10.29 Dr Pinto-Duschinsky

DRAFT SPEAKING SCRIPT [SUBJECT TO VARIATION IN DELIVERY]

Mr Morgan, amid all the arguments and rebuttals relating to the proposal in question, one thing is obvious.

Were the planning case for the building in Victoria Tower Gardens straightforward and uncontroversial, you would not have needed to conduct this inquiry.

An array of rival barristers have come before you because there is a clash between weighty planning objections and the Minister's stated "implacable" determination to press ahead on grounds of overwhelming public interest.

[Incidentally, or not so incidentally, I do admire Mr Jenrick's determination to remain unbowed by what have reportedly been serious physical threats.]

Were there clear support for the proposal throughout the Jewish or wider community, it would not have been seen as necessary to mount an expensive campaign aimed largely at Jews urging us to write in giving our support.

You will be receiving detailed expert evidence about the planning aspects. So I will not use my time to review them. My only comment - based on nine years as an elected city councillor and planning committee member in Oxford - is that objections from planning experts as concerted as those against the Victoria Park project should not lightly be dismissed.

I therefore will focus on the issue of PUBLIC INTEREST and whether it is strong enough to overcome the powerful planning objections.

Let me start with two points.

First, the Holocaust and the "battle for memory" of it are as complex as they are vital. Therefore it is both unsurprising and healthy that there should be such passionate disagreement about the substance of the proposal.

I hope and believe that real public benefit will arise from the current controversy. There is no inconsistency in my praise for both sides. On the one hand, we owe a huge debt to Lord Pickles, Ed Balls and leading political and public figures for their very strong advocacy of Holocaust remembrance.

But we need also to appreciate the reasons why some of our most leading and best informed Jews have expressed strong concerns. Careful criticisms should be welcomed since they are not only indications of a vibrant community and of the questions of judgement needed to come to solutions, but they may actually lead to improved, more nuanced plans.

The construction of edifices may have far-reaching benefits in some cases and very little in others.

It was my privilege to know Josef Fraenkel, of blessed memory, author of a standard work on the tragedy of the Jews of Austria. His brilliant daughter, now Baroness Deech, could not have failed to be deeply affected by the indignities he suffered as a refugee from the Nazis and by the knowledge that so many others died having been refused entry into Britain, Palestine or any place of safety.

Ruth Deech and the leading historian of Anglo-Jewry Professor Alderman have every reason to be dubious about the record of our Government and Parliament in the 1930s and 1940s.

My own approach is a bit different. It has been affected both by my professional expertise in the study of British politics and constitution and my early life, which I do not remember, as a survivor in Hungary of two camps and two ghettos.

In my academic writings and in past and recent advice to British governments I have been a strong proponent of the virtues of Parliamentary Sovereignty. For all the shortcomings of the policy of Appeasement, it was the House of Commons which overthrew Neville Chamberlain in 1940. It was under Churchill that Britain stood alone in 1940-41 against Hitler.

So I do not agree with Geoffrey Alderman that a British Holocaust memorial must inevitably be hypocritical. It must, however, be realistic and lacking in propaganda.

Second, my discomfort with the PUBLIC INTEREST argument stems from what former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Williams and a Jewish co-author have criticised as the **lack of sufficient thought about the precise objectives of the memorial and the prospect that the project could easily backfire**. I do not have time to go further into this but strongly recommend their piece in STANDPOINT Magazine and their recommendation to consider content as well as monumental architecture.

As a city councillor in Oxford, I was asked to attend the official opening of the new city library where I was told that the construction costs had consumed the entire budget. So, it would be a while before the City Council would be able to purchase any new books. I was reminded of that by an email this morning from a rabbi who wrote that people should be given priority over buildings.

Provided the construction and maintenance costs will not subtract from other essential post-Holocaust needs, all well and good. But do we know that?

In addition, I believe that the battle for memory needs to be far more comprehensive than teaching schoolchildren.

**All or most of our eggs should not be placed in the basket of a prestige construction project or of the annual Holocaust Memorial Day**.

I have listed some other essential post-Holocaust issues in my submission because they tend to be forgotten. I believe the scope of our efforts needs to be considerably widened.

- Top of the list for me is the material and psychological welfare of my fellow Holocaust survivors. We survivors - most of us older than me - must not be considered as useful only as props for television programmes or as givers of testimony to schoolchildren.

With our increasing age and frailty, policymakers and Jewish communal bodies must consider what they need to do for US, not only our use as agents of memory for the general population.

Apart from a few survivor leaders, ordinary survivors in my experience have often been treated poorly by scholars, communal activists, broadcasters and others. I should mention that the trauma extends to survivors' descendants many of them part Jewish and thus difficult to reach and help.

- Welfare apart, there is unfinished business from the Holocaust. To the best of my knowledge, it remains the official German Government position that slave labour in Auschwitz and elsewhere was - as I heard a German ambassador to London telling Auschwitz survivors Rudi Kennedy and Roman Halter - "strictly speaking" legal.

That is a pernicious stance that needs to be challenged if there is to be a legitimate legal order in Europe.

- Our universities have too easily accepted funds from Nazi-tainted corporations and foundations. Despite the usual protests of recipient scholars that they are free from the influence of their benefactors, this is sometimes open to question.

The focus of a series of conferences at the Imperial War Museum on topics "beyond" concentration camps and what was euphemistically called "forced" rather than slave labour was perhaps easier to explain when the funding sources emerged. They included the company which had profited from the trade in gold extracted from the teeth of gassed victims. The Museum no longer accepts its contributions.

- The list goes on. The European Union has officially established the equivalence of Nazi and Communist crimes remembered each year on 23rd August, the day Molotov and Ribbentrop signed their pact in 1939.

- Slovenia has become the latest central European country to overturn the postwar conviction of the country's leading pro-Nazi in a legal decision that appears to throw doubt on the validity of the Nuremberg trials. This is by no means an isolated example.

- Seventy five years on, the battle for basic **restitution** for victims continues.

- What of **the records of postwar collaboration of British intelligence with former Nazis**? When will they be declassified?

- Why did the National Archives produce such biased and inaccurate educational materials?

- Why did a member of the Dresden Trust, devoted to the memory of the Allied bombing of Dresden recently complain that Britain has obsessively rubbed German noses in the blood of the Nazis?

- What of the soft-core Holocaust denials of leading German historians?

- Why are intimate personal details of Holocaust survivors readily available on the internet while equivalent documents relating to their persecutors kept private under German privacy laws?

My sad conclusion is that it is dangerous to suppose that a few major initiatives will resolve our post-Holocaust problems. It is hard for commissions of eminent persons such as that created by David Cameron to devise policies and projects to cover the range of needs. I am extremely grateful to the members of the commission, to members of the new Holocaust Memorial Foundation and to all the very senior political figures who have offered their backing and support. However, I feel that considerably more thought needs to be given to post-Holocaust issues in general.

If the aim is to create an ICONIC symbol of our horror concerning the Holocaust and if the site next to Parliament is considered essential, I suggest that the current proposal should be judged on grounds of

1. planning law and standards,

2. functionality and

3. possibilities for future expansion.

If the proposal fails on those criteria, another site should be found for the project.

But if there is to be another site for the learning centre, an ICONIC memorial to the Holocaust - on the lines of the Cenotaph and thus taking less room - can and should be found in the Victoria Park Gardens or a more prominent Westminster site. This double option could satisfy both proponents and objectors.