

Rupert Murdoch Apologizes for Anti-Semitic Cartoon

Media baron Rupert Murdoch has apologized for a *Sunday Times* cartoon depicting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu building a wall using blood-red mortar, an image Jewish leaders said was reminiscent of anti-Semitic propaganda.

The political cartoon, which ran in the British newspaper on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, features Netanyahu wielding a trowel and bricking agonized Palestinians into a wall. It was meant as a comment on recent elections in which Netanyahu's ticket narrowly won the most seats in the Israeli parliament.

"Will cementing the peace continue?" the caption read, a reference both to the stalled peace process and Israel's separation barrier, a complex of fences and concrete walls which Israel portrays as a defense against suicide bombers but which Palestinians say is a land grab under the guise of security.

Murdoch wrote on Twitter that the cartoonist, Gerald Scarfe—a veteran artist who frequently depicts blood in his work—did not reflect the paper's editorial line. "Nevertheless, we owe [a] major apology for [the] grotesque, offensive cartoon," Murdoch tweeted.

Jewish community leaders were particularly disturbed by parallels they saw between the red-tinged drawing and historical anti-Semitic propaganda—in particular the theme of "blood libel," the twisted but persistent myth that Jews secretly use human blood in their religious rituals.

Their anger was heightened by the fact that the cartoon was published on a day meant to commemorate the communities destroyed by the Nazis and their allies in the mid-20th

century.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews, which represents the country's roughly 265,000-strong Jewish community, said it had lodged a complaint with the U.K. press watchdog.

The board said in a statement that the depiction of a Jewish leader using blood for mortar "is shockingly reminiscent of the blood libel imagery more usually found in parts of the virulently anti-Semitic Arab press."

Israel's ambassador to Britain echoed the statement, while Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin wrote to his U.K. counterpart to express "extreme outrage."

Murdoch's News International, which publishes *The Times*, said Scarfe was not available for comment.

In a statement, the paper's acting editor, Martin Ivens, said that insulting the memory of Holocaust victims or invoking blood libel was "the last thing I or anyone connected with *The Sunday Times* would countenance."

"The paper has long written strongly in defense of Israel and its security concerns, as have I as a columnist," Ivens said. "We are, however, reminded of the sensitivities in this area by the reaction to the cartoon, and I will of course bear them very carefully in mind in future."

British political cartoons can be shocking to those used to tamer American drawings of donkeys and elephants slugging it out on Capitol Hill.

Distorted features, blood, and excrement are commonplace. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair, a once-popular leader whose reputation was badly damaged by his decision to support the U.S. invasion of Iraq, was often depicted with ghoulish features, sharpened fangs, or with his hands or mouth drenched in gore.

Scarfe, whose career with *The Sunday Times* stretches back to the 1960s, often makes use of blood in his cartoons.

In fact, his website is splashed with blood. In a recent cartoon of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, he depicted Assad as a green, wraith-like creature drinking greedily from an oversized cup labeled "Children's Blood."