

How Zionism and Its Traditional Relationship to Antisemitism is Playing Out Today

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The founder of political Zionism, Theodore Herzl. (Photo: E.M. Lilien, via Wikimedia Commons)

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By Tony Greenstein

Given that antisemitism in the West has declined almost to the vanishing point, and arguably only exists because the Zionist movement associates Jews with Israel's genocide, they can live with those contradictions.

Writing about Israel's wooing of the far-right, despite the fact that they are deeply antisemitic, Robert Inklakesh, in 'Nick Fuentes and the Israel Question: Inside the MAGA 'Civil War' noted that:

The Israeli strategy is nonsensical. They seek to ally themselves with the people who ideologically align with them, yet seem to forget that they are Jewish.

In fact, there is nothing nonsensical about this strategy. On the contrary, it is the logical outcome of Zionism. The fact that Israelis are also Jewish is irrelevant. In Israel, people are Jewish by race or nationality, whereas in the diaspora, they are Jewish by religion.

The strategy is only nonsensical when Jews outside Israel support Zionism when it's clearly not in their interest to ally with a movement that works with antisemites. To understand what at first seems to be a crazy strategy, we must go back to the beginning of Zionism.

Zionism arose as a reaction to antisemitism, in particular the 1881 Odessa pogroms. But it was a reaction that marked it out from all other Jewish reactions, which fought to protect and extend Jewish rights in the lands where they lived.

Zionism accepted the argument of the antisemites that Jews did not belong in the lands of their birth but in their own separate Jewish state. The founder of Political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, published in 1896 a pamphlet called, appropriately, *The Jewish State*.

Herzl held that it was the Jews themselves who produced antisemitism by living in other peoples' states. Even worse, 'in the principal countries where Anti-Semitism prevails, it does so as a result of the emancipation of the Jews.' [25 – page references are to *The Jewish State*] In other words, the very fight for equal rights produces antisemitism.

Herzl accepted the antisemitic stereotypes of the Jews. The immediate cause of antisemitism was

our excessive production of mediocre intellects... When we sink, we become a revolutionary proletariat, ... and at the same time, when we rise, there rises also our terrible power of the purse.' [26]

Thus 'Immigration is consequently futile unless based on an assured supremacy', i.e., a Jewish supremacist state. [29]

Herzl recognised from the start that his main supporters would be the anti-Semites the Jews were fleeing from: 'Great exertions will hardly be necessary to spur on the movement. Anti-Semites provide the requisite impetus.' [57]

Herzl believed that the emigration of the Jews would be good for the non-Jews too. 'A great period of prosperity would commence in countries which are now Anti-Semitic.' [73] Herzl recognised that 'people will say that I am furnishing the Anti-Semites with weapons. Why so? Because I admit the truth?' [77]

It was therefore not surprising that most Jews saw Zionism as a form of Jewish anti-Semitism, and most antisemites saw Zionism as a kindred movement amongst the Jews. In his *Diaries*, Herzl was even more explicit:

'The antisemites will be our most dependable friends, the anti-Semitic countries our allies.' [p. 84]

Indeed, Herzl believed that anti-Semitism 'probably contains the divine Will to Good'. [231] For Herzl, antisemitism was actually beneficial!

(It) will not harm the Jews. I consider it to be a movement useful to the Jewish character. It represents the education of a group by the masses... Education is accomplished only through hard knocks

Other Zionist writers, such as Jacob Klatzkin, were even more understanding of anti-Semitism.

If we do not admit the rightfulness of antisemitism, we deny the rightfulness of our own nationalism... Instead of establishing societies for defence against the anti-Semites who want to reduce our rights, we should establish societies for defence against our friends, who desire to defend our rights. (The Meaning of Jewish History, vol. II, p. 425; Jacob Bernard Agus.)

Israeli historian, Yigal Elam, described how

Zionism did not consider anti-Semitism an abnormal, absurd, perverse or marginal phenomenon. Zionism considered anti-Semitism a fact of nature, a standard constant, the norm in the relationship of the non-Jews to the presence of Jews in their midst... a normal, almost rational reaction of the gentiles to the abnormal, absurd and perverse situation of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. 'Ot', organ of the Israeli Labor Party (Ma'arakh) no 2, Tel-Aviv 1967 (in Hebrew) cited in Zionism and its Scarecrows, Khamsin 6, Moshé Machover and Mario Offenberg.

Thus it was that Zionism understood that without antisemitism, there would never be a Jewish state because the Jews would have no incentive to go there. This took on sinister tones with the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. The Zionist leaders realized at once that they could take advantage of the new development in order to build their state.

Critical Zionist scholar, Noah Lucas, described how

'As the European holocaust erupted, Ben-Gurion saw it as a decisive opportunity for Zionism... Ben-Gurion above all others sensed the tremendous possibilities inherent in the dynamic of the chaos and carnage in Europe.... In conditions of peace,... Zionism could not move the masses of world Jewry. The forces unleashed by Hitler in all their horror must be harnessed to the advantage of Zionism. ... By the end of 1942... the struggle for a Jewish state became the primary concern of the movement.' (The Modern Foundations of Israel, pp. 187-8)

Emil Ludwig (1881-1948), the world-famous biographer, 'expressed the general attitude of the Zionist movement':

Hitler will be forgotten in a few years, but he will have a beautiful monument in Palestine. You know, the coming of the Nazis was rather a welcome thing. ... Thousands who seemed to be completely lost to Judaism were brought back to the fold by Hitler, and for that I am personally very grateful to him. (Eitan Bloom, Arthur Ruppin and the Production of the Modern Hebrew Culture, p. 417.)

Nahman Bialik, the Zionist national poet, volunteered that 'Hitlerism has perhaps saved German Jewry, which was being assimilated into annihilation.' (Bloom as above) Berl Katznelson, a founder of Mapai (Israeli Labor Party) and editor of its paper Davar as well as Ben-Gurion's effective deputy, saw the rise of Hitler as 'an opportunity to build and flourish like none we have ever had or ever will have.' (Francis Nicosia, Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, p. 91). Ben-Gurion was even more optimistic. 'The Nazis' victory would become "a fertile force for Zionism."' (Tom Segev, The Seventh Million, p. 18).

The reaction of most Jews to Hitler was one of horror. Almost immediately, they instigated a Boycott of all things German. The Zionist leaders, however, in their enthusiasm for the new



developments, set their face against any anti-Nazi activity. In a letter to Hitler of June 21, 1933, the German Zionist Federation wrote that:

‘The realization of Zionism could only be hurt by the resentment of Jews abroad against the German development. Boycott propaganda... is in essence unZionist, because Zionism wants not to do battle but to convince and to build.’

Two months later, the Zionist leaders agreed to a trade agreement between Nazi Germany and the Zionist movement, Ha'avara.

So far from being strange or ‘obsessive’, the alliance today between the Israeli state and the anti-Semitic far-right is absolutely normal. Indeed, in order to characterize its opponents as antisemitic, it was necessary for Zionism to redefine antisemitism itself. Thus, there was born the ‘new antisemitism’. No longer was antisemitism hostility to, hatred or prejudice against Jews as Jews. It was hostility to the Israeli state, anti-Zionism. What non-Jews think of Jews is irrelevant. All that matters is what they think of the Jewish state.

After all, according to the Zionist understanding, all non-Jews have anti-Semitism in their blood anyway, having inherited it for 2,000 years. (Leon Pinsker, *Autoemancipation*, p.5, 1881)

Hence why Amichai Chikli, Israel’s Diaspora Minister, when organising a conference on fighting antisemitism this March, invited some of the world’s leading antisemites! So appalling were they that even the ADL was forced in the end to boycott it. See e.g. [List of Jewish leaders boycotting](#).

Of course, Jews in the diaspora do face antisemitism, and thus their loyalty to Zionism and opposition to antisemitism are contradictions. However, given that antisemitism in the West has declined almost to the vanishing point, and arguably only exists because the Zionist movement associates Jews with Israel’s genocide, they can live with those contradictions.

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