

New York Times promotes “escape” to Israel

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While it portrays itself as the “newspaper of record,” dedicated to reporting “all the news that’s fit to print,” the *New York Times* as a media institution is in the most fundamental sense maintained of, for and by wealthy financial elite that dominates the economic, political and social life of New York City and the entire United States.

This class orientation and bias often come through most blatantly in the non-news sections of the paper, from advertisements for jewelry that costs more than the annual income of the average New Yorker to a real estate section that presents million-dollar apartments as a bargain and a travel section that treats \$500-a-night hotel rooms as the norm.

Then there is the “Escape” section published every Friday largely to give the wealthy hints on how to spend their money, much of it oriented to the purchase of multimillion-dollar “second homes.”

This Friday, the intersection of the personal, or more precisely, class interests of this financial elite to which the *Times* caters and the politics of the paper’s editorial board came through most clearly in the Escape section in an article entitled “Choosing Israel, Not the Hamptons.”

The Hamptons is the Long Island seaside watering hole where homes sell for tens of millions and sections of New York’s financial aristocracy spend as much as \$100,000 a month on rentals.

“From downtown Tel Aviv to the heart of Jerusalem, foreigners—especially Americans—searching for second homes are redefining Israel’s high-end real estate market,” the paper declares breathlessly.

The article cites “deals like the \$13 million purchase of a Tel Aviv triplex by Shari Arison, the Carnival Cruise Lines heiress,” and gushes about a new “gated community” of multimillion-dollar Tuscan-style mansions just a half-hour outside of Jerusalem called Eden Hills.

“Eden Hills is priced to appeal to buyers accustomed to living among the parks, tennis courts, artificial lakes, bike trails and tree-lined pedestrian malls typical of high-end American subdivisions,” according to the *Times*. “Such attributes, along with numerous synagogues, are designed to lure Eden Hills’s wealthy, Orthodox American target audience—and keep them there.”

“I hate sounding like an ugly American,” Dr. Allen Josephs, a 56-year-old New Jersey neurologist and future Eden Hills resident, told the *Times*. “But I want my creature comforts while still being in Israel.”

Eden Hill’s developer, Jake Leibowitz, a recent transplant from Flatbush, Brooklyn, apparently has no such qualms about how he sounds. “American Jews...can’t just be plucked down in the middle of nowhere,” he told the *Jerusalem Post*. “They are entitled to the best and are willing to pay for it. And this is what our project offers.” He accused Israeli opponents of his project of having a “socialist mentality.” “They don’t want to see successful Americans,” he said. “They resent us.”

Foreign buyers of Israeli real estate, the *Times* notes, are “taking advantage of a decrease in terrorism and property prices still far below Western levels” to scoop up their luxury vacation homes.

The “decrease in terrorism” is factored in as one might list beach erosion in the Hamptons. The word “Palestinians” is nowhere to be found in the article, though the expensive real estate deals and “gated communities” it touts are all founded upon land seized from a people who were violently dispossessed and turned into refugees nearly six decades ago.

The human suffering caused by the mass confiscation of Palestinian land that began in 1948 has only been intensified by the policies of the Israeli government, backed by Washington.

While the *Times* promotes lavish second homes in

Israel to America's wealthy, tens of thousands of Palestinians lack even a single roof of their own, while millions remain refugees, denied the right to live in their own land. Since 1967, the Israeli authorities have demolished tens of thousands of Palestinian homes in the occupied territories. According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, between 2000 and 2005 alone, 30,000 families were made homeless by demolitions carried out by Israeli forces.

Until 2005, it was a common practice to demolish the homes of those accused of terrorist acts, a form of collective punishment banned by international law. For the most part, these houses are destroyed on the pretext that they were built without first obtaining a permit, something that the bureaucracy of the Zionist state makes virtually impossible for Palestinian Arabs.

The demolitions have been accompanied by the building and expansion of illegal Zionist settlements in the occupied West Bank, the construction of the so-called separation wall, seizing large new tracts of Palestinian territory, while turning what is left into non-contiguous and unviable ghettos, and the enforcing of an oppressive system of checkpoints and roadblocks that effectively make the occupied territories into a massive open-air prison.

Underlying these brutal actions is an apartheid-style policy of population transfers and segregation aimed at carving out exclusively Jewish territories and annexing even more land.

While trampling on the rights of the Palestinians, the Israeli state has also presided over the deepening impoverishment of large sections of the population within Israel itself, including both Jewish immigrants and Arabs born within Israel's boundaries. According to Israeli government statistics released last September, fully 1.6 million people—a quarter of the population—live below the poverty line. Long gone are the egalitarian and even "socialist" pretenses of Labour Zionism of an early epoch. The present state and all major parties have abandoned any serious attempt to ameliorate poverty, instead embracing free market policies and imposing continuous rounds of budget cuts.

The result has been mounting social polarization, of which the real estate deals highlighted by the *Times* are a direct expression. The gobbling up of ever-more-expensive properties by wealthy Americans in Israel

has placed increasing pressure on Israeli working people, driving up housing prices beyond what they can afford.

Under these conditions, the *Times* promotion of Israeli real estate as an attractive alternative to a house in the Hamptons is indecent to say the least. It reflects the world view and mores of a social layer that has enriched itself off of the protracted redistribution of the national wealth from the masses of working people to those at the top of the economic ladder. Alienated from concerns and problems of the general population, it is generally contemptuous of issues of democratic and human rights.

In this case, this layer's self-obsessed pursuit of ever-more-grandiose real estate deals intersects with the right-wing nationalist and capitalist ideology of Zionism and the criminal policies of occupation and ethnic cleansing.



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