

The Socialism of Fools

Shane Burley¹

As a personal discussion on the topic of anti-Semitism, this article brings together the common issues that lead to the conceptual complexity of anti-Semitism. The breach of anti-Semitism into public politics and the organized left through the two-axis points of Israel and conspiracy theories are discussed, in particular recent controversies in the Labour Party, attacks on religious centers, and discordant views on what qualifies as anti-Semitism. Weaving together personal narratives, the essay unpacks the difficulty of considering anti-Semitism in the contemporary understanding of oppression, colonialism, and white supremacy. [Article copies available for a fee from *The Transformative Studies Institute*. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by *The Transformative Studies Institute*. All rights reserved.]

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I did not think about organizing on a college campus until I attended graduate school. I felt some disdain for the politics of the campus, disconnected from the larger community and treated as its own constellation. But, as many people have pointed out, the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), where I attended, was well placed to make an impact on global affairs because of the heavy investment of national defense organizations in the school. This was why we formed RIT for Palestine, a chapter of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) on Israel movement.

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The goal of BDS is simple and straightforward: By boycotting Israeli goods, asking for organizations to divest in Israel and for the U.S. to issue sanctions on Israel, we can force the country to answer for its crimes against Palestinians, which are numerous and egregious. This was in 2010, shortly after the Gaza War and various solidarity caravans that were making their way to Palestine, either through the Rafah border or off the coast. The second caravan, the boat called the Gaza Freedom Flotilla that tried to gain access to the strip by sea arrival, had recently been attacked by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and nine people were killed in a highly publicized atrocity. BDS was an easy sell, Israel was engaged in war crimes and turning Gaza into an open air prison with almost no access to resources.

BDS as a national campaign had a huge investment from the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which at the time was the largest revolutionary socialist organization in the country. It was not uncommon to see the ISO flood other organizations, turning them close to “front groups,” since they had large-scale coordination and often sent in their members to social movements, they thought were worthwhile and that they could have sway in.

It was with the ISO, who had a dominant presence in RIT for Palestine, that a certain discomfort started to form. Two members had recently returned from Gaza, and in presentations made comments like, “If the only Jews you saw were holding guns, you might hate Jews too,” with regards to antisemitism in the region. The local branch leader explained to me that the Holocaust was not a particularly significant event, as genocides go, and that we should not think of it as anything more significant than any wartime atrocity. “The belief that Israel must exist is actually the belief that antisemitism is inescapable,” going on to explain how, if you think about it, Israel helps to create and maintain antisemitism rather than act as a solution to it. It should go without saying that this logic would not gain common currency when discussing any other form of bigotry or oppression.

But what really shifted things in the organization was how we interpreted the boycott portion. While our campus had a heavy number of student employees working on defense contracts, such as programming military drones, we chose to focus on Sabra Hummus. This was largely because it was easy to explain to people, it was a high profile Israeli company (with a Jewish sounding name) that we told people was named after a massacre of Palestinians (which is untrue). This was fine by all of us since we were set on boycotting Israeli goods, despite objections from people like Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein about the appearance

of boycotts on goods made almost exclusively by Jews.² But when we thought about how to expand the boycott, several members of the ISO started researching what Israeli products shops sold on campus. They came back with a list of kosher goods, which they said could determine boycott targets. Many of us voiced a discomfort with this approach, which inherently correlated Jewishness with Israel and crimes against Palestinian, but this was quickly dismissed. If kosher goods are the target, not just landmark Israeli products involved with the settlements, then how we understand Israel and Zionism is rooted in something other than the politics of the region: it is rooted in Jewishness.

A portion of us left the project quietly at the end of the year. We certainly were not going to be heard inside the organization, and the ISO determined the course of the campaign by that point anyway.

The issue was not that the people involved were vocal antisemites, in fact they often worked with local Jewish organizations and joined protests of far-right antisemites. But what took place in this political space lacked a critical eye about how antisemitism functioned, how to understand its shifting character, its effect on Jews, and on the level of its persistence and importance. People like Norman Finkelstein, with his comments about Jewish opulence and success, were lionized: this was the way to think about antisemitism, something only present in synagogue burnings but not in the rest of social life.

The missives and missteps moved from casual bigotry to politically programmatic problems. Instead of seeing antisemitism as a viable threat to Jews, organizers viewed accusations only as a cynical ploy from right-wing politicians in defense of Israeli imperialism.

THE JEWISH QUESTION

Viennese politician Ferdinand Kronawetter termed antisemitism the ‘socialism of fools,’ a term that was intended to capture the quasi-left-wing character of some forms of antisemitism. While we assume antisemitism to be a far-right notion, it has been captured by some on the left because of the way it fits into leftist narratives about imperialism, capitalism, and social coercion. Jews, or projects associated with Jews such as Zionism, are placed as active agents in the despicable systems of Western statism and capitalism, usually in ways that are contradictory. Jews undermine

² Jordan Michael Smith, "An Unpopular Man, *The New Republic*, July 7th, 2015, newrepublic.com/article/122257/unpopular-man-norman-finkelstein-comes-out-against-bds-movement.; Dave Markland, "Chomsky on BDS: a transcript," *Znet*, July 4th, 2017, zcomm.org/zblogs/chomsky-on-bds-a-transcript/.

working people through their perceived role in “finance capital,” or they are imperialists because of Israel, or they are part of the American war machine because of neoconservatism. The ‘socialism of fools’ is the process where the socialist politicians refuse to see the targeted issues as fully systemic and instead focuses on specific actors, often Jews or roles and labels commonly associated with Jews, and thereby port over traditional antisemitic bigotries in the name of a liberatory politics.

While I would argue that all antisemitism is a far-right delusion, there are two areas where antisemitism manifests: the political right and the political left.

On the right, the antisemitism operates largely as you would expect it to. Jews are a racial and religious outsider to Western nations; they are associated with degeneracy and the undermining of national identity since they can protect themselves by destabilizing Western man.³

The way that the right explains how Jews function is, by and large, the same as that of antisemitic areas of the left. There are two particular fulcrums where this dynamic can exist:

- A. Conspiracy Theories
- B. Anti-Zionism

The conspiracy theory is often the most obvious, since it functions by finding particulars instead of systems, which, in its explicit form, labels Jews as the malicious figures likely responsible for throwing our otherwise potentially-neutral social systems (such as the Federal Reserve or investment banks) out of whack. When these are deracialized, they tend to consist of the same logic (which is both incorrect and built to blame a marginalized group), or they are filled with dog whistle caricatures that serve the same effect.⁴

The second of these presents a bigger problem because many readers of this on the left will likely have said to themselves, “But opposition to Israel isn’t inherently antisemitic!” And they would be absolutely correct. Even the most vehement opposition to Israeli policy, or perhaps even opposition

³ Contemporarily, this is best exemplified by the work of former evolutionary psychologist Kevin MacDonald, whose work on Jews as a “group evolutionary strategy” has synthesized an entire history of antisemitism into a common academic-appearing narrative. Kevin MacDonald, *A People Who Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy, with Diaspora Peoples* (iUniverse, 2002).

⁴ I address this issue in my book review for *Producers, Patriots, Parasites*: Shane Burley, “Google Jewish Bankers: A Review of *Producers, Patriots, Parasites*,” *The Journal of Social Justice*, Vol. 9.

to the existence of Israel itself as we understand it today, is not inherently antisemitic. But the knee-jerk reaction to these statements, the hundreds of articles published in the last few years restating the obvious, belies the problem. Anti-Zionism is not inherently antisemitic (no serious person actually believes it is), but the way in which anti-Zionism often plays out, the types of strategies it utilizes, the language it is comprised of, and the way it can place double standards on Jews, can certainly be.

Because antisemitism is often difficult to see, and because it underlies political narratives that are often commonplace in circles of critique, it can be difficult to identify. "The term carries a heavy emotional charge. It is hard to find anyone these days whom one could describe, however objectively, as an 'antisemite' without insulting him; and, obversely, it is not easy for anyone to report having been subjected to an 'antisemitic' action without being suspected of paranoid tendencies," said Ben Halpern in 1981, seeing antisemitism as both ever present and seemingly impossible to pin down.⁵

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith tries to make it incredibly simple.⁶ "The belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews."⁷

Jews are then ascribed something extraordinary, something that surpasses conventional human dynamics, either religiously or ethnically (or both), which allows them to be pernicious, not by choice, but by origin.

"Jews are not only partially but totally bad by nature, that is, their bad traits are incorrigible. Because of this bad nature: (1) Jews have to be seen not as individuals but as a collective. (2) Jews remain essentially alien in the surrounding societies. (3) Jews bring disaster on their 'host societies' or on the whole world, they are doing it secretly, therefore the anti-Semites feel obliged to unmask the conspiratorial, bad Jewish character," said Dietz Bering, carving out a definition of how antisemitism, or more appropriately "Jew Hatred," is applied diversely and even against incorrect assumptions about how antisemitism is defined.⁸

This seems, on one level, completely common sense, yet on the other it

⁵ Ben Halpern. "What Is Antisemitism?" *Modern Judaism* 1, no. 3 (1981): 251.

⁶ Some at the ADL have included anti-Israel politics as an example of their subsequent definition, which further confuses the issue for many.

⁷ "Anti-Semitism," *Anti-Defamation League*, <https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>.

⁸ Avner Falk (2008). *Anti-Semitism: A History and Psychoanalysis of Contemporary Hatred*. (Westport, CT: Praeger), 5.

still feels ephemeral. Xenophobia and white supremacy are baked into contemporary society, so it is no surprise that antisemitism is a component of that. But the question is, why does it proliferate in areas where racism should be under attack? Why does it exist in ways that feel less simple to unpack?

ANTISEMITISM IS DIFFERENT

Antisemitism works in fundamentally different ways than other forms of racism, even if there are commonalities. It relies on complex narratives about secret allegiances – a people who are (too) smart, and because of their covert intentions are able to undermine some of our most coveted values and institutions.

This works differently than the stories that undergirded white working class support for slavery, which demonized people of African descent with narratives of sub-humanness. It even works different than the maintaining myths of settler colonialism, that gave the right to an expanded white empire whose greatness justified its atrocities. With both of those narratives, which helped to build white supremacy and continue to motivate our stratified and oppressive society, the non-white person is othered by attacking their dignity and robbing them of identity, agency, and full personhood.

With Jews a different, parallel form of demonic othering took place, one that does not question intelligence or cognizance, but instead sees Jews as uniquely pernicious in other ways. Black people were labeled as incapable of Western Civilization, and Jews are ascribed as agents of its intentional destruction. This should not be an indication of antisemitism's significance in comparison, since Western societies are fundamentally built on anti-blackness and anti-indigenous forms of white supremacy, but it does outline the fractured way that antisemitism has evolved into its own unique form of bigotry and systemic bias.

But this story continues. It is one of a discrimination, pogromist violence, total erasure from history, and the disavowal of full Jewish participation, even within the organs of social liberation (the left). Like any community systemically pushed by white supremacy, Jews continue to quest for actualization, never quite achieving what was promised. The world continues to distrust Jews, and this distrust is only magnified by a left that is unsure of antisemitism, both as bias and as rage.

IT'S FRIGHTENING TO BE JEWISH

One of the most persistent archetypes of modern Western countries is

the synagogue shooting. It is important to distinguish the synagogue shooting with a “the” to give it an official title: it is almost a Jungian archetype in its persistence. For decades now, white supremacists and those fixated on Jew hatred have maintained a common pattern – angst that usually forms as a response to the failure of their organizing strategies. This angst leads them to explode with rage and attack a group identity they feel “pulls the strings” of the social forces they obsess over.⁹ This has often led them to the Synagogue, an institution that is foundational to all things Jewish and therefore a seat of Jewish power in the mind of an antisemite.

On October 7th, 2018, I was planning on going to synagogue. I am of Jewish descent, which is to say my father is ethnically Jewish and my mother is not, and I was raised with very little Judaism.¹⁰ (My parents were, effectively, Christian.) But now that both of my parents are dead and I am looking to establish familial traditions with my wife, I wanted to stake out roots at a local synagogue. My thought was, with the coming National Refugee Shabbat, I could establish some connection with a synagogue and then attend for that event, which was a nice use of religious institutions to support refugees. This is particularly important as Islamophobic narratives persist around Syrian refugees and the so-called “refugee crisis” in Europe.

That is when I heard that someone had stormed the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, gunning down eleven people in the worst mass shooting at a Jewish location in U.S. history. My wife and I then discussed whether or not we should actually attend a synagogue at all, and she mentioned that it might be time to get our concealed carry permits, since it may be a bad idea to enter into a synagogue without carrying a compact handgun. I still haven’t been to synagogue.

The shooting was a shock, but it wasn’t a surprise. This was the latest attack in a string of frustrated attacks, from sniper strikes at Jewish community centers to murder at the National Holocaust Museum. Jewish organizations are seen as centers of the Jewish cabal, a secret nation that controls the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG).

This came at a time when Jews were negotiating whether or not to be public. It is dangerous to walk around many European cities wearing a Kippah, but it is also increasingly frightening to simply be an “out” Jew

⁹ Shane Burley, “A History of Violence,” *Commune*, December 23, 2018, <https://communemag.com/a-history-of-violence/>.

¹⁰ I use the term “of Jewish descent” to distinguish Jewish ethnicity and people who practice Judaism, which I just use the term “Jewish.” If I chose to practice Judaism (Which, at this point, would require study and practice akin to conversion) I would then use Jewish rather than “of Jewish descent.”

anywhere visible. For journalists and artists on social media (i.e. Twitter) this has become the fervent mission of racists, identifying “the Jew” with echo parenthesis and forcing Jews to respond, either by outing themselves or refusing to accept the label.¹¹ In the weeks after the Tree of Life, I thought about writing an op-ed considering what it meant to be a person of Jewish descent, particularly as someone who was not uniquely raised as a Jew, in an era where it felt like our identity has to be defined by the fear of assault. My wife, again, reminded me that if I was going to publish something about being Jewish, maybe we should bring one of our guns from the garage into the house. It reminded me of a woman I knew who had converted to Judaism when marrying a man with a particularly orthodox family. Before she completed the process, the Rabbi brought her into a room to tell her that when Hitler began the process of rounding up the Jews, he also brought the converts with them, and their children. I now feel like I lied to my wife by not revealing my Jewishness sooner and what the consequences of it could be. The guns are now in our house, not the garage.

IT’S NOT ANTISEMITIC TO CRITICIZE ISRAEL

These are flashpoints, and they are obvious. When I get a message on social media accusing me of “standing on the shoulders of the Jews that came before,” no one would argue that the Groyper Twitter account that DM’d me was an antisemite. But this plays out in subtler ways as well, and consistently without interruption.

There was recently a slew of articles with the same line in them: It’s not antisemitic to criticize Israel. And, of course, I agree. There is a cottage industry of right-wing Israeli nationalist organizations, such as the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), that accuse people of antisemitism for fair criticism of Israeli policy.¹² Make no mistake about it: I think Israel is a nationalist state formed partially through colonialism and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and its exclusionary political structures and current right-wing politics, is clearly a problem. Those more supportive of Israel tell me that, if I don’t support Israel, I must harbor equal opposition to all other forms of nationalist liberation movements. I respond honestly:

¹¹ Matthew Yglesias, "The (((echo))), explained," Vox, June 6, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/6/6/11860796/echo-explained-parentheses-twitter>.

¹² Mairav Zonszein, "How the Right Has Tried to Rebrand Anti-Semitism," *The New York Review of Books*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/09/04/how-the-right-has-tried-to-rebrand-anti-semitism/>.

I am, and Israel does not form an exception to my politics. (I then offer the vastly unpopular “No State Solution.”)

So, what is the issue with pointing out that criticism of Israel is not inherently antisemitic? The absolute persistence of this line, a straw man response to an argument no one should have taken seriously in the first place, underskirts a larger issue. When it is about Jews (or perceived to be about Jews), no cost is spared in telling them how wrong they are. When Congresswoman Ilhan Omar made an ill-phrased comment about the Israel Lobby, people decried it as antisemitic.¹³ She apologized, and everyone should have moved on, yet a certain talking point persisted. It was as if pointing out that she said something with antisemitic connotations fostered an erasure of fair criticisms of Israel, the oppression she faces as an Islamic Somali immigrant woman, and the assault she is facing from the right. But we can, and should, look at it differently. Multiple things can be true simultaneously – that the attack on her was disingenuous in some corners, accurate in others, and even if she said something questionable, she still deserves our forgiveness, support, and protection.¹⁴

But that is not the conversation we had. Instead we discussed the outrageousness of daring to suggest antisemitism exists in discussions about Israel. In many of our discussions about Israel, antisemitism is only examined as a diversionary claim in defense of Israeli atrocities, never as a sincere and accurate description. And when discussing an oppressive nationalist regime like Israel there can still be antisemitism, just as when Islamophobia clearly plays into condemnations of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The strongest indicators that antisemitism persists comes from our inability to see antisemitism, to do the work of unpacking it, and to listen to Jews when they suffer it.¹⁵

¹³ Victoria Albert, "Rep. Ilhan Omar Criticized for 'Anti-Semitic' Tweet," *The Daily Beast*, February 11, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/rep-ilhan-omar-criticized-for-anti-semitic-tweet>.

¹⁴ It really should go without saying that Omar's treatment around her tweet was also deeply Islamophobic and xenophobic, and part of the uncharitable response is from the perception of Islamic antisemitism. The tweet still used an antisemitic narrative, but the response was also motivated with bigotry. Lived oppression happens in multiple places at multiple times, the oppressed can act oppressive as well, and the marginalized have the capacity to marginalize others. This requires a clear headed and principled stance to address, and we should never let one person's use of an antisemitic narrative erase the fact that they are facing a full front racist assault from the right.

¹⁵ *Jacobin* went on a particular tear in 2019 after questions about Omar and the Labour Party, with headlines like "Ilhan Omar is Not Antisemitic," "No, Rashida Tlaib is Definitely Not Antisemitic," "How Labour Became 'Antisemitic'," "The Antisemitism Controversy," "The Never-Ending Story" (About how "nothing will ever be enough"

In 2009 there was a massive Equality March in Washington D.C. A friend of mine from upstate New York joined a caravan of busses rented by the International Socialist Organization (the same ISO branch as before) to attend. Once on the bus the conversation turned to Israel, which she was fine with since she had also done Palestinian support work. But the tone changed, and she slowly became quiet. "I became terrified," she told me afterwards. "They weren't just saying Israel or Likud, they were saying Jews. I thought that if they found out I was a Jew they might kick me out of the bus. Or demand that I answer their questions. I didn't know what to do."

I would give those people the benefit of the doubt that they would not want to be openly antisemitic (and they would even take measures not to be), but the narratives available for discussing their anger about the treatment of Palestinians remains caked with antisemitic caricatures, assertions, and conspiracy theories. In a way, the righteous rage about the treatment of Palestine creates a barrier to seeing and understanding antisemitism. In the same way as anyone might break their own rules in a state of rage (perhaps by calling someone an oppressive term that they would regret later) antisemitism becomes a form of transgressive rule breaking only allowed in response to the violence wrought on Palestine. This logic has been echoed in articles and books on the subject, that while antisemitism may exist, it is nothing when compared to what is faced by the Palestinians,

I will be the first to admit differentiating between real and disingenuous accusation of antisemitism can be confusing, particularly when some organizations have spent years battering Palestinian campus groups with accusations of antisemitism. Such brash and accusatory attitudes produce defensive organizational cultures that can provide antisemites with cover, hiding inside walls of cynicism by dismissing every claim as tantamount to the ideological rantings of Alan Dershowitz.¹⁶ As our situation spins out of control, the threat of antisemitism grows inside leftist spaces on the one hand, and accusations of antisemitism from bad faith actors on the right desensitize the left to even fair complaints.

A CYNICAL ATTACK THAT CAN BE TRUE

In November, 2019, Verso Books, the largest left-wing English

when they purged antisemites from the Labour Party), and, of course, "How Jacobin Became 'Antisemitic.'"

¹⁶ Who is a buffoon.

language publisher in the world, released a new book called *Antisemitism and the Labour Party* for free on their website.¹⁷ The book is an anthology written in response to the accusations of antisemitism that have mired the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn in recent months, particularly for issues relating to Palestine solidarity activism. “[A] story about the Labour Party that has no basis in fact, is prima facie absurd, and whose partisan motivations are transparent is playing a significant role in our national conversation and might even influence the results,” says editor Jamie Stern-Weiner on the first page of the introduction.¹⁸ When they say “influence the results,” they suggest that accusations of antisemitism stem from conspiratorial plots concocted by the right to cost the left seats.

It is a curious experience to write about the 'antisemitism' allegations against Labour, because there is barely anything of substance to engage with. A miniscule proportion of the party's half-million members were found to have posted offensive remarks on social media; so far as can be told, the entire furor reduces to this. Were it not for the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans would have continued to suffer the rigid segregation, harsh discrimination, and routine brutality of the Jim Crow South. Were it not for the 'Labour antisemitism' campaign, a small number of questionable Facebook posts would have received less publicity. Indeed, this book might fairly have been titled, *A Comprehensive and Exhaustive Examination of Nothing*.¹⁹

This is an inaccurate description of the claims of antisemitism, which have been outlined extensively and include Jeremy Corbyn's personal behavior and the dismissal of Jewish voices objecting to the prejudice.²⁰ Apparently, the hurt of Jews raising the issue should not only be rejected, but they should be mocked as well.

The book continues in this way, minimizing the role that antisemitism has played in Labour, and the left by proxy, reducing it to mere bad actors, misinterpretations, or “bad faith” readings by detractors. “Wild

¹⁷ This came after Verso, in an even more tasteless move, put literal testimonials from Jews on their website claiming the accusations of Labour antisemitism are wrong.

“Testimonies: Labour Jews Speak Up,” *Verso*, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4511-testimonies-labour-jews-speak-up>.

¹⁸ Jamie Stern-Werner, "Introduction," in *Anti-Semitism and the Labour Party*, ed. Jamie Stern-Weiner (London: Verso, 2019), xi.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, xii.

²⁰ “A guide to Labour Party anti-Semitism claims,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2019, www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-45030552.

exaggeration and bad faith attacks are the surest way to provoke knee-jerk dismissal by left-wing activists of all concerns about antisemitism – especially when those attacks come from pundits and politicians who are up to their necks in rancid bigotry,” says Daniel Finn.²¹ The point here is not that they are wrong about bad faith actors, but what is wrong is that the nefariousness of the right is then used to provide cover to a left that refuses to acknowledge the reality of antisemitism, as if the cynicism of your opponents gives you a pass for your own bigoted behavior.

The Verso book has salient points in it and does not let Labour completely off the hook, but the point is clear: Antisemitism in Labour is not the critical issue it has been made out to be, and we should take a look at the accusers. Labour is a critical part of the British left, and Corbyn’s ascendancy is akin to that of Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America in the U.S., so the accusations against Labour did have the very real ability to destabilize the gains they hoped to make. After the recent Tory victory there is no reason to believe that the issue of Labour antisemitism has been laid to rest.²² Labour’s failure remains less the fault of those addressing antisemitism than those who ignore it, and the best way to help Labour grow is to undo its contradictions and eradicate the antisemitism so the party can have a more consistent politic of liberation. Often, accusations of antisemitism are wrongly perceived as accusations of Nazism or deliberate maleficence. Instead, antisemitism can exist in subtler ways that go unchecked and become influential scripts of bigotry without the enactor’s conscious intention. A discussion of Labour antisemitism does not necessarily act as a disqualifying mark against the party, but ignoring obvious acts of antisemitism because of Labour’s fragility actuates antisemitism. (I still would likely have voted Labour if I chose to vote at all.)

THE BICAMERAL ANTISEMITISM OF THE LEFT

The two channels of antisemitism mentioned above (conspiracy theory and problematic forms of anti-Zionism) rest on unspoken understandings. The first channel relies on confusion regarding the exact nature of Israeli nationalism as an inherently Jewish phenomenon. The word Zionism itself has meant a number of things historically, but our understanding of it is

²¹ Daniel Finn, "Corbyn Under Fire," in *Anti-Semitism and the Labour Party*, ed. Jamie Stern-Weiner (London: Verso, 2019), 8.

²² And if history shows us anything, this will likely lead to increased anger over the accusations of antisemitism, claims that the accusations themselves were in part responsible for Labour’s epic loss.

now defined by sectors of Israeli politics typically understood on a range from right-wing to far-right.

For years prior to the foundation of the State of Israel, many definitions of Zionism existed that the right wing would consider anti-Zionist by today's standard. One form of Zionism envisioned the creation of a multiracial society in Palestine, where Jews enjoy recognition and support without eclipsing Muslim populations. Zionism may have a uniquely Jewish character, a dream for a Jewish place to be safe from antisemitism, but the Israel of today does not represent the logical conclusion of that idea. By assuming that "Jews" equals "Zionism" equals "Israel," activists adopt an inherently antisemitic script assigning an inherently Jewish character to the institutions of Israeli power that the left opposes, rather than understanding the capitalist and nationalist character of Israel as distinct from its perceived Jewishness. That the resulting State of Israel is the fault of Jews or, worse, Jewish influence through their ability to lobby, resolves to make the image of Israel that of Judaism rather than as an outpost of wretched politics and corporate interests.

The second channel for antisemitism in the left lies in conspiracy theory, in the fractured and dismal ways that the left tries to deal with a fragmented class analysis. Conspiracy theories often undergird a very real fact of political power: those who operate in the highest echelons of capital and the state form a class inclusive of corporate boards of directors, political positions, and what is often called "high society." However, the existence of an "upper class" remains institutional and public; the behavior of its members is often readily explainable by outlining the interests of particular actors and the way that these structures formed to maintain their position.

Conspiracy theory manifests a classic perversion of this general understanding away from a role in the system toward scapegoating specific people. It creates an inherently "class collaborationist" model in which a type of person, partially in and partially out of the ruling class, behaves as a foreign enemy, thereby calling members of all classes to unite in opposition to their pernicious influence. More than this, their motivations are more covert, money and power are not good enough reasons for the conspiracy theorists. Instead, a particular population of people (Who could it be?) use crypsis to hide themselves and inhabit even more profound spheres of influence.

The points at which we reconcile with these conspiracies are also common sense: In a mass movement, social struggles live or die by participation and you cannot control all the people who enter. In that way, there can be multiple versions of class struggle, some liberatory and some

less so. This was especially true in Occupy Wall Street, as the rhetorical singular focus on finance allowed antisemitic canards to gain currency within less ideologically-grounded areas of the movement. The same was true in the anti-globalization movement, where the issue for some became less the inequalities of neoliberalism and more the “globalist” ventures that undermined national borders.²³

From Labour to BDS to just about every left-wing publisher, there are moments when this type of rhetoric gains currency. This is certainly not a call to abandon the left, which has been infiltrated by both problematic forms of antisemitism, but to identify, purge, and inoculate.²⁴ We cannot dispense with every area of the left that has been marked with antisemitism because, like everything in a white supremacist society, racism is endemic and an infection that we are a long time from fully eradicating. But we can still engage in the fight, we can do so consciously, and we can come at it with the intention to do something about the problem rather than minimizing it. To do that we have to see the ongoing significance of antisemitism in its uniqueness and create an antiracist politic that has some teeth.

In this issue of the *Journal for Social Justice* I wanted to buck the trend of leftist minimization of antisemitism by putting it front and center. I immediately got paper proposals about the uses and abuses of antisemitism, not antisemitism proper. Misusing the term antisemitism (which, as I mentioned, does happen) has been well covered at this point, both in acceptable and clearly unacceptable ways. But my Call for Papers made no indication this was an issue about how antisemitism was being misapplied, and it was as if the left could only understand discussions of antisemitism through the dismissal of its existence. It should go without saying that the belief that the responsible discourse on antisemitism is purely discussing its non-existence is, inherently, antisemitic, but on this issue nothing can go without saying.

Eventually I got a stream of papers, a sign that many have been waiting for this to be addressed openly. The Frankfurt School, autonomism, and anarchism are well represented in the following pages, unpacking many of

²³ Simon Murdoch, "A Global Anti-Globalist Movement: The Alternative Right and Globalization," *Hope Not Hate*, September 28, 2019, hopenothate.com/2018/09/23/global-anti-globalist-movement-alternative-right-globalization.

these complex political issues. There are also political points I simply disagree with as well, political diversity that I chose not to control with a tightly guarded hegemony. That is to say that each other, including myself, only speaks for themselves, and should not be considered to speak for any of the other authors or the issue as a whole. This issue is not just my pontifications about the antisemitism of the world, but a range of voices with a diversity of backgrounds. There are provocative questions raised, and both the left and the right are called in on this question. (Though this journal is particularly leftist in orientation.) In theoretical, historical, and critical analysis, the idea of antisemitism as a complex system is unpacked, and while some of the authors offer answers, more questions still persist.

I named this article the Socialism of Fools because it is the most common phrase used across the articles in the journal. This looks at the way that real impulses towards liberation are shot off course by antisemitism; it confuses the way home. If your problem is capitalism, then conspiracy theory will fail you. If you want liberation from nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism, then blaming Jews will stop you from making your vision a reality. If we actually believe another world is possible, we owe it not just to Jews to fight antisemitism big and small, but to all of society as well.

As I began working on this, we entered 2019's Hanukkah season, which interweaves with the Christmas season that year. In that time New York's Jewish population, which is the largest population of Jews outside Israel, was laid with what could properly be called a siege as antisemitic attacks began occurring daily. Five people were stabbed in an attack at a rabbi's home during a Hanukkah celebration in Monsey, which was the thirteenth act of antisemitic violence in the preceding three weeks. Jewish communities were then discussing heading underground, hiding their celebrations as the threats became so pernicious that it felt like there was no hope.²⁵ Thankfully, there was a nearly positive response from the left to the attacks, without attempts at minimization, as a 'No Hate, No Fear' rally drew 25,000 people into the streets of New York City to fight against antisemitism and racism, with speakers calling for an open solidarity against Jew hatred.²⁶ Shortly afterward one of the attendees was accosted

²⁵ Deborah Lipstadt, "Jews Are Going Underground," *The Atlantic*, December 29, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/after-monsey-will-jews-go-underground/>.

²⁶ Deena Yellin and Alexi Shanes, "March against anti-Semitism draws estimated 25,000 to New York City streets: 'No Hate, No Fear'," *USA Today*, January 5th, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/01/05/no-hate-no-fear-new-york-city-march-anti-semitism/2818595001/>.

on the subway in an antisemitic attack, and the high we were on as people flooded the streets was shunted by reality.²⁷

We know why the right is antisemitic, they hate difference in the face of homogeneity. The left should see right through this, refuse to take the bait, and unite around how to deal with this. This remains particularly true as we confront the growing power of Wall Street and the crimes in Israel, not with conspiratorial deflections and defenses of problematic “allies,” but with principle. When we make common cause with bigots in the service of immediate ends, we undermine our larger struggle. When I was working as a part of the BDS movement, I felt it manifested my desire for a just and equal world, and the mistreatment of the Palestinians represented one piece of that general will. We cannot get to that final end of a just and equal world by compromising our core values. So instead we can build a more vital and capable politic that maintains a three-dimensional view of the world and sees oppression as the shapeshifting force it is.

-Shane Burley
January 2020

²⁷ Ewan Palmer, "Jewish Man Abused on New York Subway After Attending 'No Hate, No Fear' March Against Anti-Semitism," *Newsweek*, January 7th, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/new-york-jewish-attack-no-hate-march-subway-1480743>.