

ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM: RACIST POLITICAL TWINS

The movement for freedom, justice and equality for Palestinians opposes Israel's occupation, colonisation of Arab lands and its apartheid system. The campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) targets the Israeli state, institutions and companies complicit in Israel's crimes.¹ BDS has become an effective means for people of diverse backgrounds to express their humanitarian, anti-racist impulses in solidarity with Palestine.

Recognising the power of BDS, Israel's defenders have regularly accused the movement of antisemitism. They use this favourite weapon to intimidate and silence critics of Israel, including Jewish anti-Zionists, who are dismissed as 'self-hating Jews'.

This briefing has been written by and for BDS activists to explain how the charge of antisemitism applies to Zionism itself. Indeed, they are racist political twins. Understanding their mutual dependence will help strengthen the BDS movement and inform our strategy.

Antisemitism portrayed as eternal

Zionism historically argued that antisemitism was inherent in non-Jews and thus would always persist. According to Leo Pinsker, founder of the 19th century Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion), 'Judeophobia is a mental disease. As a mental disease it is hereditary, and as a disease transmitted for two thousand years it is incurable.'² On this basis, antisemitism couldn't be eliminated, so opposing it was futile.

Founder of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, wrote in his 1895 diary: 'In Paris... I recognized the emptiness and futility of trying to "combat" anti-Semitism.'³ He also wrote that 'the anti-Semites will be our most dependable friends, anti-Semitic countries our allies'⁴, i.e. by stimulating Jewish immigration to Palestine. According to Jacob Klatzkin, editor during 1909-1911 of *Die Welt*, the official Zionist newspaper: 'We are... naturally foreigners. We are an alien nation in your midst and we want to remain one.'⁵

Early Zionists accepted stereotypes commonplace at the time: that Jews, especially Eastern European Jews, were backward. They were seen as having become degenerate because they lacked a homeland, so settling Palestine would uplift and cleanse them. For example Pinhas Rosenbluth, later Israel's Justice Minister, wrote that Palestine was 'an institute for the fumigation of Jewish vermin'.⁶ Seeing Jews as 'human dust', Zionists sought to redeem them through *aliyah* – i.e. 'ascent' to the ancient Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*).⁷

Zionists agreed with European antisemites that Jews didn't belong and should be assisted or even pressurised to leave Europe. But most Jews rejected this notion. In 1897 the first Zionist Congress had to be moved to Basel in Switzerland from Munich, because Jews there regarded Zionism as antisemitic and feared it would undermine their civil rights in Germany.⁸

Antisemitic support for a Jewish State

Zionism has always depended on support from antisemitic elites. Even before Jewish Zionist organisations developed, political Zionism was promoted by 19th-century European imperialists such as Lords Palmerston and Shaftesbury, Benjamin Disraeli and Napoleon III's Secretary Ernest Laharanne. Many Christians believed Jewish immigration to Palestine would bring about the Second Coming of Christ, as in Biblical prophecy. More pragmatically, they saw a future Jewish homeland as a British imperial outpost – 'a "little loyal Jewish Ulster" in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism', according to the first military governor of Jerusalem.⁹

Such political motives explain the famous 'Balfour Declaration' of 1917, when UK Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour (a Christian Zionist) favoured 'the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'. Everyone else was classified as belonging to 'non-Jewish communities'.

The only opposition in Cabinet came from its sole Jewish member, Edwin Montagu, who warned that the plan would lead to discrimination against non-Jews in Palestine and against Jews elsewhere.¹⁰

As Prime Minister a decade earlier, Balfour had promoted the 1905 Aliens Act, designed to block immigration of Jewish refugees from Czarist pogroms in Russia. He wanted them to go to Palestine instead. He warned against 'the undoubted evils that had fallen upon the country [Britain] from an immigration that was largely Jewish'.¹¹

Undermining an anti-Nazi boycott

Zionists have often argued that only their own state can protect Jews from antisemitic attack. During the early stages of the Third Reich, moreover, the Nazis and Zionist organisations shared an outlook on Jewish separation.¹² By attempting to separate Jews from the rest of humanity, the Zionists made destructive choices.

When Nazi Germany introduced antisemitic laws and promoted physical attacks on Jews, the Jewish diaspora in other countries organised an effective campaign for an international boycott. Mass rallies were held in many cities all over the world. In the USA and several European countries, large shops cancelled orders for German goods and found alternative sources.

The Nazi regime's accomplice to beat the boycott was the World Zionist Organisation (WZO). Under the Transfer (*Haavara*) Agreement of March 1933, the WZO actively opposed the boycott in exchange for the Nazis permitting some well-off Jews and their wealth to be transported to Palestine. This transfer amounted to at least \$30m worth of German goods, thus making Hitler a significant economic sponsor of the Zionist project. The Agreement would 'pierce a stake through the heart of the Jewish-led anti-Nazi boycott', according to historian Edwin Black.¹³ Members of the World Jewish Congress sought to continue the boycott, but the WJC leadership soon joined the WZO in undermining it.

Zionism gains from antisemitism in Poland

In the mid-1930s Poland's government also moved against the country's Jews by enacting laws modelled on the Nuremberg Race Laws of Nazi Germany. For example, new laws restricted the kosher slaughtering of cattle and excluded Jews from specific professions. The Polish regime also negotiated with France to establish a 'Jewish colony' in Madagascar where Polish Jews could be sent.¹⁴ These developments and the antisemitism of the Catholic Church strengthened the Polish Zionist movement.

Betar, a right-wing Revisionist Zionist movement opposed to trade unions, worked with antisemites in the Polish military from 1930 onwards. High-ranking army officers secretly trained Betar recruits, most of whom immigrated to Palestine by the end of the decade to join Zionist military forces there. Nevertheless Zionism in Poland faced strong opposition from the Bund, a Jewish-secular socialist party, which had a stronger following than any other Jewish party in Poland.

From the Holocaust to the 'New Jew'

Zionism was a minority political force among European Jews until six million were killed by the Nazis. The Holocaust strengthened Zionist efforts to gain international support for a Jewish state in Palestine. Most Jewish refugees sought escape to Western Europe or the USA but were blocked by immigration controls – supported by Zionist organisations – and so migrated instead to Palestine.

Zionist colonisation depended on racist institutions which still operate today. The Jewish Agency promotes Jewish immigration to Israel. The Jewish National Fund (JNF) still allocates Israeli land only to Jews.¹⁵ The Histadrut – often mistakenly called a 'trade union' – has been in reality a business promoting 'Hebrew-only labour'.¹⁶ The Israeli 'Law of Return' offered citizenship to all Jews, wherever they live in the world.

Zionist militias attacked Palestinian civilians during the 1940s until the 1948 declaration of independence for Israel. In 1947-48 this terror campaign led to the expulsion of more than 700,000 Palestinians from their homes. Several massacres panicked Palestinians to flee their homeland.

An official 'state of emergency' prevented refugees from exercising their right of return, thus violating international law to this day. Zionist settlement did not stop at taking over indigenous people's land. Rather than exploit their labour, Zionism sought to expel or eliminate them, as earlier European settlers had done in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand.

Zionism sought to replace the indigenous population with colonial-settlers as the 'New Jew'. This doubly racist project maligned the Bund's working-class solidarity as backward and sought to replace immigrants' Yiddish culture with a literally fabricated one. Israeli author Amos Oz explains: 'Even new lullabies and new "ancient legends" were synthesised by eager writers, e.g. glorifying the settlers' land appropriation through agricultural labour (compare the two posters).'¹⁷

As the ideology underpinning Jewish settlement in Palestine, Zionism was embraced by many Jews as a route to a socialist Utopia based on collective labour and idealistic kibbutz communities. In practice they faced a choice: either break with Zionism or accept its racist, colonial nature.¹⁹



Socialist Jew of the Bund youth organisation: 'Join the Tsukunft' (Future)¹⁸



New Jew of settler-colonialism: 'Towards a new life in the Promised Land'

Racist Right-wing politics

As in the 1930s, Zionism and racist Right-wing politics have continued to converge. The US political scene features an alliance between Jewish Zionists and the far more numerous fundamentalist Christian Zionists. Today many of the 40 million Christian Evangelists there believe that a Jewish 'return' to Palestine will bring the Second Coming, Armageddon and then the Rapture, when the Righteous will be saved. Everyone who does not accept this prophecy, including Jews, will be sent to hell. Since 9/11 Christian Zionists have also seen Israel as a front-line defence against the so-called 'Islamic threat'.

Jewish Zionists have exploited this support, even when combined with blatant antisemitism. According to Pastor John Hagee, President of the Southern Baptist Convention, 'Adolph Hitler was a "hunter", sent by God, who was tasked with expediting God's will of having the Jews re-establish a state of Israel.'²⁰ Nevertheless Hagee's support for Israel has been welcomed by the Anti-Defamation League, which is meant to oppose antisemitism.²¹ Likewise Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, 'The good news is that Israel is not alone – it has your support', when addressing a rally of Hagee's one million-strong Christians United for Israel.²²

As in the USA, European racist groups combine antisemitism with support for Zionism.²³ Throughout Europe most major racist parties are antisemitic, Islamophobic and pro-Zionist. English Defence League members express antisemitic views, while also flying the Israeli flag. Support for Israel also comes from Robert Zines, MEP of Latvia's Freedom & Fatherland Party, who joins the annual march in memory of SS veterans who guarded extermination camps.²⁴ Similarly in Poland, the Law and Justice Party is a home for pro-Israel antisemites.²⁵ Michal Kaminski MEP strongly supports Israel while also defending 'the good name of Jedwabne' – a town where hundreds of Jews were burned alive in a synagogue in 1941.²⁶

Racist equation: Zionist = Jewish

Western support for Israel is based on much more than collusion with antisemitism. Israel has demonstrated its utility in suppressing Arab nationalist aspirations for democratic control of the Middle East and its natural resources, especially since the 1967 war. Israeli counter-insurgency methods have been used widely by Western military forces, e.g. in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Israeli military has turned the Middle East into a laboratory for surveillance, control and armament systems to be extended globally.²⁷ Imperialist domination closely links the Western powers to the Israeli colonial-settler state. Palestinians regularly face Western demands 'to recognise Israel as a Jewish state', thus conflating a people with a state. This conflation has been encouraged by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), whose supporters have described it as 'the Jewish lobby'.²⁸

A similar conflation was also promoted by the now-defunct EU Monitoring Centre (EUMC) on Racism and Xenophobia.²⁹ According to its so-called 'working definition of antisemitism', it could be antisemitic to deny 'the Jewish people their right to self-determination, for example by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour'.³⁰ Since this definition was rejected by the UK's Universities and Colleges Union (UCU), Zionists have campaigned for universities to de-recognise the union. This demonstrates once again that it is Zionists, not their critics, who continue to equate their colonial-settler project with all Jews. By claiming to be 'the State of the Jews', Israel implicates all Jews in Israel's wars, occupation, land thefts, expulsions and other crimes.

Mirroring that equation, some misguided supporters of the Palestinians have attributed their oppression to an international Jewish conspiracy, to 'Jewish power', to 'a Jewish spirit', etc. The extreme-Right journalist Israel Shamir promotes those elements of traditional European antisemitism, ostensibly to support the Palestinians. These explanations obscure the source of Palestinian oppression. They perversely accept Zionist claims to represent all Jews and 'Jewish values'.

Leading Palestinian commentators and activists reject such "support" as damaging the Palestinian cause. Ali Abunimah, Joseph Massad, Omar Barghouti and Rafeef Ziadeh were among dozens who denounced those who blame 'Jewish'

characteristics for the oppression of Palestinians.³¹ As the Palestinian BDS National Committee has argued, 'equating Israel and world Jewry... is itself antisemitic'.³²

The equation stereotypes Jews, threatens their civil rights and undermines their national identity in countries where they live. It originated from antisemites who saw Jews as an alien people not belonging in Europe and needing their own homeland. This equation is contradicted by the many people of Jewish origin who actively support Palestinian national rights and play central roles in the BDS campaign.

BDS – against Zionism and antisemitism

Understanding Zionism and antisemitism as racist political twins – sometimes even partners in crime – underpins the Palestinian call for BDS. Its anti-racist aims – freedom from occupation, justice for refugees denied their right of return and equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel – are best served by targeting Israel as a racist state aligned with the political-economic interests of the Western powers.

Published January 2013.

The web-posted version at jews4big.wordpress.com includes notes with references.

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JEWIS FOR BOYCOTTING ISRAELI GOODS (J-BIG)

We are UK-resident Jews who support the Palestinian call for a boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign to hold Israel to account for decades of breaching international law. J-BIG is part of the Boycott Israel Network (www.boycottisraelnetwork.net).



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