

Jewish opponent of Zionism tells WSWS: “Our liberation is joined. It’s that simple”

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Nearly three months into the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, which has claimed the lives of close to 30,000 Palestinians, overwhelmingly women and children, masses of people throughout the world continue to protest the ongoing slaughter and the governments responsible for it.

In the face of police violence, right-wing persecution and Zionist threats, millions of people of every background and ethnicity have taken part in the largest anti-war protests in a generation, demanding an immediate ceasefire and freedom for the imprisoned Palestinian people.

Refuting the vile lie advanced by capitalist politicians and governments complicit in the genocide that opposition to mass murder and the apartheid state of Israel is “antisemitic,” hundreds of thousands of Jewish people have not only taken part in the anti-war protests but in many cases have led them.

At a November 4 ceasefire protest in Los Angeles, California, reporters with the *World Socialist Web Site* conducted interviews with dozens of demonstrators, including Jane, who described herself as “an anti-Zionist Jew.”

In her interview, Jane spoke powerfully in defense of the Palestinian people and against a “two-state solution,” instead calling for “one state for all of its people.” Jane’s interview went viral on social media, amassing over 700,000 views on X/Twitter and TikTok alone in less than a month.

Last week, Jane was kind enough to speak with the WSWS again on her political awakening and what she sees as the way forward. Her interview has been lightly edited for length, content and clarity.

Jane:

“The synagogue that I went to was founded by my grandfather, and in that synagogue there were always flags of Israel. I come from a very Zionist background. It was very important. I remember my grandmother always talking about ‘Israel, Israel.’

“Israel was above all. It was our savior. It was what all of us should aspire to represent. And it wasn’t just the synagogue, it wasn’t just the community, it wasn’t just my family, it was every aspect of my life.

“I went to a school that was a Zionist school. We sang the Hatikvah, which is the Israeli national anthem, every single day. There were flags of Israel all over our school. There was Theodor Herzl’s photograph portrait in every classroom.

“And it was interesting when I looked more into the first letters that Theodor Herzl and [Vladimir] Jabotinsky had written. There were certain things that stood out to me, like colonial. They said it was a colonial project.

“Lord Balfour supposedly gave us ‘the right’ or put in writing the right for the Jews to have a homeland in Palestine—which was not his territory to give away anyway. But then I found out that in 1905, years earlier than the 1917 Balfour Declaration, he was a signatory of the Aliens Act, which did not allow Jews to migrate to Great Britain.

“So here you have an antisemite giving the Zionists the right to a land that’s not theirs. And I guess it shouldn’t shock us that you have the Christian Zionists, which there are more of than Jewish Zionists, backing up Israel. So it shouldn’t shock us that these Christian Zionists are, if you look into what it is that they believe, what they ascribe to, they’re the ones that are antisemitic.

“Israel welcomes them with open arms. Antisemites. So when [someone] tells me that Israel represents Judaism—sorry, it doesn’t, it just doesn’t.

“None of this stuff was ever addressed to us in school or in our synagogue and temple, or in any of our community clubs or activities. And that just made me very suspect, most especially since the things that resonated most with me in regards to Judaism were the social justice aspects, “B’tzelem Elohim,” you know, that we are created in the image of God.

“I remember my Moreh, my teacher, explaining to me very clearly, his words were, ‘We have a spark of God in us.’ I remember things like Tzedek, justice, Pikuach nefesh, the importance, the value of every life. Gemilut hasadim, the acts of loving kindness. These were all things that spoke vastly to me. They connected with me.

“And everything I saw and learned about Israel was in opposition to this. So there was a chasm, and I had to figure out what do I do. Do I maintain the Jewish values, human values, that were taught to me, that spoke to me, that resonated with me? Or do I give my unconditional support to a state that doesn’t espouse those same values?

“We were indoctrinated to believe that, you know, Israel was David, and all ‘the Arabs’ were the Goliath. I questioned so many things about that. It didn’t feel right, there was a disconnect. The minute I started questioning, I was told that I couldn’t be part of this community.”

“It was in the early 1980s, when apartheid South Africa was still alive and well.

“There was a group that I became a member of ... [at] one of the meetings I was actually asked by one of the people there who was black, he asked, ‘How do you feel about Israel?’

“My last name is Jewish. I went to a Jewish school. It wasn’t too difficult to put two and two together. When he asked me that, I felt like he was stabbing me in the back. My reaction was, ‘What do you mean about Israel? What are you talking about? This is a country that ensures the

safety of Jews. You know how much we've been persecuted. That's where our safety lies. What are you talking about? It's the Arabs.'

"Back then, that's all they were called, 'the Arabs.' I was never taught about Palestinians. It was 'the Arabs that are trying to annihilate us, as what happened in Europe ... the pogroms and the Holocaust.' My defenses went full through the roof.

"So it took some time, but when he asked me again, 'Do you know about Zionism? Do you know that Zionism started as a Christian movement?' I was, like, wait a minute, they never taught me that. He asked me, 'Well, what about Einstein?' I said, 'What do you mean?' He's a Jew. He's our crown jewel. He's the one that everyone talks about. At least back in those days.

"And he actually showed me an article, an editorial that was published in the *New York Times* from December 1948, with [Einstein] describing how he felt about the fascism in Israel ... how he felt about the Deir Yassin massacre, which I had heard nothing about. And then I see at the end that he wasn't the only one that signed this. These were all the thought leaders of that time, all the people that we were taught to admire as exemplary Jews—they had signed this letter.

"And that time, that was the first piercing of the veil of my indoctrination. It didn't come off from one minute to another, but it's what I remember as that first pierce, the first opening for me to think, 'Wait a minute, this does not reconcile at all with what I've been taught. So what else have I been lied to about?'

"The first time that I was in Israel was for my brother's bar mitzvah. I was 15 and a half years old. I got to meet a lot of my father's family there, and I was only exposed to what I believe most Jews are exposed to when you go there, which is, I guess, what's called 'Israel proper.'

"You don't really get to see any Palestinians. I didn't get to see much of them except from far away, from at a distance. It was just barely less than a year later when I was first exposed to what was going on there.

"But it didn't register with me the first time I was there. I'm being very frank. I didn't notice it. I was just so happy to get to meet relatives. I was grateful to be at the Wailing Wall. I was grateful to be able to see what everyone spoke of. And for whatever reason, I did feel a connection. I did. The indoctrination had worked, at least until then.

"I did go a second time with some friends from high school, and I was already a little bit more alert. The veil of my indoctrination had already started, as I said, to open.

"And I didn't have the same connection. I didn't have the same feeling. I got to see things that were a bit more disturbing. I got to hear things that were more disturbing. But that was not the seminal trip for me.

"In Israel, like in America, the disparities between the rich and the poor are quite noticeable. If you just touch the surface, you will see that the wealthy have one life—and by the way, the majority of the ruling class is Ashkenazi, which is what my grandparents, my parents and myself are described as.

"And then you have the Mizrahi Jews, who get treated differently, who aren't represented in the same way. I guess, just look at the US. Really, just look at the US, and you've got a pretty good picture of what it's like.

"In 2017, there were certain places that I wanted to go: East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Al-Khalil, Ramallah, Tulkarem, Nablus, and I wanted to

go to Bethlehem. I also wanted to cross the border from Jordan, the way that most Palestinians have to cross it.

"And I have to tell you, it's not a great experience from the moment you get there. No matter how much I thought I knew, the first time, East Jerusalem was daunting, but it was nothing like when you went to the occupied territories.

"I remember the checkpoints, reading these huge red signs that say, 'Danger, don't go. Don't go past this point. We can't secure your safety.' In the back of my mind I knew that meant the people I needed to be afraid of were the Israelis. It wasn't the Palestinians. I had met many kind Palestinians, with such generosity.

"It was so shocking to me. The checkpoints where you have these 18-year-olds, 19-year-olds, teenagers with these huge machine guns, and they could stop you at any minute. Actually, they do stop you. It doesn't matter that you have an American passport.

"And these are not always the same checkpoints, by the way. They could just bring them up like that ... they move them around all the time. And they make you get out of your vehicle. You have to show your passport a million times or whatever documentation you have.

"It was an American, 18- or 19-year-old at one of the checkpoints to whom I gave my American passport, and she actually threw it back at me and called me an 'Arab lover.' That tells you how indoctrinated you have to be...

"She had a perfect English, an American accent. I have a passport. It has my name. It says where I was born. And she took it upon herself to make certain to insult me and throw my passport back at me.

"When I thought about it, she meant it as a derogatory remark, and I actually took it to—I love all people. Isn't that what Judaism is about? Standing with the oppressed?

"Don't you have Marek Edelman, a man that all of us should admire, right? He was the only surviving commander [of] the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. And he came out and said, 'Our duty is always to be with the oppressed, never with the oppressor.'

"It was heartbreaking to me when we were in Al-Khalil, and one of our tour guides says, 'I have to stop here. I can't walk further than this.'

"I was shocked. What do you mean you can't walk? 'No, those are sterile streets. Palestinians are not allowed on those streets.'

"I felt so ashamed. You can't come back after experiencing that and be the same. You can't.

"We went through the streets. Underneath, it's the Palestinians. On top are the settlers, who talk to you in a completely American accent—actually, a New York, New Jersey accent—and there's wire above. And the reason the wire is there is because these settlers throw trash. I had trash thrown at me. I had diapers thrown at me. I had people explain that sometimes they throw urine.

"I don't know what Judaism they profess, but I can tell you that that is not the Judaism that I know. It's not. It's not the Judaism that any of us should aspire to be a part of.

"I thought the movie [*Israelism*] was wonderful. I believe that it really touched on a lot of the things that I experienced during this journey. The younger generation is saying, 'Not in my name.' They are saying no. And I love that. I respect them for that.

"I love the way that more of the younger generation is choosing to take on this battle. Not an easy battle to take on. The experience that I had during the 80s is not the same experience that this generation is having

now. More and more of us are getting to know Palestinians, are getting to know Arabs. We're exposed. We get to see them. We get to meet them. In the 80s there wasn't the internet. There wasn't social media.

"Some of these kids, I hear them. They've been kicked out of their homes by their parents because of the position that they take. I mean, can you imagine what indoctrination it takes for you to be able to tell your child, 'Go, get out of my home,' because you don't support an ethnocratic state?"

"We don't have to listen to traditional media. We have social media. The younger generation, they have no trust and no faith in the media, in the government. So they look for alternative sources of information. And that's fabulous that they have that possibility. And I think that that's exactly what has the Zionists so afraid. It has them running scared because of the fact that the younger generation—it's very difficult to keep these things from them.

"You can continue trying to indoctrinate them, but they're going to find out. I mean, the likelihood of someone in my generation finding out back then was much smaller than for this generation to find out now.

"Israel now is unmasked. Think about this. Every year, every election, Israel has gone further and further and further to the right. I mean the elements right now that are overtly fascist, I think it's shocking to everyone.

"I find this appalling, that people in government can come out and talk about nuking, can talk about taking away people's food, water, electricity. Talk about flattening Gaza. I mean, these are things that you didn't hear in the past. Those were things that were only said in quiet. Now they're just out for the world to see.

"So of course, of course, people are going to say 'no.'

"The ruling class, which is 0.0001 percent, they will do anything, whatever it takes, to maintain control. They control their media, they own the narrative on everything. Who else can make you do something that is completely contrary to your interests?"

"And I just ask myself, how much is enough? I mean, how much more do you need? ... And how do people sleep at night? Can you imagine knowing that all you needed to do was to maybe make a little bit less profit, but not enslave people, but not bring these horrors of what happens in so many places.

"Because this is not just what's happening right now in Gaza. ... This is just a symptom of what is wrong with our system. ... Israel is an outpost, an outpost for imperial hegemony in the Middle East.

"I know that there's so many different issues. You know, AIPAC and the lobby and the media. We talk so much about Russia 'meddling in our elections.' However, here we have a foreign entity that has everything to do with our elections, and we're okay with that?"

"But if you look at it, it all boils down pretty much to one thing. And that one thing is control, power.

"Israel is an appendage, just like the media is. I personally don't listen to the media ... because I see, I know, I've witnessed that they are just mouthpieces. That's it.

"The minute you stand up, then you are taken out. Look what is

happening now at the universities.

"Didn't Biden say, 30 years ago when he was the senator, that if Israel didn't exist we would have to create her? I mean, that tells you right there where he stands.

"It's the utility of it. And they know it. They use it to the max... It's the tail that wags the dog, right? At our expense, because it is not the ruling class's children that go to be killed, or to kill, or to maim, or come back with PTSD, or all the horrors of what we do around the world. It's not them, so they don't care.

"Antisemitism is hatred of Jews because they are Jewish. And, sadly, it exists. Obviously, we've seen that it exists. I myself have not experienced that tragedy. My grandparents did. I did not.

"When people ask me if I have ever experienced antisemitism, I'm honest with them, and I've told them personally I have not. I'm grateful for that. The only racism that I have experienced is being the wrong type of Jew, is being an anti-Zionist Jew. And that racism comes from within the Jewish community.

"So in regards to Zionism, which is a political movement, it's a nationalist movement. It is not the same thing as Judaism at. So anti-Zionism cannot be the same thing as antisemitism.

"And one further thing that just strikes me as strange and scary, actually, is the fact that here I am, an American anti-Zionist Jew, and according to the government, according to resolutions that just passed, I'm considered antisemitic.

"I just find that very disheartening. And it lacks a moral fiber, right? Here I am an American, I can criticize the US, I can criticize the government of the US without having slander thrown at me. But I can't criticize a foreign entity? That shows you how close Zionism is to the imperialism of the US. I don't think the American government represents me either.

"It is interesting, the minute that you question anything that Israel does or Israelis do, you're automatically told you're not a Jew. And I'm sorry to tell you, I am a Jew, whether any of you like it or not.

"I espouse Jewish values and I will continue to espouse them forever. What I am not is a Zionist. Zionism is a national movement that has nothing to do with—I actually feel it has usurped Judaism. I'm not the only one that feels that way.

"My values are to say, 'Not in my name.' To continue saying not in my name, to continue saying no. I can't stand behind inequality. I can't stand behind oppression.

"Our liberation is joined. It's that simple. We cannot be free if we're oppressing other people. We just can't.

"Living conditions are untenable. They're not sustainable. We talk about globalization... What happens in the Middle East, it absolutely has ramifications for here. What happens everywhere has ramifications.

"All of these struggles are connected. Now, obviously, there's going to need to be a lot of international involvement; there's going to have to be a lot of unlearning, as I had to unlearn everything that I was indoctrinated into."





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