

# Yoram Hazony: ‘In Britain and in Israel, there is no stopping National Conservatism’

Orthodox Jewish philosopher who sparked row over 'Cultural Marxism' gives his side of the story in his only UK interview

BY **DAVID ROSE**

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Yoram Hazony

Orthodox Jewish philosophers from Israel rarely make political waves in Britain. That changed this week, when Yoram Hazony’s National Conservatism conference kicked off in London, immediately sparking a major row about whether the term “cultural Marxism” was antisemitic.

“There are many very good people who are tarred as antisemites, simply because it’s expedient for some elements on the political left to try to delegitimise conservative speakers,” the 58-year-old Israeli says.

“All the examples of the people smeared in this way this week — Miriam Cates, Douglas Murray and Kevin Roberts — are among the best friends we Jews have in public life.”

Hazony, who heads the Herzl Institute in Jerusalem and the Edmund Burke Foundation, is speaking on the closing day of the conference, which he organised and chaired.



Focus of row: Miriam Cates MP addressing the National Conservatism conference

He chose the JC for his only interview because we published Herzl's first manifesto in 1896, more than 18 months before the famous First Zionist Congress in Basel.

Hazony is strident in his insistence that National Conservatism speakers are not antisemitic. "I'm an Orthodox Jew," he says. "I live in Jerusalem.

"My public career has brought me into contact over the decades with people who don't like Jews and people who say they don't like Jews.

And there has been a rise in antisemitism, very clearly on the left and in certain places on the right as well. But the idea that anything these speakers said was antisemitic is absurd.

"There is no antisemitism here. We are simply looking at unscrupulous leftist operatives who are willing to falsely accuse innocent men and women in order to drive conservative men and women out of politics."

He adds: "The National Conservative movement in the different countries where it operates does not give a platform to antisemites, and those who are hostile to Jews will not receive any aid from our movement."

The allegations reveal a deeper crisis afflicting many democracies, notably Britain, America and Israel, he says: the emergence of an intensely polarised politics, in which the left deliberately tries to delegitimise its opponents. At the other end of the spectrum, Conservatism has been hollowed out.

"Conservatism has been in a state of confusion almost continuously since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and an aspect of that confusion is its capitulation to liberalism in Britain, America and elsewhere. That's a polite way of saying conservatism has virtually ceased to exist."

He doesn't exempt Britain's current Conservative government from this charge, and neither did some of those who spoke at the three-day conference, notably Home Secretary Suella

Braverman, who said that immigrant levels must be sharply reduced to let Britons fill jobs such as fruit-picking.



Yoram Hazony

She also railed against those who ignored the ethnicity of child-grooming gangs or claimed women could have penises.

However, Hazony also believes that conservatism — with both a lower case and a capital “c” — is renewing itself, rediscovering the significance of national identity and tradition. He stresses the need for the “conservation and transmission” of such values.

“British conservatism is in the process of clarifying what the voting public wants and how it’s possible for the Tory Party to update itself to respond to that,” he says. “This conference is a rallying of forces, political and intellectual, to push the Tory party and the country in a direction that we believe the public will be very pleased to see.”

An Israeli political philosopher chairing a conference in Britain that features British ministers is very unusual. (Among others who spoke were Tory deputy chairman Lee Anderson and Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove.)

But according to Hazony, the UK has a unique significance. “Britain has tremendous influence with other democratic nations and is a beacon of hope to the non-democratic world as well,” he says.

“I was sitting with a US senator recently and he told me, ‘America isn’t going to learn from Hungary, but it is going to learn from Britain, the original source of American political life.’ What happens here affects all of us.”

Which leads us back to the false claims of antisemitism and the international malaise that Hazony says they exemplify. He dates this back to 2016, with the so-called “resistance” to President Donald Trump and the equally fierce attempts to reverse the Brexit referendum, which, he says, “paralysed” UK politics for the next three years.

Similar forces, Hazony says, explain the current crisis in Israel, triggered by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu forming a coalition with far-right parties led by Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir.

“Bibi is a very cautious politician and he upholds the tradition of governing from the centre that has characterised almost the whole of Israeli history,” he says.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Getty Images)

“There’s no doubt that Netanyahu would have preferred this government to include left and centre parties. That it doesn’t is entirely the fault of the left and centre parties who boycott Netanyahu.”

The attempt to delegitimise the right, he goes on, doesn’t only explain why Israel has had five general elections in three years, but why political divides have become so deep in Britain, America and elsewhere.

We are, he says, facing nothing less than “a breakdown of democracy” because “democracy requires each side to regard the other as legitimate, and to be ready, if defeated, to serve as a loyal Opposition”.

In this new, polarised world, “the correct stance is ... to see things in black and white, so that if you’re not a liberal or a lefty, then you must support autocracy, the return of authoritarianism.

This has always been part of far-left discourse, but now it’s moved to the mainstream. As soon as someone is identified as a non-leftist, he seen as a fascist.



Itamar Ben-Gvir (Getty Images)

“But you have to remember, this also involves an attempt to delegitimise and disenfranchise 30, 40, 50 per cent of the electorate.” The same is true in Israel. “Ben-Gvir is not my cup of tea,” he says. He does not see the firebrand as a fascist, however. “He’s certainly on the conservative spectrum,” he adds.

Hazony lays part of the blame on social media, which has “acted as an amplification system for people who are willing to reach hasty conclusions.”

But there is hope. “If used properly, social media does permit all kinds of intellectual currents that are not dangerous to find each other.”

If it is to prevail against the left, National Conservatism shouldn’t seek to impose ideological hegemony. Instead, he says, it must “build a coalition” of “anti-Marxist liberals, Christians and nationalists”.

Among Hazony’s statements that have aroused most controversy is his suggestion that “having kids is the greatest thing a man or a woman can do”.

A substantial part of his latest book, *Conservatism: A Rediscovery*, deals not with politics but the consciously conservative path that he and his wife, Yael, have chosen for their family’s life.

Born in Israel, Hazony was largely educated in America, where his physicist father took up a post at Princeton. Hazony studied there too, and met Yael when they were students.

She converted and the couple decided to embrace Orthodox Jewish life in the east Jerusalem settlement of Ramot.

“There are 13 synagogues on our street,” he says. “We thought this would be the most meaningful way to live.” They have nine children and four grandchildren.

Despite his view that millions exist in a “spiritual void”, Hazony is optimistic. “When we talk about the nation, a large of group of people see this as a homecoming. The call to care about one’s nation is also a call to care about one’s family, one’s community,” he says.

He adds: “We’re going to be here for years. I believe that within a very few years, there’s a very good chance that National Conservatism will be the dominant strain within the Tory Party.”

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