



**“Progressive”
Jewish Thought
and the **New Anti-Semitism****

Alvin H. Rosenfeld

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Compiled by the Faculty Action Network

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Alvin H. Rosenfeld is professor of English and Jewish Studies and director of the Institute for Jewish Culture and the Arts, Indiana University. His most recent publication for the American Jewish Committee is *Anti-Zionism in Great Britain and Beyond: A “Respectable” Anti-Semitism?*, published in 2004.

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Foreword

How can there be something “new” about something as old as anti-Semitism? Hostility to Jews—because of their religious beliefs, their social or ethnic distinctiveness, or their imputed “racial” differences—has been around for a long time. But, as this erudite essay by Professor Alvin Rosenfeld of Indiana University demonstrates, hostility to Jews has morphed into hostility toward a Jewish state, and that hatred has acquired the ability to leap across national, linguistic, and religious boundaries.

Old tropes, such as Jews as well-poisoners or as conspiratorial power brokers, have been transformed into Jews as inoculators of AIDS in the Arab world or contaminators of Palestinian water sources or manipulators of American foreign policy. The spread of these calumnies has been especially rapid in the Muslim world, but Europeans, not only those within Muslim communities, have been susceptible to the virus. As Prof. Rosenfeld points out, “those who denounce it [Israel] as an outlaw ... are found on both the left and the right, among the educated elites as well as the uneducated classes, and among Christians as well as Muslims.” A “conflation of interests” among these divergent groups has led to a well-documented spike in violence against Jews on streets of European cities as well as a parallel rise in verbal aggression—whether it be tarring Israel as a Nazi state or its prime minister as a “terrorist” and a “war criminal.”

Perhaps the most surprising—and distressing—feature of this new trend is the very public participation of some Jews in the verbal onslaught against Zionism and the Jewish state. Here, too, the vociferous denunciators are to be found at both ends of the politi-

cal-religious spectrum, from the ultra-Orthodox Neturei Karta, who believe that a Jewish state in advance of the messianic era is blasphemy, to the ultra-leftists who find a territory-based Jewish existence to be antithetical to their own self-referential definitions of Judaism. But when it comes to getting noticed by the media and getting “traction” for their views, it is the so-called “progressive” Jewish anti-Zionists who receive the lion’s share of the attention.

These leftist Jewish critics challenge not just Israel’s policies, but “its legitimacy and right to an ongoing future.” Their acerbic criticisms and negative rituals—such as renouncing a Jewish child’s right to Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return at his *bris* (ritual circumcision)—are documented here by Prof. Rosenfeld. There is the poet Adrienne Rich, who argues that the word Zionism is “so incendiary, so drenched in ... ideas of blood and soil, in memories of victimization and pursuant claims of the right to victimized” that it “needs to dissolve before twenty-first century realities.” There is the hyperbolic British academic Jacqueline Rose, who says, “We take Zionism to be a form of collective insanity.” And there is Joel Kovel, a professor, writer, and Green Party politician who believes that “to be a true Jew,” Jews must “annihilate their particularism,” “annihilate or transcend Zionism,” and “annihilate the Jewish state.”

The American Jewish Committee, from its founding a hundred years ago, has seen its mission as the protection of Jewish rights worldwide and the strengthening of Jewish security. Today that mission centrally includes assuring the right of Jews to a national collective self-expression through the existence of the State of Israel. Those who oppose this basic right—whether Jew or gentile—must be confronted. Prof. Rosenfeld is to be thanked both for exposing the vacuousness of their arguments and for alerting us to the threat that arises when a Jewish imprimatur is given to the questioning of Israel’s legitimacy. Note that those he calls “proud to be ashamed to be Jews” are ideologists who deny the legitimacy of Israel’s existence, not critics of specific Israeli actions or policies. There can be healthy disagreement and debate within a family or a country as to what the

right course of action is—but never of the fundamental rightness of its being.

This essay follows others Prof. Rosenfeld has written for the American Jewish Committee tracing manifestations of anti-Semitism, the previous being *Anti-Zionism in Great Britain and Beyond: A “Respectable” Anti-Semitism*. We are indebted to him for his insightful analyses and his vigilant awareness of the reemergence of dangerous passions and destructive ideas.

David A. Harris
Executive Director
American Jewish Committee

“Progressive” Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism

“German fascism came and went. Soviet Communism came and went. Anti-Semitism came and stayed.”¹ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, offered these discerning words in response to a speech by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in which the president of Iran denounced Israel as “a disgraceful blot” that should be “wiped off the map.” A few days after this incendiary declaration, the Iranian leader followed up with more of the same, dismissing the Nazi Holocaust as a “myth” or “fairy tale.”² Shocked by such unabashed outpouring of anti-Jewish venom and by numerous parallels to it, Rabbi Sacks confessed that the reemergence of anti-Semitism “is one of the most frightening phenomena in [my] lifetime—because it’s happened after sixty years of Holocaust education, anti-racist legislation, and interfaith dialogue.”

In light of this disturbing trend, this paper will reflect upon two questions: (1) What, if anything, is new about the “new” anti-Semitism? (2) In what ways might Jews themselves, especially so-called “progressive” Jews, be contributing to the intellectual and political climate that helps to foster such hostility, especially in its anti-Zionist forms?³ Before proceeding to examine these issues, though, it will be helpful to review some of the developments that give rise to them in the first place.

Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in the Muslim World

Over the past year, copies of a new Turkish translation of *Mein Kampf* have been selling in Istanbul and other Turkish cities at the same pace that lottery tickets go in America. The popularity of Adolf Hitler’s diatribe against the Jews is so great that eleven differ-

ent publishers are currently marketing it; even so, bookstores evidently cannot keep up with the demand. New editions of *Mein Kampf* have also appeared in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, and it is readily available in Arabic translation in London bookstores.⁴ The obvious appeal of this noxious book is one ominous sign among many that yesterday’s ghosts are once again stirring.

At the same time, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, another classic work of anti-Semitic literature, is also selling well in Turkey, as it is in Arabic translation throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Long ago exposed as fraudulent, this bogus tale of a Jewish plot to take over the world has emerged from a period of dormancy and disgrace to wide circulation today in Arabic-speaking countries. Two years ago, at a much-publicized exhibition of religious books in the Alexandria library in Egypt, the *Protocols* was prominently displayed next to a Torah scroll as one of Judaism’s “sacred texts.” A favorite in Iran, it was made available in English translation at the Iranian exhibition booth at the 2005 Frankfurt International Book Fair (as were such related titles, in Arabic, as *The Jewish Role in the 9/11 Destruction of the World Trade Center*, *The World Jewish Conspiracy*, *Three Thousand Years of Jewish Iniquity*, *The End of Israel*, etc.). The notion of a well-plotted Jewish scheme to seize power on a global scale is reiterated as well in the charter of Hamas, which cites the *Protocols* as an authoritative source to prove, among other things, that “there was no war that broke out anywhere without their [the Jews’] fingerprints on it.” Additionally, the *Protocols* has inspired recent TV serial broadcasts in Egypt, Syria, and other Arab states. The appetite for such fare in broad segments of the Muslim world seems to be insatiable, and is being fed on a regular basis across the media of popular culture.

The ancient blood libel against the Jews is also being revived, with a new twist here and there. The older calumnies that Jews regularly kidnapped Christian children and drained their blood for baking matza can still be heard, although now the victimized youngsters are more commonly said to be Muslim. In Iran, for instance, television viewers have recently been treated to a gruesome

series of programs that portray Jewish surgeons supposedly removing the eyes of stolen Palestinian children and utilizing them for the benefit of sight-impaired Israelis. In another version of this same canard, a recently released Turkish film, *Valley of the Wolves–Iraq*, which played to sizable immigrant audiences in Germany and elsewhere, portrays an American Jewish surgeon operating on prison inmates in Iraq and transplanting organs from these prisoners into the bodies of sick patients in New York, London, and Israel.⁵

These doctors are presumably linked to those clever Israeli scientists who, it is widely believed, infected Yasir Arafat with fatal poisons that ended his life. Israeli doctors are also accused of actively and surreptitiously spreading the AIDS virus throughout the Muslim world; and, as further evidence of their malevolence, are said to be creating and spreading the avian flu virus to damage “genes carried only by Arabs.”⁶ Add to these wild allegations the notions that Israelis have been sterilizing young Egyptian men with toxins secreted in chewing gum and contaminating Palestinian water sources with other toxins, and the picture of the poisonous Jew, long a stock feature in the repertoire of anti-Semitic stereotypes, widens further.

As if these supposed crimes weren’t bad enough, the 9/11 terror attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., are broadly attributed to the Mossad, and even the earthquake and tsunami that devastated parts of Asia in late 2004 are said to be part of the evil plotting of the Jews. According to a program on Iranian television in June 2004, Jews set the Watergate trap that brought Richard Nixon down in disgrace and earlier were involved in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. More recently, the dean of the law school of a Jordanian university accused the Israeli secret services of assassinating Lebanese leader Rafik Hariri and prominent Lebanese journalist Jebran Tueni. Although the Israelis had nothing whatsoever to do with the Danish cartoons that caused such an uproar across the Arab and Muslim worlds in February 2006, they were attributed to a “Zionist conspiracy.”⁷ Numerous other examples could be added to this short list of purported acts of Jewish infamy. Suffice it to say that the list would be as lengthy as the items on it

fanciful and fraudulent. Nevertheless, for all our dismay that any rational person could believe such lies, countless people in the Muslim world evidently credit an array of trumped-up charges against the Jews as well-established truths—namely, that Jews are today, as they always have been, a treacherous, conniving, untrustworthy, sinister, all-powerful, and implacably hostile people, the eternal enemy of both God and mankind.

Lest one get the impression that anti-Semitism of this extreme nature is to be found only in the Muslim world, it is important to note what has been taking place in the West over the past five or six years. While *Mein Kampf* may not be a best-seller in European bookstores, new translations of it in Czech, Polish, and other languages have recently appeared. Moreover, the man who wrote this foul book continues to inspire groups on the European right, some of whom are attempting to move from the discredited fringes of political life toward the respectable center in France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the countries of the former Soviet Union. At the same time, intellectual elites on the European left have become increasingly outspoken in their hostility to Jews and the Jewish state and are voicing a kind of animosity to both that has not been heard in Europe for years. Finally, as is well known, there are those among Europe’s large Muslim populations who have been radicalized by jihadist passions and ideas and feel free to focus their antagonistic energies aggressively on the Jews.

A Conflation of Interests: Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in Europe

One manifestation of the new anti-Semitism can be found right here—in a conflation of interests among those on the far right, segments of the intellectual left, and radical Islam. While formal alliances among these otherwise disparate groups are not readily apparent, they share one thing in common: a suspicion of Jews and, especially, an emphatic dislike of the Jewish state. Growing from these inclinations, an aggressive mood of censure and hostility has developed and led to an outbreak of malicious activities over the

past few years that has been well documented: Jews have been beaten on the streets of European cities; scores of synagogues, Jewish schools, and other communal institutions have been set on fire or otherwise attacked; Jewish cemeteries and sites of Holocaust commemoration have been repeatedly desecrated; and the Jewish populations of Paris, London, Brussels, Amsterdam, and other cities now live with more uncertainty about their welfare than they have felt for decades.

In 2004, some 532 anti-Semitic incidents were recorded in Great Britain alone, including 83 physical assaults against individual Jews—a rise of 42 percent from the previous year. In 2005, the overall number of incidents declined somewhat, but authorities nevertheless recorded 82 violent assaults against Jews.⁸ In light of such hostility, Rabbi Sacks has pointed to pervasive undertones of anti-Semitism in his country and added, with diplomatic understatement, “There have been times—the first in my memory—when it has been uncomfortable to be a Jew in Britain.” In France, the numbers of violent attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions have come down in recent months, thanks to a belated but generally effective effort on the part of French authorities to take such hostility seriously. Nevertheless, the climate remains tense in the mixed Jewish-Muslim neighborhoods around Paris. Especially after the much-publicized kidnapping, torture, and murder of Ilan Halimi, in February 2006, Jewish nerves throughout France have been set on edge. The Halimi case was especially gruesome, but it hardly stands out as an isolated incident. The fact is that since 2001, France has seen more open aggression against Jews and Jewish property than any other country in Europe. The situation reached the point where the chief rabbi of France publicly warned Jews in his country against appearing in public wearing a *kippah* or other religious symbols that would draw attention to them as Jews. He did so with good reason, for his counterpart in Belgium had been badly beaten on the streets of Brussels, and religious Jews in French cities were being harassed and assaulted on an almost daily basis. Only a few days after Halimi’s death, three Jews, including the son of a

rabbi, were brutally attacked by Muslim youths on the streets of Sarcelles, and similar incidents have since occurred elsewhere.

Then there is the ongoing airing in the public media of denigration, derision, scorn, and rebuke directed against the Jewish state and its supporters, and naturally, negative social and political consequences tend to accompany the steady appearance of such verbal aggression. In a prominent article published last year in the British newspaper the *Guardian*, Ken Livingstone, the current mayor of London, showed no hesitation in accusing Israel of “ethnic cleansing” and denounced the Israeli prime minister (Ariel Sharon) as a “terrorist” and “war criminal,” declaring that he belonged in prison, not in political office.

In this same spirit of open animosity, in 2005, Britain’s 40,000-member Association of University Teachers declared a boycott of Israeli scholars and academic institutions. It was eventually rolled back, only to be succeeded in May 2006 by an even larger and more comprehensive boycott effort initiated by the 67,000-member National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, which denounced what it called Israel’s “apartheid policies” and encouraged British academic scholars to sever ties with their Israeli counterparts. A group of British architects released a strong boycott statement in February 2006 against Israeli architects, and, at about the same time, the Church of England weighed in with an official pronouncement recommending divestiture from certain companies that do business with Israel. Similar measures against Israeli goods have already taken place in some Scandinavian countries.

To their credit, the German authorities have been keeping the lid on animosities directed against Jews, and yet recent polls have shown the number of people who hold anti-Semitic views is rising in Germany. The same could be said about popular sentiments toward Jews in Spain, Greece, and elsewhere. In Russia, over 5,000 public activists, parliamentarians, artists, and members of the clergy publicly called for the outright banning of Jewish groups, accusing them of plots against the motherland. A similar call has been issued by over 100 public figures in Ukraine. It is not surprising, therefore,

that physical assaults against Jews and Jewish institutions have been growing in these countries. In February 2006, a rabbi was murdered in Tashkent, a synagogue set ablaze in the Crimea, and other synagogues have been stoned or burned elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Those who keep abreast of developments in Argentina, Brazil, and other South American countries report similar instances of anti-Semitic sentiment and sometimes outright aggression. And, as we know, the United States and Canada are not entirely immune from such threats and occasional incidents as well.

What Is New in Today’s Anti-Semitism?

What does all this anti-Jewish hostility tell us? Despite the huge scandal of the Holocaust, which most Jews probably thought would prevent public manifestations of anti-Semitism from ever appearing again, the genie is once more out of the bottle. Is there a new anti-Semitism today? There is, and while much of it resembles the anti-Semitism of the past, certain features of present-day hostility to Jews and sometimes also to Judaism do seem new.

One is that, like so much else today, Jew-hatred has been globalized and leaps effortlessly across borders. In the past, antagonism to Jews tended to take the form of localized activities, but thanks to the Internet and other global media, anti-Semitism now belongs to the world at large. With the press of a computer key, it can be accessed and distributed in a flash.

Two, while often drawing on the same repertoire of fabricated claims against the Jews as in the past—that they are clannish, conspiratorial, money-hungry, manipulative, predatory, etc.—anti-Semitism is protean and evolves. As already indicated, it may, for instance, promote images of Jews as poisoners, but instead of contaminating wells, as they were said to do in the medieval period, or blood, as in the Nazi period, this time Jews may be accused of contaminating the atmosphere itself or targeting DNA.

Three, some of the most virulent sources of today’s anti-Semitism are located within the Muslim world, not, as in the past, within Christendom. While some of this negative passion is attributed

to Muslim anger toward Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians, much of it predates the violence brought on by the recent intifadas and has roots within Arab Muslim culture. To understand Muslim anti-Semitism today, one has to see it as part of a crisis within Islam itself, as well as part of its deep-seated grievances against the West.

Four, and most prominently, some of the most impassioned charges leveled against the Jews today involve vicious accusations against the Jewish state. Anti-Zionism, in fact, is the form that much of today’s anti-Semitism takes, so much so that some now see earlier attempts to rid the world of Jews finding a parallel in present-day desires to get rid of the Jewish state.

Questioning Israel’s Essence, Not Israeli Policies

Israel’s policy of encouraging Jewish settlement in Gaza (which it abandoned in 2005) and the West Bank has long been a flash point of dispute, and its sometimes harsh treatment of Palestinian Arabs living in those areas has also drawn a great deal of negative attention. Criticizing such policies and actions is, in itself, not anti-Semitic. To call Israel a Nazi state, however, as is commonly done today, or to accuse it of fostering South African-style apartheid rule or engaging in ethnic cleansing or wholesale genocide goes well beyond legitimate criticism. Apart from the United States, to which it is almost always linked by its enemies, no country on earth is as vilified as the Jewish state. Moreover, those who denounce it as an outlaw or pariah nation are found on both the left and the right, among the educated elites as well as the uneducated classes, and among Christians as well as Muslims.

In some quarters, the challenge is not to Israel’s policies, but to its legitimacy and right to an ongoing future. Thus, the argument leveled by Israel’s fiercest critics is often no longer about 1967 and the country’s territorial expansion following its military victory during the Six-Day War, but about 1948 and the alleged “crime,” or “original sin,” of its very establishment. The debate, in other words, is less about the country’s borders and more about its origins and essence. One of the things that is new and deeply disturbing about

the new anti-Semitism, therefore, is precisely this: the singling out of the Jewish state, and the Jewish state alone, as a political entity unworthy of a secure and sovereign existence. As Jacqueline Rose, the author of *The Question of Zion* (Princeton University Press, 2005), puts it, “the soul of the nation was forfeit from the day of its creation.”⁹

A Jew among the Anti-Zionists: Jacqueline Rose

Rose typifies one of the most distressing features of the new anti-Semitism—namely, the participation of Jews alongside it, especially in its anti-Zionist expression. Her book is a disturbingly revealing example of this tendency. More an indictment than an examination of its subject, *The Question of Zion*, dedicated “to the memory of Edward Said,” is fashioned as a companion piece to Said’s *The Question of Palestine*. Rose is intrigued by Zionism, but claims to be “appalled” by what she sees as its encouragement of gross wrongdoings. As if it were foreordained from the start, “violence,” she writes, “would be the destiny of the Jewish state” (p. 124). Moreover, the “cruel powers” of this state have not only brought “injustice” to the Palestinians, but have subverted “the moral mission of Israel” (p. 133), put at risk the Jewish nation’s own “safety and sanity” (p. 85), and right now are even “endangering the safety of Diaspora Jewry” by helping to provoke a new anti-Semitism (p. xviii). In sum, Israel on its present course “is bad for the Jewish people” (p. 154) and also bad for just about everyone else.

Rose, who leans heavily on the dubious methods of psychohistory, begins her analysis of Zionism with an extended reference to one of the most ruinous personalities in Jewish history—Shabbatai Zvi, the seventeenth-century messianic pretender and apostate from Judaism (to Islam)—whom she identifies as a “proto-Zionist.” Convinced that “a line runs directly” (p. 3) from this aberrant figure to modern Zionism, she proceeds to identify Theodor Herzl as his kindred spirit. What animated both men, in the author’s view, was the deep passions that fuel Jewish messianism, which Rose associates with madness. Zionism, the latest incarnation of the messianic

furies, is similarly driven: "We take Zionism to be a form of collective insanity" (p. 17). And those who embrace it are part of a group neurosis. All the early Zionist thinkers and activists, in her view, were touched by this madness in one way or another.

In fact, as most histories of Zionism demonstrate, the opposite is the case. Israel's founders, by and large, were secular Zionists who opposed religious notions like messianism and chosenness. The majority of their successors, likewise, have kept distant from such ideas and have built the state along the pragmatic and rationalist lines of other modern states. Rose, though, will have none of that and prefers to believe that Israel's leaders, inspired by Sabbatean and messianic excess, have brutally activated the "latent violence" within Zionism and brought "tragedy" to "both peoples in Israel-Palestine" (p. xvi).

She is fond of using the language of "tragedy" to describe the sins of Zionism, but more often she pitches the register of her alarm and disapproval higher still and takes recourse to "catastrophe." This word, repeated again and again, is hardly a neutral term in the discourse on the Middle East conflict, for it is the English translation of "*al nakba*," the Arabic term that Palestinians commonly use to describe the events of 1948, which for the Jews led to an independent state and for Palestinians brought defeat and dispersion. Because Rose closely aligns herself with this reading of history—"I believe the creation of Israel in 1948 led to a historic injustice against the Palestinians" (p. xvi), she writes—her lexicon of descriptive terms for Zionism and its errant ways is overwhelmingly negative: "agony," "anguished," "belligerent," "bloody," "brutal," "cataclysmic," "corrupt," "cruel," "dangerous," "deadly," and "militaristic" alternate with "apocalyptic," "blind," "crazy," "delusional," "defiled," "demonic," "fanatical," "insane," and "mad." Presented in these terms, Zionism appears to be both inspired and nightmarish, ruthless and deranged. Moreover, Rose speculates, it contained this explosive mix right from the start: "sown somewhere at the very center of [the Zionist vision]" are "the seeds of catastrophe" (p. xiv). Most scholars these days are reluctant to think about national histo-

ries in terms of manifest destinies and unbroken lines of continuity across centuries, but Rose is not writing factual history so much as she is developing a psychopolitical myth of Israel's origins and development. Since hers is an emphatically negative myth, matters only get worse after the creation of the Jewish state. Convinced that the Jews of Israel have imposed upon the Palestinians an almost unparalleled degree of suffering, she does not hesitate to pose the loaded question: "How did one of the most persecuted peoples of the world come to embody some of the worst cruelties of the modern nation-state?" (p.115) Compared to the truly horrendous crimes committed by other nation-states—think Sudan, Cambodia, Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia, or Augusto Pinochet's Chile—Israel's record actually looks relatively good. Foregoing any comparative perspective, though, the author presses her case against Israel alone. She does not deny "the legitimacy of the Jewish people's desire for a homeland" (p. 146), but she rues the form that this desire took and believes that Israel, now in "decline" (p.154), is manifestly "in danger of destroying itself" (p.155).

As evidence, she alleges Israel's wanton destruction of Palestinian society, including the "razing [of] the town of Jenin" (p.103) in April 2002. Like much else in this deeply flawed book, this charge is either a blatant error or an outright fabrication. In response to Palestinian suicide bombings, Israeli forces fought against Palestinian militants in a refugee camp near Jenin, but the city itself was left untouched. To claim, as she does, that Jenin was leveled is to indulge in either bad scholarship or bad faith or both.¹⁰

As if the foregoing were not bad enough, to point up how tainted Zionism is, Rose reaches for the ultimate weapon in the anti-Zionist arsenal—the alleged link between the Jewish national movement and Nazism—and offers this gratuitous and altogether baseless anecdote: "It was the same Paris performance of Wagner," she writes, "when—without knowledge or foreknowledge of each other—they [Theodor Herzl and Adolf Hitler] were both present on the same evening, that inspired Herzl to write *Der Judenstaat* and Hitler *Mein Kampf*" (pp. 64-65). Inasmuch as Herzl died in 1904

and Hitler never set foot in Paris until his triumphal entry into the French capital in 1940, this story is entirely apocryphal. Even if there were some historical basis for placing Hitler in the Paris opera house at the time when Herzl was alive to have attended—and there is not—Hitler would have been a mere child then and hardly likely to draw inspiration for the writing of *Mein Kampf*. Surely Rose should have known that. Why, then, did she make this historically impossible linkage between the father of Zionism and the father of Nazism?

As if to head off a more obvious explanation, Rose more than once feels compelled to declare that criticism of Israel is not tantamount to anti-Semitism, and, of course, she is right. But then how do we account for her constant references to “the injustice of Israel” (p. 115), to its “capacity for evil” (p. 103), to its fundamental “belligerence” and inherent “violence,” to its being “mad” and “crazy,” while no such damning qualities are ascribed to any of Israel’s neighbors, who are not generally known for their tolerant and peaceful ways?

The many false notes in this book point to something badly awry at the core of Rose’s treatment of her subject. On several occasions she claims to be “appalled by what the Israeli state perpetrates on a daily basis in the name of the Jewish people” (p. 11). Her overwrought rhetoric notwithstanding, nothing in her book expresses any genuine concern for the Jews as a people. In fact, Rose exhibits only antipathy for collective identities of any kind and most especially for ethnic or national identities. Like other postmodernists, she finds the concept of the “nation” suspect, and large, enveloping national ideas like Zionism anathema. When she writes that “Israel inscribes at its heart the very version of nationhood from which the Jewish people had had to flee” (p. 83), she comes uncomfortably close, once again, to equating Zionism with German anti-Semitism at its worst. Like her historically unsupported effort to tie Herzl to Hitler, such poisonous linkages reveal nothing about the reality of Zionism, but a great deal about the author’s uneasy identity as an anti-Zionist Jew facing the reality of the Jewish state.

Michael Neumann and the Accusation of Genocide with all Jews Complicit

Rose’s unease is mild, though, compared to the pathological fury one finds among some other anti-Zionist Jews. As a telling example, let us review the reflections on Israel and present-day anti-Semitism of Michael Neumann, a professor of philosophy at Trent University in Canada and author of *What’s Left: Radical Politics and the Radical Psyche*.¹¹ Neumann accuses Israel of committing “Zionist atrocities” and of waging “a race war against the Palestinians,” a war whose purpose is nothing less than “the extinction of a people.” Toward this end, Israel has embarked on “genocide” against the Palestinians—“a kinder, gentler genocide that portrays its perpetrators as victims.”

The Palestinians “are being shot because Israel thinks all Palestinians should vanish or die.... This is not the bloody mistake of a blundering super-power but an emerging evil.” Moreover, the guilt belongs not only to Israelis, but to Jews in general, “most of whom support a state that commits war crimes.” Such support implicates all Jews, Neumann contends—so much so that “the case for Jewish complicity seems much stronger than the case for German complicity” in the crimes committed against the Jews during the Holocaust.

He is aware there are those who will resent an assessment that paints Jews in such black colors, but he will run the risk of their ire. Indeed, “if saying these things is anti-Semitic, then it can be reasonable to be anti-Semitic.” Moreover, “some anti-Semitism is acceptable.” What would he say, one wonders, if an “acceptable” level of anti-Semitism were to lead to outright aggression against Jews? He answers: “Who cares?... To regard any shedding of Jewish blood as a world-shattering calamity ... is racism, pure and simple; the valuing of one race’s blood over all others.”¹²

The thinking here is so breathtakingly awry that one hardly knows how to address it. First of all, Jews do not typically define themselves in racial terms, nor do they value other people’s lives according to their “blood.” To claim so shows either gross ignorance

or outright malice. Most Jews in Israel, far from wishing each and every Palestinian dead, as Neumann declares, are looking for ways either to make peace with the Palestinians or to live apart from them. By no reasonable standard of historical comparison or legal judgment can one show that Israel is intent on genocide; nor are the Israelis engaged in a “race war” against the Palestinians. Indeed, if there is “racism” to be perceived in this conflict, it is far more likely to appear in Palestinian teachings and preachings about the Jews than the other way around. Israel’s aim is to free itself finally from the state of siege that has been the country’s fate since its inception and enjoy something like a normal life. Short of that, it does what it believes it needs to do to protect its citizens from being blown apart as they sit in cafes and on city buses by Palestinian suicide bombers intent on their own campaign of “extinction.”

Given what they know firsthand of the lethal character of anti-Semitism, most Jews of Israel will not endorse any form of anti-Semitism as “reasonable” or “acceptable.” Prof. Neumann believes otherwise and even proposes that “we should almost never take anti-Semitism seriously, and maybe we should have some fun with it.” How many other Jews, one wonders, will want to join him in pursuing such fun?

In fact, there are lots of others, as anyone who surfs the Internet will see merely by clicking on “Jews against Israel.” Hundreds of entries that sound like Neumann’s article instantly appear, many of them representing anti-Zionism at its most aggressive.

Jewish Opposition to Zionism in Historical Perspective

Opposition to political Zionism is not a new development within Jewish thinking, of course, and, especially in the prestate period, was even a pronounced tendency within certain political, religious, and intellectual circles. Jewish Marxists regularly denounced Zionism as inherently imperialist, colonialist, racist, and repressive; they saw it as an ideological enemy of those who stood on the side of the oppressed in the class struggle. At the other end of the spectrum, rigorously observant Jews associated with Neturei Karta and other

extreme Orthodox groups have regarded the idea of a Jewish state established before the days of messianic redemption as blasphemous and have passionately opposed it on religious grounds.

For other reasons, Reform Jews in the United States likewise opposed the idea of a territorially-based independent Jewish nation and rejected any claims of political Zionism on them. And some prominent Jewish liberal intellectuals, convinced that the creation of a sovereign Jewish country in Palestine would be unacceptable to the majority Arab populations in the region and inevitably would lead to unending war, stood against the state-building ambitions of Zionism and advocated the idea of a binational state instead.

Prior to 1948, each of these tendencies had its adherents, some of whom continued to oppose Zionism even after Israel’s establishment in that year. Once Jewish political sovereignty became a fact, however, and the small, embattled, but accomplished Jewish nation became a source of pride, anti-Zionism among Jews waned, especially following the war of June 1967, even if it did not disappear completely. In recent years, however, there are signs of an anti-Zionist revival, particularly among Jews on the left.

Tony Judt: “Israel Is Bad for the Jews”

The historian Tony Judt, for instance, has published a series of increasingly bitter articles over the past three years in the *Nation*, the *New York Review of Books*, and *Ha’aretz*, in which he has called Israel everything from arrogant, aggressive, anachronistic, and infantile to dysfunctional, immoral, and a primary cause of present-day anti-Semitism. “Israel today,” Judt avers, “is bad for the Jews,”¹³ and it would do them and everyone else a service by going out of business. “The time has come to think the unthinkable,” he writes, and that is to replace the Jewish state with “a single, integrated, binational state of Jews and Arabs.”¹⁴

Far from being new, this is an old idea and, by now, a properly discredited and discarded one; everyone knows that such an entity, were it ever to come into being, would before long be an Arab-dominated state in which a residual Jewish presence would, at best, be a

tolerated minority. In promoting such an obsolescent scheme, which would spell an end to a territorially-based Jewish national existence, Judt, as Benjamin Balint persuasively argues, unwittingly aligns himself with older forms of Christian opposition to Jewish particularism: “Israel is merely the new ground upon which the old battle over Jewish distinctiveness is being waged.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, Judt has his followers, and talk of dissolving the Jewish state and replacing it with a binational state is once again in the air in certain intellectual circles.

Collections of Critics

For an exposure to the full range of such sentiments, one could hardly do better than to consult two recently published collections: *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, edited by Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon (New York: Grove Press, 2003) and *Radicals, Rabbis and Peacemakers: Conversations with Jewish Critics of Israel*, edited by Seth Farber (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2005).

Liberally sprinkled through the pages of the first of these books are references to Israeli “apartheid,” “racism,” “colonialism,” and “ethnic cleansing.” These descriptors have become part of standard discourse among “progressive” American Jews, who seem to take for granted that the historical record shows Israel to be an aggressor state guilty of sins comparable to those of Hendrik Verwoerd’s South Africa and Hitler’s Germany. As for “Zionism,” gone are the days when it was praised by those on the left as a movement of Jewish national liberation. One contributor, Joel Kovel, a professor at Bard College, who is writing a book on post-Zionist Israel, suggests that Zionism “is equivalent to a form of racism” and is unforgiving that it brought about “the Jewish homeland at the expense of another people” (p. 357).

The prominent poet Adrienne Rich proposes that the very word “Zionism” is “so incendiary, so drenched in idealism, dissension, ideas of blood and soil, in memories of victimization and pursuant claims of the right to victimize” that it “needs to dissolve

before twenty-first century realities” (p. 164). She neglects to say precisely what these “realities” are, but inasmuch as she affirms the extraterritorial ideal of “a Jew without borders” (p. 165), it is evident that, for her, the word “Zionism,” along with the whole Zionist project, has served their purpose and should be retired.

Still another contributor, Sara Roy, who identifies herself as the daughter of Holocaust survivors, notes that “within the Jewish community it has always been considered a form of heresy to compare Israeli actions or policies with those of the Nazis” (p. 176). Then she proceeds to draw just such a comparison by accusing Israel of replicating Nazi occupation policies.

In more condensed form, Irena Klepfisz, a poet and Holocaust survivor, declares that “you can be a victim and also a victimizer” (p.367)—a simplistic charge routinely made by those who wish to blacken Israel’s image in the worst way by drawing unseemly parallels between Jews as victims and those who victimize them.

Some of Israel’s Jewish critics are irate at the country for still other reasons: In their eyes, Judaism itself has fallen casualty to Israel’s sins, and the cost to their own religious principles is so high as to render questionable the value of the state’s existence. “I’m not against Israel,” writes Douglas Rushkoff, a New York-based author who writes on media and new culture. His objection rather is to the version of Israel which he sees as “this nationalized refugee camp,” which is “a compromise of Jewish ideals, and not their realization.... We get a claim on some land, but we lose our religion in the process” (pp. 181, 182).

Daniel Boyarin, a professor of Talmud at the University of California at Berkeley, joins Rushkoff in this critique but goes him one better. Just as Christianity may have died at Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Sobibor, laments Boyarin, so “I fear ... that my Judaism may be dying at Nablus, Deheishe, Beteen (Beth-El), and al-Khalil (Hebron)” (p. 202). As always, the recourse to Holocaust parallels is a sure sign that lucid thinking has been replaced by bias. In this case, as in others, Jewish identity is affirmed in opposition to the Jewish state.

New Rituals of Dissent

Some Jews devise novel changes in their practice of Judaism to reflect the ways in which, so they claim, Israel has damaged the religion. Jews who are members of JATO (“Jews Against the Occupation”), for instance, build what they call “an anti-occupation *sukkah* with pictures of destroyed Palestinian buildings” adorning its walls. Marc Ellis, a professor of Jewish Studies at Baylor University and the author of several anti-Zionist books written from a liberation theology perspective, proposes that the synagogue Torah scrolls be replaced in the Ark of the Covenant by replicas of Israeli helicopter gunships, which he argues are the true symbol of Israeli reality today (p. 155).

Anti-Zionist Jews have introduced other rituals as well, such as taking an oath against exercising their rights under the Law of Return—the privilege of citizenship in Israel that every Jew (except one who has a criminal past and might endanger the public welfare) currently enjoys. “Far from being protected by Israel, I feel exposed to danger by the actions of the Israeli state,” writes Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz. “I am declaring another way to be Jewish.... I renounce my right to return” (p. 256). At the ritual circumcision of their son, Meg Barnett and Brad Lander issued a similar declaration: “We are thrilled to pronounce you a Jew without the Right of Return. Your name contains our deep hope that you will explore and celebrate your Jewish identity without confusing it with nationalism” (p. 293).

As these gestures of Jewish dissent indicate, there is a tendency among American Jews who identify themselves as “progressive” to embrace positions on Zionism and Israel that are as negative, and sometimes even as damning, as any to be found among the most fervent non-Jewish anti-Zionists. One recognizes in their writings passions of anger and indignation, bitterness and repudiation that transcend those associated with mere politics. Israel in their eyes is guilty of a great betrayal and should be punished. Never mind that more than a thousand of its citizens have been murdered in the last few years and thousands more maimed for life. Never mind as well

that Israel is singled out more than any other country on the globe for inaccurate and one-sided condemnations of its alleged human rights abuses and targeted for boycotts and divestment campaigns. And never mind that, alone among the world’s countries, Israel’s very existence is considered an aggression, its legitimacy subjected to doubt, and its right to a future openly questioned.

No historical or political explanations of Israel’s current predicament are acceptable to some of the country’s Jewish critics, nor can the Jewish state be easily redeemed from its perceived wrongdoings. “History is screwing us totally up ... forget the history,” suggests Irena Klepfisz (pp. 358-59). She is for less explanation and more action—and now.

Like other “oppressive” regimes before it, Israel is judged to be guilty of the worst and must be brought to heel. Journalist Esther Kaplan, commenting on the charge by a young Rutgers University activist that “Israel is a racist state, an imperialist state—it is and should be a pariah state,” remarks: “[I]f that’s what it takes to bring down the occupation..., Israel should absolutely become a pariah state.... The time has come when Israel must be totally isolated by world opinion and forced, simply forced, to concede” (p. 87).

While their numbers are still relatively small, activists in groups like A Jewish Voice for Peace, Jews for Peace in Palestine and Israel, Students for Justice in Palestine, the Labor Committee for Peace and Justice, the International Solidarity Movement, and other “communities of the principled and disobedient”—the term is Susan Sontag’s (p. 348)—are organizing to bring about their political goals, whatever the costs. With others who condemn Israel as a “racist state, an imperialist state,” some will do whatever they can to make it a pariah. The full effects of their efforts may not be clear to these Jews, for they couch their ambitions in high-sounding terms like “peace,” “justice,” and “reconciliation.” Should they ever succeed in reducing Israel’s already embattled status to that of a rogue state, “totally isolated by world opinion,” the result would not be a fuller measure of peace and justice for either the Israelis or the Palestinians but, almost certainly, the opposite.

**Progressives’ Complaint:
*Radicals, Rabbis, and Peacemakers***

The true end point of these views is not just to force the Israelis out of the territories they have occupied since 1967, but to force an end to the Jewish state itself. This goal is suggested more implicitly than explicitly in some of the contributions to *Wrestling with Zion*, but it gets spelled out quite openly in Seth Farber’s collection of interviews with anti-Zionist Jews. The book’s contributors include Noam Chomsky, Steve Quester, Joel Kovel, Norton Mezvinsky, Ora Wise, Norman Finkelstein, Phyllis Bennis, Adam Shapiro, Daniel Boyarin, Rabbi David Weiss, and Marc Ellis, most of whom are identified as “progressive.”

Whatever substantive meaning the term “progressive” may once have had, it appears in *Radicals, Rabbis and Peacemakers* as little more than a self-validating honorific—the presumed equivalent of moral and political virtue itself. Like “peace,” “justice,” and much else in the contemporary lexicon of leftist rhetoric at its most dogmatic, “progressive” has worn badly; and in Farber’s overheated book, the term appears either as a pious gesture in the direction of utopian politics or, with reference to Zionism, signals views that can only be called regressive. The Israel that emerges in *Radicals, Rabbis and Peacemakers*—a country characterized as “amoral,” “barbaric,” “brutal,” “destructive,” “fascistic,” “oppressive,” “racist,” “sordid,” and “uncivilized”—is indistinguishable from the despised country regularly denounced by the most impassioned anti-Semites.

As pictured by Farber and his colleagues, Israel is guilty of every sin that a modern nation-state is capable of committing—from “apartheid” and “state terrorism” to “ethnic cleansing,” “crimes against humanity,” and “pure genocide.” No convincing evidence is offered to support any of these extreme charges. Rather, as demonstrated by the contributors to this book, it is an unquestioned assumption of their collective thinking that Israel is an inherently racist, oppressive, and singularly brutal country and, ipso facto, stands guilty as charged. For what is alleged to be its racist, systematic cruelty, the Jewish state is likened to the Ku Klux Klan and

South Africa during the worst years of apartheid rule. Lest these analogies be considered too tame, Farber quotes the theologian Marc Ellis, who favors references of a still stronger kind: “What the Nazis had not succeeded in accomplishing ... we as Jews have embarked upon” (p. 15).

Others portray Israeli actions in similarly exaggerated and defamatory terms. Adopting the Palestinian nomenclature, Joel Kovel calls Israel’s still incomplete security fence an “Apartheid Wall” and compares the lives of Palestinians on the other side of it to Jews in “the Warsaw Ghetto” (p. 67). Anyone who knows anything about life and death in the Warsaw ghetto will find the comparison as bogus as Rose’s attempt to tie Herzl to Hitler. But Kovel is undeterred by the transparent falsity of his analogy and, determined to smear the Israelis, goes on to make his obscene point all the same.

In much the same spirit, Steve Quester wonders if Israelis are “going to build gas chambers and kill them all” (p. 41), but then backs off from that idea and imagines that the Israeli plan for the Palestinians is merely to “terrorize” and “starve” them out. Seth Farber himself holds to the harsher view and insists on conflating Israeli “racism” with “Nazi anti-Semitism” (p. 137). And Rabbi David Weiss goes him one better by claiming that the Zionists have actually been “worse than Hitler” (p. 206).

No serious scholar of history would argue that Israel’s actions warrant legitimate comparison with the systematic cruelties of apartheid South Africa or the genocidal barbarism of Nazi Germany. The extreme anti-Zionism exhibited in the quotations above is not driven by anything remotely like reasoned historical analysis, but rather by a complex tangle of psychological as well as political motives that subvert reason and replace it with something akin to hysteria. As one astute commentator puts it, to explain the obsessive, self-negating thinking of such Jews, “psychologists of the future will have their work cut out for them.”¹⁶ Instead of attempting to preempt these analysts, let’s simply note the most disturbing consequences of this Jewish war against the Jewish state: In much left-

wing rhetoric, including that of many “progressive” Jews, “Zionism” has become a term of abuse, meant to convey a dangerous and defiled ideology that has given rise to a corrupt and evil state. To bring this state to its knees by aligning it with the atrocious behavior of the past century’s most notoriously criminal states is the aim of the anti-Zionists.

To advance this aim, the contributors to Farber’s *Radicals, Rabbis, and Peacemakers* at times invoke Judaism’s own teachings, denounce Zionism as “a perversion” of Judaism,” and call the state it created a “horrible mistake” (p. 224). Taking up a position long favored by the extreme right-wing rabbis of Neturei Karta, Farber finds the Jewish state heretical from a religious standpoint and condemns it for “driving a dagger through the heart of our identity as Jews” (p. 15). None of his contributors demurs from that line. Rather, a given of their collective thinking seems to be that Israel betrays the prophetic tradition, is “stifling ... to the notion of Judaism” (p. 63), and is simply unredeemable.

As is well known, the biblical prophets stood on the side of justice and were never hesitant to denounce their people’s behavior when they saw it deviating from the standards of justice. To remind contemporary Jews of these demands is a religious imperative that deserves to remain rigorously alive. But to cite the prophetic books to condemn Israeli actions and, at the same time, to forego any realistic historical and political frameworks that might account for such actions, is to do little more than gesture promiscuously in the direction of Jewish religious thinking. Farber’s book is replete with such superficial gestures, whenever Judaism is evoked just to score political points. Matters hardly improve when Farber’s contributors look away from Judaism and advocate the de-Zionization of Israel on other grounds. Thus Noam Chomsky, the intellectual godfather of “progressive” attitudes toward Zionism and Israel, decries the Zionist project, but, for pragmatic reasons, claims to be for a “two-state settlement.” He regards such a step, however, as only a “stage” toward “the optimal solution, which is no state at all” (p. 28).

Adam Shapiro, an activist member of the International Solidarity Movement and a one-time comrade of Yasir Arafat in the latter’s

Ramallah compound, sees Chomsky’s position as seriously outdated and is certain that the “two-state solution option has been over for a long time” (p. 174). Ora Wise, another young Jewish activist who is convinced the Palestinians are being systematically “massacred” by the Israelis, agrees: “[A] two-state solution will never lead to true justice or equality” (p. 106). Phyllis Bennis is likewise certain such a solution is incompatible with the requirements of “peace and justice” (p. 148). And Joel Kovel, who denounces the Israelis as wholesale butchers, believes Jews are badly mistaken if they believe “there’s something fundamentally worthwhile about the state of Israel” (p. 72). To him, and his fellow “progressives,” there clearly is not.

What, then, are these “Jews of conscience,” as Farber self-righteously calls them, to do? Affirming that “whatever human beings make, they can unmake” (p. 68), Kovel proclaims an even more radical solution to the problems created by Zionism than does Chomsky, who, in supporting a two-state settlement, comes across within the context of this book as being an almost conservative thinker. Jews, in Kovel’s view, are suffering the burdens of what Marxists like to call “false consciousness” and need to free their minds of such benighted notions as Jewish particularism, exceptionalism, ethnicity, and chosenness—indeed, of their bonds to the ancient biblical covenant altogether. Because these “destructive” ideas have now been incorporated into a Jewish state, it is critical that Jews liberate themselves from such a mentality and look beyond the “raw, sordid practices of Zionism” (p. 77) and the “illegitimate” state it brought into being. The Jewish vocation, in other words, is to be fulfilled by living openly and peacefully in the Diaspora, not narrowly and defensively within the confines of territorial borders. “To be a true Jew,” according to Kovel, Jews have to “annihilate their particularism,” “annihilate or transcend Zionism,” and “annihilate the Jewish state” (p. 63) itself.

Like Farber’s “dagger” through the heart of Jewish identity, Kovel’s picturesque language is full of violent tropes, an odd gesture for someone supposedly sworn to peacemaking. Such extreme rhetoric is typical, however, of much “progressive” talk about Zionism and Israel today, which often no longer bothers to mask the murder-

ous fantasies that reside within it. As for the bizarre behavior that these fantasies sometimes bring about, consider Steve Quester’s response to the onset of Palestinian homicidal assaults within Israel: “[W]hen the suicide bombings started one after the other, I was like, ‘Okay, now everyone’s got to understand how horrible the Israeli behavior is.’ ... So, I just went out and bought myself a little Palestinian flag pin and wore it around all the time” (p. 34). Like so much else in Farber’s book, this theatrical gesture of solidarity with “the oppressed” reduces “progressive” political thinking to the level of the perverse and aligns it with the thinking that drives the new anti-Semitism. At a time when the delegitimization and, ultimately, the eradication of Israel is a goal being voiced with mounting fervor by the enemies of the Jewish state, it is more than disheartening to see Jews themselves adding to the vilification. That some do so in the name of Judaism itself makes the nature of their assault all the more grotesque.

Odd Bedfellows—and Profoundly Wrong

The figures whose words are cited in the latter part of this paper are a diverse bunch. Some stand outside the mainstream of contemporary Jewish intellectual opinion; others help to shape it. Academic scholars, teachers, writers, political activists, poets, religious thinkers, etc., they represent one side—they take pride in calling it the “progressive” side—in an ongoing, high-stakes debate. “This is a time for deciding which side you are on,” exhorts Jacqueline Rose.¹⁷ In this, she is right, although the political tendency she represents—which abhors the idea of Jewish nationhood and continues to advocate, in her words, “economic and military sanctions against Israel, and an academic boycott as well”—is profoundly wrong.¹⁸ Such thinking is also harmful in its likely effects, for in calling into question Israel’s legitimacy and moral standing, it abets the views of those who demand an end to Jewish national existence altogether and lends a coveted aura of Jewish support to the advancement of this eliminationist goal.

There are many like Rose today. Some are probably no more

than ideological fellow travelers—Jews who mouth the standard negative clichés about Zionism and Israel to establish their leftist credentials. Because the ideological package that informs progressive politics today links anti-Zionism to anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-globalization, anti-racism, etc., one is expected as a matter of course to be against Zionism and the supposedly “racist,” “colonialist,” and “oppressive” state it has created. As political scientist Andrei Markovits puts it, “If one is not at least a serious doubter of the legitimacy of the state of Israel (never mind the policies of its government) ... one runs the risk of being excluded from the entity called ‘the left.’”¹⁹ The fact that anti-Zionism—understood as the rejection of the long-established right of Jews to a secure national homeland in Israel—shares common features with anti-Jewish ideologies of the past either eludes or fails to trouble Jews who identify with these political tendencies. That is more than just a pity—it is a betrayal. Over the decades, elements within the left stood as principled opponents of anti-Semitism and fought against it. To witness some of their heirs today contributing to a newly resurgent anti-Zionism that, in many ways, recalls older versions of anti-Semitism is dismaying as well as disheartening.

At least as troubling as the subscribers to this cultural code are the Jewish intellectuals who have helped establish and advance many of its most destructive tropes. To the dismay of many, Israel itself has provided a disturbingly large number of writers, scholars, journalists, and others to feed this poisonous stream. One such was the philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who felt no reservations in talking about the “Nazification” of Israeli society and was fond of using the epithet “Judeo-Nazi” in referring to the Israeli army. And Leibowitz was hardly alone in employing such corrosive language.

It is a sad but familiar fact that some of Israel’s most passionate defamers live within the borders of the state and have judged it guilty of “racism,” “fascism,” “apartheid,” “ethnic cleansing,” “genocide”—vilification drawn from the same devil’s thesaurus of anti-Zionist derisions and excoriations that the Jewish state’s harshest enemies regularly dip into when leveling their own attacks.²⁰

“Proud to Be Ashamed to Be Jews”

Within the English-speaking world, the pioneers in the rhetorical radicalization of “progressive” anti-Zionism include many of the people in *Wrestling with Zion* and *Radicals, Rabbis, and Peacemakers*. Their counterparts within British Jewry include Jacqueline Rose, Hilary and Steven Rose (who led the academic boycott campaign against Israel in the United Kingdom), John Rose, author of the polemical book *The Myths of Zionism*, and others. (The British lawyer Anthony Julius describes the Roses and their confreres as people “who are proud to be ashamed to be Jews.”) Some of the harshest anti-Israel vehemence in today’s political rhetoric is their creation, as are the now frequently heard notions that “Zionism is the real enemy of the Jewish people,” that it is subversive of Judaism, the primary source of today’s anti-Semitism, and that the dissolution of Israel—conceived of as a morally repugnant, even criminal state—would be “good” not only for the Jews, but for world peace in general. The cumulative effect of these hostile ideas, which have been moving steadily from the margins to the mainstream of “progressive” opinion, has been to reenergize ugly ideas and aggressive passions long considered to be dormant, if not dead.

Like other declarations of the end of pernicious ideologies, this prognosis, too, has proven not only premature but mistaken. Far from slumbering, the age-old indictment of the Jews has reawakened and rediscovered its voice, which these days is inflected more and more with a Jewish accent. One hears it, for instance, in a recent op-ed by Richard Cohen, a *Washington Post* journalist who in the middle of the Second Lebanon War pronounced the creation of Israel to be a “mistake” that has “produced a century of warfare and terrorism.” Cohen is right about the never-ending violence, but wrong about its causes. Instead of placing the responsibility for terrorism squarely where it belongs, he dodges the issue, saying, “There is no point in condemning Hezbollah.” Instead, he blames the agents of an abstract and errant “history” for having brought the Jewish state into being in the first place. His conclusion: “The great-

est mistake Israel could make at the moment is to forget that Israel itself is a mistake.”²¹

To others, Israel is less a mistake than a crime, and those charging it in precisely such terms these days are not only the old-fashioned anti-Semites and the new-fashioned jihadists but, time and again, people with conspicuously Jewish names like Cohen.

Zionism ... is built on an impossibility, and to live in it and be of it is to live a lie.... Zionism can only repeat its crimes and degenerate further. Only a people that aspires to be so high [above others] can fall so low.²²

Zionism and its deeds are the biggest threat to Judaism.... The Zionist State known as “Israel” is a regime that has no right to exist.²³

These words are taken from a new book published, not by a propaganda mill in Cairo, Tehran, or Damascus, but by a mainstream press in the United States. Designed ostensibly as a school textbook to stimulate discussion about Israel, the book’s opening chapter carries the stupefying heading, “Should Israel Exist?” Can one imagine such a question being raised in an American schoolbook about any other country on the globe? “Should Sweden, Egypt, or Argentina exist?” “Should Canada or Japan exist?” The question would be so baffling as to never arise. Yet when it comes to Israel, the heretofore unthinkable has become pedagogically acceptable, and the “issue” of the Jewish state’s entitlement to a future evidently stands as a legitimate question for schoolroom debate.

As for answers to the question, those given most resoundingly in the negative come not from a Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or some Hamas chieftain—that would be no surprise—but from Ahron Cohen and Joel Kovel, the first identified as a rabbi (affiliated with Neturei Karta), the second the now-familiar professor from Bard College who has called for his fellow Jews to “annihilate the Jewish state.” Cohen is credited with the entry entitled “Israel Has No Right to Exist”; Kovel, with “Israel Should Not Remain a Jewish State.” As young readers quickly learn, the arguments for the elimi-

nation of the Jewish state—every anti-Semite’s cherished dream—are contributed by Jews themselves. Given the drift of “progressive” Jewish thought, that, too—perverse as it is—should come as no surprise.

Endnotes

1. Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks, “Thoughts for the Day, 16 December 2005,” BBC.
2. The public speeches of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continue to feature inflammatory statements about Israel and mocking comments about the Holocaust. In this regard, his rhetoric is of a piece with that of other Iranian leaders in recent years. See Michael Rubin, “The Radioactive Republic of Iran,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2006.
3. The just-released volume edited by Edward Alexander and Paul Bogdanor, *The Jewish Divide over Israel: Accusers and Defenders* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Books, 2006), maps this terrain in copious and clarifying detail. For a briefer but incisive study of anti-Zionism among European Jewish intellectuals, see Emanuele Ottolenghi, “Europe’s ‘Good Jews,’” *Commentary* (December 2005), pp. 42-46.
4. David Pryce-Jones, “Their Kampf,” <http://www.national-review.com>, July 29, 2002.
5. See Sebnem Arsu, “Istanbul Journal: If You Want a Film to Fly, Make Americans the Heavies,” *New York Times*, February 14, 2006.
6. “Syrian Government Daily Suggests Israel Created, Spread Avian Flu,” MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 1094, February 16, 2006.
7. See “Ahmadinejad Blames Israel for Cartoons,” Associated Press, February 11, 2006.
8. “UK Anti-Semitism Skyrockets,” at <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3209915,00.html>.
9. Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 72.
10. For a detailed account of biased media coverage of the fighting near Jenin, see Stephanie Gutmann, *The Other War: Israelis, Palestinians, and the Struggle for Media Supremacy* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005), pp.145-78.
11. Michael Neumann, *What’s Left: Radical Politics and the Radical Psyche* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1992).
12. Michael Neumann, “What Is Anti-Semitism?” in *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*, ed. by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), pp. 3, 4, 5, 6, 10.
13. Tony Judt, “Israel: The Alternative,” *New York Review of Books*, October 23, 2003.
14. Ibid.

15. Benjamin Balint, "Future Imperfect: Tony Judt Blushes for the Jewish State," in *The Jewish Divide over Israel*, pp. 65-75.

16. Ottolenghi, "Europe's 'Good' Jews," p. 45.

17. Rosemary Bechler, "Nation as trauma, Zionism as question: Jacqueline Rose interviewed" (August 18, 2005), p. 7 at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article.jsp?id=2&debateId=97&articleId=2766>.

18. Ibid.

19. Andrei Markovits, "The European and American Left since 1945," *Dissent*, Winter, 2005.

20. For more examples, see Edward Alexander, "Israelis against Themselves" and Paul Bogdanor, "Chomsky's Ayatollahs," in Alexander and Bogdanor, eds., *The Jewish Divide over Israel*, pp. 33-45, 115-134.

21. Richard Cohen, "Hunker Down with History," *Washington Post* (July 18, 2006).

22. Joel Kovel, "Israel Should Not Remain a Jewish State," in John Woodward, ed., *Israel: Opposing Viewpoints* (Detroit: Greenhaven Press, a Division of Thomson/Gale, 2005), pp. 40-41.

23. Ahron Cohen, "Israel Has No Right to Exist," in *ibid.*, p. 29.

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