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JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY

Doubling down on anti-Semitic displays, Belgian parade features costumes of Orthodox Jews with insect bodies

BY CNAAN LIPSHIZ FEBRUARY 23, 2020 9:58 AM



Participants of the Aalst Carnival wearing costumes combining haredi Jew clothes with ant parts in Aalst, Belgium on Feb. 23, 2020. (Cnaan Liphshiz)

AALST, Belgium (JTA) – Caricatures of Jews, including ones depicting them as ants, were prominently displayed at this city's annual parade.

The displays came a year after the Jewish Telegraphic Agency exposed anti-Semitic displays in last year's parade in Aalst, located about 10 miles west of Brussels. Participants said the new displays were designed to reject the criticism of the town and carnival that followed JTA's report.





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“This is us saying we’re not going to stop making fun of everyone,” a man who identified himself as Fred van Oilsjt, 26, told JTA Sunday while wearing a costume that exaggerates the suits favored by haredi Jewish men. (Oilsjt is Aalst in the local dialect.)

He and 11 other members of his group also wore an ant’s abdomen and legs attached to their backs and a sticker that read “obey” on their lapels. Anti-Semitic imagery has often associated Jews with vermin, but he said the display was meant to be a pun referencing how the Dutch-language word for the Western Wall sounds like “complaining ant.”

Another group wore fake hooked noses and haredi Jew costumes as protest. Their float had a sign labelled “regulations for the Jewish party committee,” and it included: “Do not mock Jews” and “Certainly do not tell the truth about the Jew.”

Among the thousands of revelers who watched the parade from the sidelines, dozens of people wore fake haredi Jew costumes, including one person who also wore large troll feet.

Rudi Roth, a journalist for the Antwerp-based Joods Actueel Jewish paper, said the expressions of anti-Semitism in Aalst this year were more numerous and prominent than last year. He called it a “backlash effect.”



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The Aalst Carnival included more anti-Semitic displays in 2020 than in 2019. (Cnaan Liphshiz)

Last year, JTA reported that the Aalst carnival included effigies of grinning Orthodox Jews holding bags of money, with a rat perched on one effigy's shoulders.

The report brought scrutiny to the city. In December, UNESCO pulled its endorsement of the Aalst Carnival as a world heritage event, and Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz on Thursday called for what he labelled a “hateful” event to be banned. Meanwhile, celebrities have backed out of appearances with Aalst's mayor, who has defended the parade displays.





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The mayor, Christophe D’Haese of the right-wing New Flemish Alliance, said on Sunday that in the “context of the carnival, these displays are not anti-Semitic.” Any illegal hate speech, he added, would be dealt with by law enforcement.

“This is not an anti-Semitic event,” he told journalists at a press conference.

Joel Rubinfeld, the president of the Belgian League Against Anti-Semitism, condemned the displays, which, he said, “although are the work of a minority of participants and spectators, stain the whole event.”

He said the event “certainly has anti-Semitic elements,” the likes of which he said had not been on display since the end of the Nazi occupation in 1945.

“Aalst’s name is now associated with anti-Semitism,” Rubinfeld, said, “and that’s partly because of the mayor’s inaction.”

<https://www.jta.org/2020/02/23/global/belgian-parade-features-costumes-of-haredi-jews-with-insect-bodies>

