



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Foreign Affairs

Other Relevant Information

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

Home Affairs

House of Lords Debate

Online Safety Bill, Committee Stage

col 1288 Baroness Deech (Crossbench): ... the Bill treats user-to-user services, such as Meta, and search services, such as Google, differently. The so-called third shield or toggle proposed for shielding users from legal but harmful content, should they wish to be shielded, does not apply when it comes to search services ... Why the discrepancy? Though search services rightly highlight that the content returned by a search is not created or published by them, the algorithmic indexing, promotion and search prompts provided in search bars—the systems they design and employ—are their responsibility, and these have been proven to do harm. ...

... some of the dreadful things that emerge from searching on Google et cetera are a warning of what could occur. It has been pointed out that search engines would in the past have thrown up, for example, swastikas, SS bolts and other Nazi memorabilia when people searched for desk ornaments. If George Soros's name came up, he would be included in a list of people responsible for world evils. The Bing service ... has been directing people—at [e]ast, it did in the past—to anti-Semitic and homophobic searches through its auto-complete, while Google's image carousel highlighted pictures of portable barbecues to those searching for the term "Jewish baby stroller".

These search engines, which are larger than some countries in terms of the funds they raise, should be treated in the same way as Meta, Twitter and others, knowing the harm that their systems can cause. The Joint Committee on the draft Bill, and Ministers in meetings with the APPG Against Antisemitism, have been clear that this is an issue and recognised that it needs addressing. ...

col 1289 Lord Weir of Ballyholme (DUP): ... we are not talking about some of the minor search engines. We are talking about some of the largest companies in the world, be it Google, Microsoft through Bing, Amazon through its devices or Apple through its Siri voice tool, so it is reasonable that they are brought into line with what is there is for face-to-face users. ... Mention has been made—we do not want to dwell too long on some of the

examples, but I will use just one—of the realms of anti-Semitism, where I have a particular interest. For example, on search tools, a while ago there was a prompt within one search engine that Jews are evil. It was found that when that prompt was there, searches of that nature increased by 10% and when it was removed, they were reduced. It is quite fixable and it goes into a wide range of areas. ...

I mentioned the example of extremism and radicalisation when it comes to anti-Semitism. I have seen it from my own part of the world, where there is at times an attempt by those who still see violence as the way forward in Northern Ireland to draw new generations of young people into extremist ideology and terrorist acts. There is an attempt to lure in young people and, sadly, search engines have a role within that, which is why we need to see that level of protection. ...

col 1293 **Baroness Meron (Labour):** ... the noble Baroness and the noble Lord, Lord Weir, raised very important, realistic examples of where search engines can take us, including to material that encourages racism directed at Jews and other groups and encourages hatred of various groups, including Jews. ...

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay): ... Search services play a critical role in users' online experience, allowing them easily to find and access a broad range of information online. Their gateway function, as we have discussed previously, means that they also play an important role in keeping users safe online because they have significant influence over the content people encounter. ...

col 1294 The Bill already takes a targeted approach and the duties on search services will be proportionate to the risk of harm and the capacity of companies. ... All search services will be required to conduct regular illegal content risk assessments and, where relevant, children's risk assessments, and then implement proportionate mitigations to protect users, including children. ...

Amendment 157 in the name of my noble friend Lord Pickles, and spoken to by the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, seeks to apply new duties on the largest search services. I agree with the objectives in my noble friend's amendment of increasing transparency about the search services' operations and enabling users to hold them to account. It is not, however, an amendment I can accept because it would duplicate existing duties while imposing new duties which we do not think are appropriate for search services. ...

My noble friend's amendment would ensure that the requirements to comply with its publicly available statements applied to all actions taken by a search service to prevent harm, not just those relating to illegal content and child safety. This would be a significant expansion of the duties, resulting in Ofcom overseeing how search services treat legal content which is accessed by adults. That runs counter to the Government's stated desire to avoid labelling legal content which is accessed by adults as harmful. It is for adult users themselves to determine what legal content they consider harmful. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-04-27/debates/AC7C700F-39F3-406C-854C-0EA6F3E3E911/OnlineSafetyBill>

Proposed amendment no. 157, referred to above, can be read at

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/50887/documents/3349>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

Andrew Percy (Conservative): This morning, the Center for Countering Digital Hate issued a shocking report on the online activities of Press TV, particularly its use of a video series called "Palestine Declassified", which focuses its hatred on British Jews. Among

other things on social media, Press TV has been promoting claims that Jews were involved in 9/11 and in covid conspiracies, and it has promoted articles claiming that the holocaust is the greatest lie ever told. While Press TV may be banned from our airwaves, this foreign state hate operation is continuing online. May we have a debate at some point on what more we can do to ensure that social media platforms tackle this outrageous content?

Penny Mordaunt: ... It should be a concern to all Members of the House that these dangerous and, in many cases, antisemitic conspiracy theories can still be promoted and do gain traction. As my hon. Friend will know, I take this matter very seriously and gave a speech on it a couple of months ago. ... I think that ensuring we can all understand what is going on with these kinds of campaigns, and who is behind them, is something we should consider.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-04-27/debates/864713BD-8052-4C6D-B3F5-39D7CA6D59D7/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-FB3E5421-05D4-4A1C-ABFF-39FCC157723D>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://counterhate.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/State-Hate-CCDH-FINAL.pdf>

House of Lords Written Answer

Juries

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green) [HL7331] To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to the findings of a study by Royal Holloway, University of London of religious bias in jury outcomes with regard to different choices of oath; and whether they have any plans to update existing rules or guidance.

Lord Bellamy: Trial by jury is a fundamental part of our justice system, and the Government is committed to ensuring juries are as representative as possible of the public at large. Juries are selected completely at random in order to ensure that a cross-section of society is reflected in their make-up. Successive academic studies have shown that juries deliver fair and impartial results.

We continually monitor proceedings in the criminal courts to ensure fair trials for defendants. There are currently no plans to change the rules or guidance around swearing an oath or making an affirmation in court.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-20/hl7331>

The findings referred to above can be read at

<https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/bjop.12651>

Royal Holloway, University of London and British Journal of Psychology

'So Help Me God'? Does oath swearing in courtroom scenarios impact trial outcomes?

<https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/bjop.12651>

TOP

Israel

See also Andrew Percy's question during "Business of the House" that is included in the Home Affairs section above, and the CCDH report that is included in the Other Relevant Information section below.

Holy Land: Desecration of Religious Sites

Tim Loughton (Conservative) [904699] What discussions the Church of England has had with international counterparts on the desecration of religious sites in the Holy Land.

Desmond Swayne (Conservative) [904702] What discussions the Church of England has had with international counterparts on the desecration of religious sites in the Holy Land.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): In the first three months of this year, seven cases of serious vandalism and antisocial behaviour against churches have been recorded in Israel. That is a sharp increase on the previous year. The Church of England continues to work with the Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem, the heads of other Churches, other faith leaders and the Jordanian Government, as custodian of the holy sites, to maintain the peace.

Tim Loughton: It was particularly galling to see these scenes in what is supposed to be a liberal democracy in the middle east: the desecration of Christian graves and other Christian sites—something that, I am afraid, we have become used to in other countries. These were effectively religious terrorists and extremists, with no regard for the Christian religion. What measures are taking place to ensure that, in future, Christians can celebrate the Easter fire ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem without facing undue restrictions as a result of the fear of violent clashes?

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right to draw attention to the Easter fire ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. That 2,000-year-old ceremony has repeatedly taken place without serious incident. It is certainly our view that the restrictions have been overly heavy-handed. As he will know, the Archbishop of Canterbury has called out what has been happening—the attacks on Christian graves and so on—as blasphemous attacks. The UK Chief Rabbi has also spoken out, as we need to do across the House. I hope the Foreign Office will have similar things to say.

Desmond Swayne: Last Thursday, the Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), came here and announced a strategic partnership with the Government of Israel. That ought to give us some influence over the level of vandalism and antisocial behaviour to which churchgoers are being subjected, oughtn't it?

Andrew Selous: As always, my right hon. Friend makes an important point. He may have seen that over Easter the Latin Patriarch said: "The frequency of these attacks, the aggressions, has become something new. These people feel they are protected...that the cultural and political atmosphere now can justify, or tolerate, actions against Christians."

Attacks are simply not acceptable, whether against Christians or people of any other faith or no faith. I hope that what my right hon. Friend has said, as a distinguished former International Development Minister, will be heard loudly and clearly at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-04-27/debates/D11272EB-69A1-4A53-B2B1-A53CEA3CBADA/HolyLandDesecrationOfReligiousSites>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-04-20/debates/AE73754D-C8F3-4555-84C4-FFC9F4BEF2CE/IsraelAndOccupiedPalestinianTerritories#contribution-E27B81CA-8E84-4441-AE3E-696F94A2B3F3>

House of Commons Written Answers

Imports: Israeli Settlements

Pauline Latham (Conservative) [181648] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make it her policy to prevent the importation of goods originating from illegal Israeli settlements into the UK.

Nigel Huddleston: There are no current import sanctions on goods originating from Israeli settlements. However, goods originating from Israeli settlements in the West Bank are not entitled to tariff and trade preferences under either the trade agreement between the UK and Israel, or the agreement between the UK and the Palestinian Authority.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-19/181648>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Israel: Palestinians

Cat Smith (Labour) [182007] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the treatment of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons.

Cat Smith (Labour) [182008] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the use of administrative detention by Israel against Palestinians.

David Rutley: We remain concerned about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention which, according to international law, should be used only when security makes this absolutely necessary. We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law. The UK is a constructive partner to Israel and we will continue to raise these issues with the Israeli authorities at every opportunity.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-20/182007>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-20/182008>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Lord (Tariq)Ahmad of Wimbledon Today I was pleased to meet independent adviser to HMG on antisemitism @LordJohnMann to discuss how we can strengthen efforts to tackle the despicable scourge of antisemitism globally. Antisemitism is evil and has no place in our or any society.

<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1651626512699752448>

TOP

Other Relevant Information

Centre for Countering Digital Hate

How Iran's Press TV Uses Social Media to Promote Anti-Jewish Hatred

<https://counterhate.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/State-Hate-CCDH-FINAL.pdf>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Bill of Rights Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3227>

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186>

**** Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

Notice of amendments

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0279/amend/highered_rm_cclm_0428.pdf

Holocaust Memorial Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325>

**** Online Safety Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

Committee Stage, House of Lords

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-04-27/debates/AC7C700F-39F3-406C-854C-0EA6F3E3E911/OnlineSafetyBill>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-04-27/debates/958CAC63-A345-45E8-9DE3-7CBA46611DCA/OnlineSafetyBill>

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/50887/documents/3349>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217>

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188>

Same Sex Marriage (Church of England)

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3438>

Schools Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156>

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163>

Universal Jurisdiction (Extension)

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3454>

Scottish Parliament

Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/charities-regulation-and-administration-scotland-bill>

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

Prospective Scheme of Delegation for the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (closing date 15 May 2023)

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-prospective-scheme-delegation-charity-commission-northern-ireland>

Supporting earlier resolution of private family law arrangements (closing date 15 June 2023)

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/private-family-law-consultation/>

Review of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (closing date 18 June 2023)

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-review-race-relations-ni-order-1997>

** Charities tax compliance (closing date 20 July 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/charities-tax-compliance/consultation-charities-tax-compliance>

TOP

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438