sierakowiak to that of Victor Klemperer. The vast array of secondary literature requires students to engage with numerous historical interpretations of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

In this advanced course, final-year students grapple directly with the interpretation of the primary sources.

In addition, the Holocaust features on the outline courses in Oxford covering 20th-century European and world history. There is no justification for claiming that the subject is "relatively little taught in the university", or that it is somehow influenced by the source of utterly unrelated funds available for graduate students to study in Germany. As scholars who have devoted our lives to studying and teaching the history of Nazi Germany, we are personally and professionally affronted at the imputation that our teaching has even the faintest association with Holocaust denial.

(Professor) Jane Caplan, director, European Studies Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford; (Dr) Nicholas Stargardt, fellow and tutor in history, Magdalen College, Oxford

## EDUCATION LOCATION

► I read with interest Simon Rocker's article on the Moriah school admissions policy (*Community*, June 25). I dread to think how geography lessons and Duke of Edinburgh orienteering will take place when the Moriah head is unsure how to use a map.

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## FOR THE RECORD

The JC seeks to correct errors quickly. Contact details are on the opposite page.

● IN our news story of the reuniting of two Mauthausen survivors (JC, June 25), Eva Clarke was pictured with her mother, Anna Bergman, and not as captioned

# Watchdog has no bite or sight



GEOFFREY ALDERMAN

*When a leading newspaper omits to correct its misinformation about Israel's capital city, the body to tell is the PCC, is it not? Yes, it is not*

ON JUNE 11, the JC Diary included an item about a submission I had made to the Press Complaints Commission. As some of you have been kind enough to contact me about this, I'm going to explain why I complained to the PCC, and what its rejection of my complaint means for what the media here in the UK choose to report about Israel.

In its issue of March 28, the *Sunday Times* carried an opinion piece by Andrew Sullivan, an Oxford educated Catholic who is said to live in the USA and to be a "political conservative".

I must confess that I had never before come across this gentleman, an inhabitant of what I believe is termed the "blogosphere" a virtual world that I visit only when professional duty calls, or by electronic accident.

Sullivan certainly does not seem to like Israel very much. The columns he writes for the *Sunday Times* have in recent months been full of encouragement to the Obama administration to end America's "love affair" (Sullivan's phrase) with the Jewish state.

Frankly, I am not very interested in these rants, but I should add that last January Leon Wieseltier, the much respected American Jewish writer and literary editor of the *New Republic* (and also, like Sullivan and me, an Oxford alumnus) published an erudite and devastating critique of Sullivan, whom he accused of harbouring

a "venomous hostility toward Israel and Jews."

It was not, however, the content of Sullivan's March 28 column that attracted my attention, but the sub-heading, which declared: "It used to be above US reproach, but Tel Aviv is now in the firing line, writes Andrew Sullivan."

Now although I know nothing about the "blogosphere", I do know a little about newspapers, and it occurred to me that the sub-heading is unlikely to have been written by Sullivan himself, but by an ignorant sub-editor. Nonetheless, I wrote to the paper pointing out that if Sullivan wished to refer to the government of Israel by reference to the seat of government, he should use the correct proxy, namely Jerusalem. I added that, although Tel Aviv is Israel's largest city, it is not, "as a matter of indisputable fact", its capital.

How do I know this, "as a matter of indisputable fact"? Because I have visited both cities and seen for myself that Israel's legislature, its supreme court, its central government offices, and indeed the official residence of its head of state, are all located in Jerusalem.

These are the vital signs by which a capital city is identified — to say nothing of the fact that the State of Israel itself declares its capital to be that very city. It is for identical reasons

that Canberra (and not Sydney) is the capital of Australia, that Washington DC (and not New York) is the capital of the USA, and that Brasilia (and not Sao Paulo) is the capital of Brazil.

That neither the UK nor the USA recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital is an interesting irrelevance in this context. When an incoming ambassador wishes to submit his "letters of credence" to the Israeli head of state (as he must), he is obliged to travel to Jerusalem in order to do so.

But my letter to the *Sunday Times* correcting its error in describing Tel Aviv as Israel's capital was not published, nor was the error corrected. So I complained to the PCC. And, after duly deliberating upon this matter, the PCC took the coward's way out, rejecting my complaint on the grounds that "it was not in a position to come to a definitive view".

I cannot for the life of me understand why, because applying the commonsense (and universally accepted) criteria that I have outlined above, it certainly was in a position to come to a definitive view. But it chose not to.

In an interesting sequel to this story, the PCC's "complaints officer", Elizabeth Cobbe, has admitted to me that the Commission does not in fact "have a working definition of what constitutes a capital city" adding that "it assesses each case on an individual basis".

So there you have it. The *Sunday Times* and Andrew Sullivan are free to continue peddling the lie that Tel Aviv is Israel's capital. Do not look to the PCC for redress. For there is none to be had.

# If Israel did listen to friends..?



MIRIAM SHAVIV

*The Jewish state is receiving a great deal of critical advice from the diaspora, most of it missing the fundamental point*

HOW SERIOUSLY should we take the current groundswell of diaspora Jews declaring their friendship for Israel, and then begging it to change course before disaster strikes?

It is certainly a popular message. J Street, the doveish lobby in America, led the pack in 2008; then there was J Call, its European imitator. Last month we had writer Peter Beinart fretting that young American Jews were becoming alienated from the Jewish state because of its "illiberal" policies.

Here in the UK, UJIA chairman Mick Davis has told Israel to come up with a strategy to solve the conflict, while in the JC Jonathan Freedland urged Israel to "listen to its friends".

I am not convinced this outpouring of concern shows the diaspora is souring on Israel. Too many of these voices have been saying the same things for years. But they have recently found a new confidence. It stems from a broad sense, across the political spectrum, that Israel is losing the West.

Over the past few months, Israel has been permanently on the diplomatic back foot, scrambling to defend itself following the Dubai assassination, the building decisions in east Jerusalem and the flotilla affair. Its political and military leadership seems third-rate. Worst of all is the "tectonic rift" between Israel and the US — as the

Israeli ambassador to Washington, Michael Oren, reportedly described the relationship. With Israel bereft of its great protector, its enemies smell blood.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Israel's friends — and they mostly are friends — would want to save Israel from itself. But the diaspora Jews who have spoken up so far are on the wrong track.

Not that they speak with one voice. There is a vast difference between the specifics that J Call, for example,

advanced — including an end to settlement in Arab east Jerusalem — and Mick Davis's more general call for Israel to develop a coherent strategy. But there is one recurring sentiment: that Israel must make what Ariel Sharon used to call "painful concessions for peace". The strong implication is that most of Israel's problems could be over if only it showed the political will to enforce a two-state solution.

I wish it were so. Sadly, history has shown again and again that Israel cannot reach a settlement, even though the will has been there (polls consistently show that a majority of Israelis would make great sacrifices, including uprooting settlers, for genuine peace). The fact is, though, that it does not have a partner in the Palestinians.

Yasir Arafat's decision to walk away from Ehud Barak's land-for-peace offer in Camp David in 2000 is legendary. And we tend to forget that, just two years ago, there was another serious Israeli offer on the table, reportedly even more generous in scope, from PM Ehud Olmert. PA President Mahmoud Abbas did not even bother responding.

This year, Abbas refused to even begin talks unless Israel made unprecedented promises over settlements, promises which should rightfully be negotiated in a final settlement, not a pre-condition. Do they even want a state — a negotiated one, that is? For a people supposedly desperate for independence, the Palestinians seem remarkably blasé about bringing it about.

And so Israel's situation is actually much more dire than the centre-left imagines. There is no magic bullet, no major move that Israel can make that will make its problems go away.

There is, of course, much it could do to improve its hand — change its foreign minister; stop building in east Jerusalem; renew the settlement building freeze. But these are tactics, not strategy. The biggest decision of all, to end the conflict forever, is currently out of its hands. Barring a major game-changer, such as a war or a unilateral Palestinian declaration of independence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will drag on for many years.

Inevitably, this means the rift with the West, including Obama's America, will get worse; many more diaspora Jews may become disillusioned with the Jewish state.

Get used to it. It is not going away.