

A crude attempt to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism

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A recent article in the British newspaper, the *Guardian*, provides a noxious example of the concerted effort being orchestrated by the Zionist political establishment to rubbish all criticism of its murderous policy towards the Palestinian people.

In an op-ed piece headlined *Anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism: behind much criticism of Israel is a thinly veiled hatred of the Jews*, Emanuele Ottolenghi attempts to equate any opposition to Zionism and the colonial policies of the Israeli state with hatred of the Jewish people in general and the infamous and reactionary anti-Semitism of the Nazis in particular.

Ottolenghi holds an unpaid post at the privately endowed Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies and the Middle East Centre at St Anthony's College, Oxford. But by no stretch of the imagination can his article be described as a scholarly piece of work. His is an attempt on behalf of Israel's international backers to silence opposition to Ariel Sharon's regime and to legitimise its Greater Israel policy and brutality towards a people who bear absolutely no responsibility for the Holocaust, which is evoked by Ottolenghi as a bludgeon against Zionism's opponents.

His article offers total indemnity for Israel's crimes against the Palestinians and a carte blanche for Sharon to do whatever he likes. Using the politics of amalgam, Ottolenghi links anyone who criticises the Israeli state with anti-Semitism, irrespective of their political views. As far as Ottolenghi is concerned it is impermissible to note that Israel's policies towards the Palestinians are reminiscent of those employed by the Nazis. Such an equation between victims and murderers, he says, denies the Holocaust. "Worse still, it provides its retroactive justification for the Holocaust: if Jews turned out to be so evil, perhaps they deserved what they got," he continued.

This argument is made up from whole cloth. One does not have to deny the extermination of European Jewry in the Nazi gas chambers to say that Israel's dispossession, subjugation and enclosure of the Palestinian people bears a striking resemblance to the policies of the Nazis towards the Jews, Poles, gypsies, other ethnic minorities and political opponents. To acknowledge this is not to equate the criminal actions of the Zionists against the Palestinians with the Holocaust, which was on a far greater scale of barbarism. But it legitimately identifies what is a tragic irony of history—that the Jewish people, so long associated with the struggle for social progress and against all forms of discrimination, racism and oppression, should themselves be perpetrating gross human rights violations against an oppressed people. Indeed such comments are often framed as an appeal to the Jews' sense of history and social conscience—something that will be lost on political criminals such as Sharon and his apologists.

The Sharon government and the Zionist establishment routinely utilise the lie that their opponents are anti-Semitic. Ottolenghi runs with this by inventing a "counter-argument" from an imaginary accused that reeks of racism.

"Jewish defenders of Israel are then depicted by their critics as seeking

an excuse to justify Israel, projecting Jewish paranoia and displaying a 'typical' Jewish trait of 'sticking together', even in defending the morally indefensible."

Later he lists what he claims are anti-Semitic themes used repeatedly by anti-Zionists—"the Jewish conspiracy to rule the world, linking Jews with money and media, the hooked-nose stingy Jew, the blood libel, disparaging use of Jewish symbols, or traditional Christian anti-Jewish imagery—are used to describe Israel's actions".

Who says this? Ottolenghi never quotes a single concrete example, except for reference to an Italian cartoon and to Labour MP Tam Dalyell's reference to a "Jewish cabal" having influence on British foreign policy. This author cannot vouch for the Italian cartoon he cites, but the *World Socialist Web Site* has written on the attack made on Dalyell (See "Britain: Labour extends antiwar witch-hunt to Tam Dalyell"). But the essential message is that all anti-Zionists "repeatedly" resort to crude anti-Semitic attacks. And he can find no proof of this at all.

Ottolenghi's claims are fundamentally dishonest and are contradicted by the fact that many of those critical of Sharon's brutal treatment of the Palestinians are themselves both Israelis and Jews. To cite but one example, more than 100,000 Israeli Jews, appalled by Sharon's actions, attended a rally in November to commemorate the eighth anniversary of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzakh Rabin's assassination by a right-wing zealot. Demonstrators carried banners opposing the occupation and demanding peace.

He responds to Jewish critics of Zionism in typical fashion, with the claim that they are essentially traitors who are praised by the anti-Zionist/anti-Semitic lobby precisely because they have sold out: "Jews condemning Israel and rejecting Zionism earn their praise. Denouncing Israel becomes a passport to full integration. Noam Chomsky and his imitators are the new heroes, their Jewish pride and identity expressed solely through their shame for Israel's existence."

Here is the hub of Ottolenghi's argument. To be Jewish is ipso facto to be Zionist. His assertion that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism rests on this identification between the actions of the Israeli state and the interests of the Jewish people as a whole. Such an equation is historically and factually incorrect.

The Holocaust was a seminal historical experience not just for the Jews, but for working people all over the world. It was the single most grotesque example of fascist barbarism during World War II.

Against the background of the economic ruination of Germany that followed World War I, Hitler set about building a mass social base for his party among petty bourgeois layers and lumpen workers by scapegoating the Jews for the decline in their living standards. Hitler certainly utilised populist attacks on Jewish "usurers" and businessmen, but his hatred of the Jews was bound up with his fear of Marxism and Germany's powerful socialist workers' movement in which Jewish workers and intellectuals played such a prominent role.

The defeat of fascism and the struggle against anti-Semitism was,

therefore, bound up with a unified political offensive by the working class not just against fascism but the entire bourgeois order. But this was prevented from happening by the combined betrayals of Stalinism and social democracy that disoriented the millions of workers opposed to the Nazis and had allowed Hitler to come to power.

The Zionists had a very different perspective. They insisted that the anti-Semitism that gave rise to the Holocaust could only be answered by the removal of the Jewish people to their biblical homeland and the establishment of their own state. For the Zionists, the solution offered to the Jewish proletariat and intelligentsia lay in establishing a new capitalist state, not in joining their class brothers and sisters in the struggle to put an end to capitalism.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 rested upon the decisions and machinations of the major powers at the United Nations. It was viewed with sympathy by millions of people around the world appalled at the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews and was accompanied by rhetoric that attempted to identify Zionism with the labour movement, equality and socialism as a way of legitimising it in the eyes of class conscious Jews. The horrors of the concentration camps thus played a crucial role in Israel's birth.

But what is at issue now, 55 years later, is the historical and political record of Zionism, an examination of which Ottolenghi attempts to rule out of bounds. For him any objective appraisal of what the Israeli state has done constitutes rampant anti-Semitism. This serves a very definite purpose. The inability to examine Israel's history without the Zionists raising the spectre of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust is not only a slur on the motives of their critics. It makes it impossible to understand anything politically.

Ottolenghi claims that criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic because it singles out Israel to be judged by an "impossibly high standard" not applied elsewhere. This is a diversion. People have every right to "single out" a country that illegally occupies Palestinian land and brutally oppresses its inhabitants, particularly when this is only possibly because it has the financial, political and military backing of the United States—which itself constitutes one of the many crimes of the world's major imperialist power.

For him, "Israel errs like all other nations: it is normal". He says, "Israel deserves to be judged by the same standards adopted for others, not by the standards of utopia". The *World Socialist Web Site* agrees with his last point. Let us examine the record.

Israel's founding was carried out through the forcible expulsion of the indigenous Palestinian people. This was not just the result of a war that led people to flee their homes, but the explicit policy of the political progenitors of the present Likud government—the Zionist terror groups—that was given the nod by Israel's founding fathers and first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, as Israeli historians have acknowledged.

Since then Israel has fought numerous wars, including unprovoked wars of aggression against other countries: Egypt in 1956 and Lebanon in 1978 and 1982. Israel has openly defied numerous United Nations resolutions. It has repeatedly breached international law in relation to the West Bank and Gaza, which it has illegally occupied since 1967. It has appropriated territory to itself, including East Jerusalem and the land and villages for more than 200 settlements.

Israeli armed forces have carried out repeated incursions into Palestinian cities. They and Zionist settlers have killed more than 2,500 Palestinians, the great majority of which were unarmed civilians and many of them children, since the start of the Intifada in September 2000.

As one of the most violent governments in the world, Israel has demolished people's homes, destroyed farms and uprooted olive groves, closed roads and instituted curfews, crippling the Palestinian economy and bringing people to the brink of starvation. It regularly detains people without trial. Torture and inhumane treatment of detainees is routine.

Israel has exiled people. It has a declared policy of political assassination of its opponents.

Israel's policy of closing roads not only to and from but also within the West Bank and Gaza, combined with its infamous security wall that separates the West Bank from Israel, has created a ghetto for the Palestinians. The conditions for the vast majority of those who live in the Gaza Strip, separated off from Israel by means an electrified barbed wire fence and denied any means of earning a living, resemble those of a giant concentration camp.

Israel is a nuclear state that refuses to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty or let international inspectors examine its facilities. Yet everyone knows that Israel has developed more than 200 such weapons and has an extensive biological and chemical weapons programme. If Israel's nuclear weapons have gone unpublicised thus far it is because Israel serves as the custodian of US interests in the Middle East. It has even said that it will take pre-emptive strike action against Iran, which it claims has begun to develop nuclear weapons in violation of its international obligations to destroy its nuclear facilities as it did against Iraq in 1981.

The US has bankrolled Israel to the tune of billions of dollars a year for decades in the form of military aid, most of which must be spent in the US.

Israel is the only country in the world led by a man that its own judicial commission found was personally responsible for failing to protect the Palestinians in Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps from the murderous Phalangist thugs in 1982 and judged him to be unfit to serve as a minister of state. Sharon heads a government which rests upon ultra-nationalist parties that openly call for ethnic cleansing under the euphemism of "population transfer".

Within Israel itself, the government operates a policy towards the Palestinian Israelis reminiscent of the infamous apartheid regime in South Africa. It discriminates against its Arab citizens, curtails their political rights and denies them a fair share of economic resources and social welfare. It has recently passed legislation denying Israeli citizens who marry Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza the right to live with their partners in Israel.

The Sharon government does not represent the interests of the majority of the Jewish people who live in Israel, let alone the Jewish people all over the world. It is the political representative of a section of Israel's financial elite and a proxy of the Bush administration in the US.

More than 10 percent of the Israeli workforce is unemployed. Many more are impoverished. The Sharon government is pursuing a relentless attack on jobs, living standards and the social safety net in an attempt to shift the burden of Israel's precipitous economic decline in the wake of the world recession and the impact of the Palestinian Intifada onto the backs of workers and their families. Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently announced the introduction of legislation curbing the right to strike by public sector workers and the gutting of social welfare.

What the record shows is that Israel deserves international condemnation for its flagrant breach of international law and its brutal and repressive policies.

Ottolenghi does make one correct point when he admits, "There is no doubt that recent anti-Semitism is linked to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."

He quickly retreats from this admission, however, when he goes on to insist that anyone who draws any political conclusions as to what this says about the character and viability of the Zionist project or does not still lend unconditional support to Israel is an anti-Semite: "The argument that it is Israel's behaviour, and Jewish support for it, that invite prejudice sounds hollow at best and sinister at worst. That argument means that sympathy for Jews is conditional on the political views they espouse. This is hardly an expression of tolerance. It singles Jews out. It is anti-semitism."

Unquestionably one of the most potent factors re-igniting anti-Semitism today is the brutal methods adopted by the Israeli government under Sharon. A leaked European Union report shows a rise in the number of attacks on Jews by European Muslim youth. The report, compiled by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, links a rise in attacks on Jews with events in the Middle East, particularly since the start of the Palestinian Intifada in September 2000 and Israel's attack on Jenin in the West Bank in April last year.

To recognise this fact is not to endorse anti-Semitic views or to defend those who hold them. But the political basis for a dangerous emergence of anti-Semitism amongst often politically uneducated second generation Arab and African immigrants cannot be ignored. One can only combat such a noxious development by advancing a principled opposition to both the Zionist state and to those, such as the Islamic fundamentalists and Arab bourgeois leaders, who employ populist anti-Semitism to manipulate political discontent. Silence on Sharon's crimes or, worst still an apologia for them as provided by Ottolenghi, only fosters anti-Semitism.

It also strengthens right-wing forces on a world scale.

The Sharon government rests upon two fascistic parties, one based on right wing hooligans and thugs that inhabit the settlements in the Occupied Territories and another that openly promotes the "transfer" of the Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. Its survival is entirely dependent upon the Bush administration and billions of dollars of military aid and loans.

There is a growing alliance between the right-wing Zionists and the extreme-right Christian fundamentalists in the US. The Zionist right has aligned itself—on the basis of anti-Arab chauvinism and military aggression against Iraq—with groups in the US and also Europe that have a long history of anti-Semitism. Only a few weeks ago Sharon was being entertained by one of his most ardent supporters in Europe, Silvio Berlusconi, the prime minister of Italy who made headlines and sparked outrage recently when he came to the defence of Mussolini, the fascist dictator, when he claimed, "Mussolini never killed anyone. Mussolini used to send people on vacation in internal exile." On November 25 Sharon went one better, playing host to Italy's deputy prime minister, Gianfranco Fini, the leader of the National Alliance, the political heir of Mussolini's fascist party.

In the mid-1990s Fini was still describing Mussolini as "the greatest statesman of the 20th century." He now condemns what he calls "the shameful chapters in the history of our people". But what really endears him to Sharon is Fini's support for Israel's repression of the Palestinians and the construction of the fence. As far as Sharon is concerned, support for Israel today erases any whiff of anti-Semitism, even for supporters of fascists that sought the extermination of European Jewry.

That the Zionist state should seek such allies and become one of the major factors spawning anti-Semitism is indeed another of history's tragic ironies. Such reactionary outcomes are a far cry from the safe haven, free from oppression and discrimination, that the creation of Israel appeared to offer Jews in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust. But they are the inevitable product of the Zionist project of establishing a capitalist state created through the dispossession of another people and maintained by war and repression abroad and social exploitation and inequality at home. It is impossible for such a state to provide the foundations for establishing social justice and equality, even for its own citizens.

The failure of the Zionist project is not the result of any inadequacies on the part of the Jewish people but an expression of the failure of all movements in the Middle East, Africa and Asia that have based themselves upon the perspective of nationalism to resolve the fundamental social, economic and political problems confronting the mass of working people.

It is time to recognise that Zionism has been a terrible and failed experiment. Its continuation promises only further oppression for both

Palestinians and Israelis and the most bitter war.

The only way out of the current impasse is the development of a political movement to unite Arab and Jewish workers and intellectuals in a common struggle against capitalism and for the building of a socialist society. This provides the only way of redressing the historic injustices suffered by the Palestinian workers and peasants, and ending the twin evils of oppression and war that are fuelled by the profit drive of both international capital and both the Israeli and Arab national ruling cliques. The creation of a United Socialist States of the Middle East would remove the artificial borders imposed by imperialist intrigues that presently divide the peoples and economies of the region so as to utilise the resources to fulfil the social, economic and political aspirations of all.



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