

In wake of Israeli violence against Palestinians

Anti-Jewish attacks mount in Britain and France

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25 October 2000

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East has led to anti-Semitic attacks in Europe. The near-fatal stabbing of David Myers, a 20-year-old Hasidic theology student, by an Algerian man in London is one of the single most appalling results. But the tensest situation exists in France, which has a Muslim population of 5 million, mostly Arabs, as well as 700,000 Jewish citizens.

In Paris, 5,000 people followed a call by Zionist organisations and demonstrated October 10 on the Champs Elysées in support of Israel. Over the following days there were demonstrations supporting the Palestinians in several large cities, including Lyon, Paris, Marseille and Strasbourg.

The disputes took on increasingly ethnic and anti-Semitic forms. In three weeks the French police have recorded over 80 attacks on synagogues, Jewish businesses and schools. Several arson attacks were committed on synagogues, with the Trappes synagogue in Paris being completely destroyed. Gravestones were ripped out and anti-Semitic slogans sprayed on walls.

Intimidation and attacks on Jewish inhabitants are now commonplace and a climate of fear has been created. Representatives of Jewish organisations have called on the government to provide police and even army protection.

Most attacks have occurred in the *Banlieus*, the sprawling suburbs of many large cities, including Paris, where Maghrebi and Jewish communities live close together and the social tensions are sharpest. It would appear that impoverished Maghrebi youth are largely responsible for the attacks.

Many young people of North African origin living in France identify with the Palestinian youth who are

fighting against the Israeli state. As many French press reports acknowledge, a major reason for this identification is their own social situation: they also are oppressed socially and politically and face above-average levels of poverty and unemployment. They regularly suffer racist attacks by the French police, which often have deadly consequences.

A section of these young people are under the influence of Islamic fundamentalists, who do not draw a distinction between the policy of the Zionist state and Jewish people in general. They spread anti-Semitic slogans and channel indignation over the brutality of the Israeli army into reactionary, ethnic and religious channels.

At many high schools, pupils who originate from the Maghreb have solidarised politically with the Palestinians. Some teachers have reacted by attempting to suppress political discussion, but others have tried to uncover the historical and political background to the conflict and thereby counteract a purely religious interpretation.

The anti-Semitic attacks are grist to the mill of Zionism, which claims to represent the interests of all Jews. Zionist organisations in France always present the Palestinian revolt against Israel as an attack on Judaism itself.

The extreme right wing are also trying to use the situation to their own advantage, by agitating one community against another. In Paris, a group of National Front youth burned an Israeli flag and fought with members of the Jewish student federation. The rival fascist Mouvement National Républicain headed by Bruno Mégret calls for Zionists to mobilise against the “Arab danger”.



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