

France: Anti-Semitic attacks complement anti-Arab racism

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An unholy alliance of hard-line Zionists and the fascist National Front of Jean Marie Le Pen is spearheading efforts to whip up already festering tensions between France's Muslims and Jews. What amounts to a concerted political campaign is utilising a spate of anti-Semitic attacks perpetrated by disaffected North African youth in order to legitimise racist and nationalist policies and stringent law-and-order measures that are antithetical to the interests of Muslims and Jews alike.

It is of paramount importance to take a principled stand against the advocates of communal hatred on all sides. Especially in the country that is home to Europe's largest Muslim population of around six million and to 700,000 Jews—making France the world's fourth largest population centre for Jewish people after Israel, the United States and Russia. This is lent additional urgency not only by the terrible events unfolding in the Middle East, but also by the recent electoral success of the fascist National Front (FN) leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, who placed second in the first round of France's presidential elections.

The man who once described the Holocaust as "a detail of history" is seeking to foster anti-Muslim sentiment while portraying himself as a friend to France's Jewish people due to his advocacy of law-and-order measures and anti-Muslim stance.

All evidence suggests that the latest outbreak of anti-Semitic attacks are generally motivated by a misplaced sympathy amongst Muslim youth for the Palestinians suffering under Israeli occupation. This fact alone demonstrates once again that Zionism is the enemy of the Jewish people, rather than its saviour. The crimes of Ariel Sharon's government have blackened the name of Israel amongst millions of the world's people and has associated a people historically amongst the foremost advocates of progressive ideals with the systematic denial of the democratic rights and brutalisation of the Palestinians.

None of this makes attacks on Jewish people and religious institutions any less reactionary. There can be no justification for identifying all Jewish people with the crimes of the Israeli government, because such a stance is essentially racist. And though there is no indication that the youth who have attacked Jewish workers are directly influenced by the various Islamic fundamentalist groups, such groupings and a number of Arab regimes often encourage anti-Semitic sentiment in order to build a popular base amongst the more politically ignorant.

Neither can one take comfort from the fact that in the main, anti-Semitism has taken the form of racist graffiti and in so doing seeks to minimise the problem. Although one must avoid the type of hysterical reaction favoured by the hard-line Zionists, complacency in regard to the re-emergence of anti-Semitism is impermissible. There have been a number of arson attacks on synagogues, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and around 60 physical assaults on Jewish individuals. The worst incident—and so far the only one of an organised character—was the attack by hooded men armed with iron bars on a Jewish football club in the Paris suburb of Bondy. The 15-year-old goalkeeper was beaten so badly he was hospitalised.

The targeting of Jews by Muslim youth does nothing to further the cause of the Palestinian struggle for their democratic rights. The spokeswoman for the Palestinian Authority in France, Leila Shahid, issued a statement declaring, "Every act against the Jewish religion and their people is a crime against the Palestinian cause." Instead anti-Semitism plays directly into the hands of the right wing in both France and Israel. It can only serve to alienate the many Jewish people in both countries who are opposed to Sharon's war, but who justifiably fear the growth of anti-Semitism amongst the Arab peoples and the growing influence of neo-fascist groups in many European countries.

In the struggle against Sharon's efforts to destroy the Palestinian Authority and against the fascist danger in France, nothing must be allowed to compromise the struggle to unite Muslim and Jewish workers, youth and intellectuals. This task cannot be entrusted to any of the major bourgeois parties, despite their efforts to portray France's republican state institutions as a safeguard against racism. Gaullist leader Jacques Chirac and his defeated Socialist Party rival, Lionel Jospin, both combined condemnation of anti-Semitism with appeals for unity between French Jews and Muslims. But the main thrust of their policies foster anti-immigrant sentiment and target Muslim youth in particular for repressive law-and-order measures.

Young North Africans already suffer the worst forms of social oppression and discrimination. The French police have admitted that the perpetrators of attacks on Jews are likely a small number of young, second- and third-generation French North Africans. But the reaction of the authorities has been to call for harsh police measures in terms that portray the attacks as only the worst expression of a general rise in violent crime, for which young immigrants are largely to blame.

Daniel Dugléry, the former inspector general of the French police and a supporter of President Chirac, claimed that the annual number of crimes and misdemeanours increased from 500,000 to as many as 12 million over the past three decades and called for more police. In immigrant suburbs, "policemen run away from youths every day," he claimed. The theme of immigrant crime featured subliminally in an election pamphlet issued by Chirac entitled "Insecurity. France loses its bearings," showing a grasping black hand as a symbol of crime.

The attacks against Jews have also been seized on by right-wing Zionists in France and by the Sharon government. Their aims are three-fold: In order to justify Sharon's war against the Palestinians, their propaganda portrays all Muslims as anti-Semitic. For the same purpose they attack all critics of Sharon and of political Zionism as essentially anti-Jewish and, finally, they use fear of anti-Semitism to oppose Jewish assimilation and argue for mass emigration to Israel.

A significant feature of Zionist propaganda is the attempt to link the political left and anti-Zionist sentiment generally with anti-Semitism. Rabbi Andrew Baker of the American Jewish Committee described French Jews as facing a three-pronged threat—from France's Arab minority, from right-wing extremists and from the intellectual left.

A number of major Jewish organisations, headed by CRIF (Representative Council of Jewish Organisations in France), are more blunt in their approach. An April 7 rally was held in Paris that explicitly linked opposition to anti-Semitic attacks with support for Sharon's war. It drew the support of upwards of 50,000 people (the organisers claimed 150,000). Many waved Israeli flags and, according to the chief of police in Paris, Jean-Paul Proust, "A core of between 400 and 500 people belonging to extremist pro-Israeli movements did not cease provocations for several hours." They were armed with knives, stun guns and baseball bats. Members of Betar, the Likud youth movement in France, and the Jewish Defence League beat up North African Arabs and journalists whom they accused of being pro-Palestinian and one Zionist militant stabbed a policeman in the abdomen when he tried to intervene.

The decision to support Sharon's war met with opposition within France's Jewish community, but CRIF President Roger Cukierman was angrily dismissive of his critics. His predecessor as CRIF president, Theo Klein, was amongst those who refused to take part in the rally and held a counterdemonstration that was confined to opposing anti-Semitism. Cukierman said in response, "I said [at the time] that while France suffered from anti-Semitism, there had not been a single Jew killed in these incidents, whereas 125 people were killed in Israel in the month of March alone. Thus, I felt that decency compelled us to express support for Israel." At a meeting attended by Jospin earlier, Cukierman declared, "There is nothing closer to anti-Semitism than anti-Zionism."

Spokesmen for the Israeli government have made repeated calls for France's Jews to emigrate. In February, Sharon himself said Israel was preparing for an exodus of French Jews due to "this dangerous wave of anti-Semitism." On April 10, the Israeli government said the emigration of all 700,000 French Jews had become a "necessity" and announced the setting up of an inter-ministerial committee on the issue. Following Le Pen's success in the presidential primaries, Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Elie Yisha, who heads the ultra Orthodox Shas Party, called on French Jews to emigrate to Israel, insisting that the "Jews of Europe, and the Jews of France in particular, cannot remain indifferent in the face of growing anti-Semitic attacks, which the French authorities seem unable to stop."

Le Pen's long-held anti-Semitic views are well known, but the most significant feature of his most recent statements is his obscene efforts to solidarise with French Jews, Israel and the Sharon government. Le Pen's intention is to further his own campaign against the National Front's major scapegoat, hate-figure and designated enemy of his chauvinist vision for France—Muslim immigrants.

In an extensive interview with Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper on April 23, Le Pen stated, "There is a general problem of gangs that live in the suburbs of the big cities. They are using the events [in the Middle East] as ideological cover for their actions.... There is an Islamic population in France, most of which comes from the North African countries. Though some may have French citizenship, they don't have the French cultural background or sociological structure. They operate according to a different logic than most of the population here. Their values are different from those of the Judeo-Christian world."

Le Pen added, "These elements have a negative effect on all of public security. They are strengthened demographically both by natural reproduction and by immigration, which reinforces their stubborn ethnic segregation, their domineering nature. This is the world of Islam in all its aberrations." In failing to clamp down on immigrants, "The French government is simply fleeing from responsibility" by "preventing the security forces from intervening," he said.

On this basis, Le Pen identified fully with Sharon's war against the Palestinians and compared it with his own efforts within "the 10th paratroop division that was ordered to destroy the terror in Algiers.... The division did wipe out terror, and it didn't do this by being gentle with the terrorists. A war on terror is a brutal thing."

He concludes, "I completely understand the State of Israel, which is seeking to defend its citizens."

Zionism has a long and dishonourable history of utilising the threat posed by the far-right to argue for its own brand of religious nationalism, sometimes to the point where an almost symbiotic relationship is established—the fascists want rid of the Jews and the Zionists want them to emigrate. Present-day France is no exception. CRIF President Cukierman is far from having endorsed the calls emanating from Israel for French Jews to emigrate. Rather he has made statements emphasising a degree of supposed commonality between the interests of Jews and Le Pen.

Prior to the results of the first round of the presidential elections, Cukierman declared, "The very fact that Le Pen is an outspoken opponent of Muslim immigration to France sends a message which helps contain the violence which has come from this immigration." After Le Pen's vote came in, he returned to the theme of Le Pen as an ally against France's Muslim population. "Le Pen's success is a message to Muslims to keep quiet," he asserted, "because he is known as someone who has always been opposed to Muslim immigration."

The situation in France is politically complex and does not lend itself to the easy answers advanced by the ideologues of religious exclusivism, race and nation. Anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism are not opposites, but twins. Both serve to divide the working class against itself in the political interests of the ruling elites.

The present resurgence of anti-Semitism has its immediate origins in the events in the Middle East, but this does not impart a unique character to the fight against it that can be found in the separatist program of constructing a Jewish state. The Zionists are in fact asking Jews to flee from anti-Semitism in France that is so far only a pale reflection of the hostility they will face from the Arab masses as a result of Sharon's pogromist war.

The essential content of the struggle against all forms of racism is the political unity of the working class, based on the program of socialist internationalism. Progressive-minded Arabs and Jews all over the world must not only unite in a mutual rejection of nationalism and chauvinism and for the creation of the United Socialist States of the Middle East. They must do so through engaging in a broader political movement to mobilise the entire French, European and international working class independently of the political representatives of imperialism.



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