

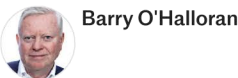
# Barry O'Halloran

## Ireland is hardly bothering to hide its anti-Semitism anymore

A controversial motion to rename a public park shows that anti-Jewish prejudice is still at large in the country



Herzog Park in Rathgar was named in 1995 after Chaim Herzog, the Belfast-born, Dublin-raised sixth president of Israel Credit: Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyne



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In 1986 the Irish author and public intellectual [Conor Cruise O’Brien](#) wrote, “anti-Semitism is a light sleeper”. Four decades later he would be dismayed (but hardly surprised) to learn that it had woken from its slumber in Ireland yet again. This time it has arisen through the issue of Gaza, and the human suffering there for which Israel is being held solely responsible.

Over the past few years Ireland has been labelled “the most anti-Israeli country in Europe”, a reputation ensured by the performative antics of Dublin city council this past week.

[Herzog Park](#) is a small public park in the leafy suburb of Rathgar in south Dublin, part of the city that is still home to a significant number of the small and ever-dwindling population of [Irish Jews](#). Nearby is one of the two Jewish schools in the whole of Ireland.

The park was named in 1995 in honour of Chaim Herzog who was born in Belfast but grew up in this part of Dublin and later became president of Israel. In every sense of the term, Chaim Herzog was a “local boy” who spoke fluent Irish and was a close personal friend of Éamon de Valera. His father, Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog, was the first chief rabbi of independent Ireland and, as an ardent supporter of Irish independence, was known affectionately as “the Sinn Féin rabbi”. Chaim Herzog’s son, [Isaac Herzog](#), is Israel’s current president.



Chaim Herzog was born and raised in Ireland Credit: Bettmann

Last June, Sinn Féin submitted a motion to the city council to change the name of Herzog Park to Hind Rajab Park “to commemorate a five-year-old girl, Hind, killed by the Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) on January 29, 2024”. The proposal was sent to the commemorations committee which recommended that the full city council remove the Herzog name from the park. That motion was due to be debated on Monday evening and would have passed as it had the support of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, a range of far-Left micro-parties and independent councillors, as well as some members of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

Over the weekend, however, it began to dawn on Ireland’s national political leadership that the passing of such an anti-Semitic motion would cause significant reputational damage to the country. Separately, the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and minister for foreign affairs all demanded that the motion be withdrawn. Micheál Martin, the Taoiseach, [described the motion as “wrong and divisive”](#). He went on to say that “the proposal is a denial of our history and will without any doubt be seen as anti-Semitic”.

Then, out of the blue, the council’s chief executive announced that the controversial motion was being withdrawn due to “administrative mishaps”. Deprived of their original de-naming motion, furious councillors had to make do with debating an emergency motion on Monday evening that rejected “the inherent suggestion that any councillor supporting the motion [to rename the part] is in any way motivated by or promoting anti-Semitism”.

In the ensuing debate, however, it transpired that the Taoiseach’s charge of anti-Semitism may have had a more solid foundation. Councillor Pat Dunne of the United Left party, said: “I’m further convinced that whatever phone calls was (sic) made to our CEO and to other officials probably emanated from Israeli intelligence attached to the Israeli Defence Force because they’re active in every issue in relation to Palestine.”

Another suggested: “The optics will appear to show these senior Irish politicians carrying out the instructions of the Israeli lobby, and it’s very hard to argue with that view when we see the actual result.”

But it was Sinn Féin’s Ciarán Ó Meachair who outshone all his colleagues by making the wild and unsubstantiated claim that Chaim Herzog, who joined the British Army to fight Nazism, had commanded troops who “raped, murdered and pillaged innocent civilians”.

In the light of much of what transpired during the hour-long debate, it is difficult to find fault with the observations of Ed Abrahamson, an Irish Jew who viewed the livestream of the council debate. He wrote on social media: “Watching the @DubCityCouncil meeting – feeling utterly sick and despondent. There is palpable hatred in that room.”

Gideon Sa’ar, Israel’s foreign minister, rebuked Sonya McGuinness, the Irish ambassador to Israel in person over the Herzog re-naming affair saying: “There is nothing in your system right now that can protect you from the virus of anti-Semitism, except external pressure and exposing the anti-Semitic nature of the government of Ireland”.

Meanwhile, the anti-Israeli bandwagon moves on to Geneva on Thursday, where European Broadcasting Union members are scheduled to debate [Israel’s participation in next year’s Eurovision Song Contest](#). If Israel isn’t barred from participating, then countries like Spain and Ireland might make good on their previously announced threat to boycott next year’s Eurovision in Vienna.

It could be a while, it seems, before the beast of anti-Jewish prejudice in Ireland returns to hibernation.