

Witness Statement Re Peter Gregson - V - GMB

My name is Ahron Cohen – Rabbi Ahron Cohen

I am part of the Orthodox Jewish community who endeavor to live their lives entirely in accordance with the Jewish Religion.

I was trained and was active as a Rabbi, afterwards was active for many years in commerce, in more recent years I became more involved once again in ecclesiastical duties within the Jewish Community and was particularly involved in educating the youth.

I now spend a lot of my time trying to eradicate a very basic misconception regarding Zionism and Judaism and to spread the important but little known message regarding the absolute opposition to Zionism held by authentic Orthodox Jewry and the fact that Judaism and Zionism are totally different concepts and are in fact diametrically opposed.

I am one of many Orthodox Jews who completely sympathise with the cause of the Palestinians in their struggle against the Zionist State. The spearhead group who are involved actively in this matter on a regular basis are called Neturei Karta meaning literally Guardians of the City but which can be loosely translated as Guardians of the Faith.

I wish today to make a witness statement in support of Mr Peter Gregson in the matter of his possible expulsion from the GMB.

I am not qualified to comment one way or the other on the union rule book. However, I am led to believe that the union rules cannot override one's statutory rights. So that the union would not be empowered to penalize a member with expulsion for an action or actions which are within the member's statutory rights. So I wish to comment as to whether Mr Gregson has acted within his statutory rights.

Mr Gregson is accused of making various statements and carrying out various actions which are anti-Semitic and therefore he is charged as being in breach of union rules. If the accusation is correct then these statements and actions could in certain circumstances be illegal and would not be within Mr Gregson's statutory rights. However, if what he has done and is doing is not anti-Semitic,

however distasteful or unacceptable his words and actions may be to various parties, then he is within his legal rights and cannot be penalised for these statements and actions by expulsion.

As stated earlier I am part of the Orthodox Jewish Community which has a religion and a way of life which has been handed down for thousands of years. We are well experienced with the phenomenon of anti-Semitism i.e. bigoted hostility to or prejudice against Jews, for more or less all the time our people and religion have existed, some three thousand five hundred years.

I am therefore qualified to comment on what is and what is not, anti-Semitism.

Firstly, I can testify that what Mr Gregson has said represents no threat to me or us as Jews nor does it show any hostility to or prejudice against Jews.

Secondly, although Mr Gregson has criticized the State of Israel, opposition to Zionism and the State of Israel has nothing whatsoever to do with anti-Semitism.

The confusion which exists at present revolves around the status and nature of the State of Israel which was a flawed concept from the start, both from a religious point of view and a humanitarian point of view. It was a concept that was an obvious recipe for disaster and the cause of tremendous bloodshed and suffering for both Palestinians and Jews. It was and remains the underlying cause of strife in the middle-east. Zionism has not helped Jews, it has been a disaster all round.

A further vital point is that the State of Israel is totally irrelevant to the Jewish right of self-determination. The Jewish People have maintained their self-determination over thousands of years without a State through their attachment to their religion and way of life. In this they differ from other nations who require an attachment to a land in order to express their self-determination. In this point the IHRA implication that criticism of the State of Israel is denying the Jewish People the right of self-determination is wrong. It may be denying the Zionists the right of self-determination but that is not anti-Semitism.

To sum up, to oppose the State of Israel or Zionism is not anti-Semitism. Judaism is an ancient, ethical, moral, compassionate and religious way of life. Going back, as stated earlier, thousands of years. Whereas Zionism (the movement and concept that begat the State of Israel) is a nationalistic, harsh, inconsiderate, secular and racist way of life, barely 120 years old, a totally new concept. It is totally incompatible with and diametrically unacceptable to Judaism on grounds of religious belief and religious humanitarian grounds.

Zionism is indeed a concept started by Jews but it is not Jewish, it is foreign to Judaism. Simply because Jewish people are involved in an endeavor does not and cannot mean that opposition to that endeavor is anti-Semitic, particularly if that endeavor is obviously seriously flawed.

The fact that very many Jews and non-Jews approve of Zionism and the State of Israel, is part of the phenomenal success of the Zionist propaganda machine over the last 100 years or so in persuading those Jews and non-Jews alike that Zionists represent the Jewish People. But that is a total falsehood, the Zionists do not in any way represent the Jewish People. Judaism has existed for thousands of years – Zionism for 120 years. If Zionism had been part of Judaism it would have been with us for all the previous generations

In the light of the above, criticism of the State of Israel, Zionists and Zionism is entirely within the boundaries of free speech and within the statutory rights of anyone making that criticism. Legally entitled criticism should not and cannot be stifled – punitive steps to stifle the criticism such as expulsion must be wrong and would be a serious flawed element in union rules and should not and cannot be followed.

Consequently Mr Gregson cannot be penalized by expulsion for his words and actions in relation to the State of Israel.