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American Left

The Left and the Jews: A Tale of Three Countries

First in a series on the American left: Will left-wing anti-Zionists and anti-Semites in America succeed in hollowing out the traditional liberal left in the United States, as they have in Britain and France?

By Paul Berman

November 11, 2018

I.

In the early spring of this year, an angry dispute broke out in the United Kingdom between the mainstream Jewish communal organizations and the leader of the radical left, currently head of the Labour Party, who is Jeremy Corbyn; and a couple of days later, a roughly similar dispute broke out in France between the equivalent French Jewish organization and Corbyn's counterpart on the French left, who is Jean-Luc Mélenchon; and the double outbreak suggested a trend, which raises a question. It is about America and the Democratic Party. To wit: When the delegates to the Democratic National Convention assemble less than two years from now, will the showdown between centrists and progressives that everyone expects actually occur? Will a few zealots of anti-Zionism take their place among the progressives? Will they push their way to the microphone, and will they send mad orations beaming outward to the American public, calling for the elimination of an entire country? And will the mad orations lead to grisly chants and an occasional outbreak of medieval superstition, hither and yon? In short, will the same miserable battle that has torn apart large portions of the European left spread to America, not just on a

miniature scale (which has already happened), but full blast, with national consequences? This is not a silly question.

The crisis of the democratic left all over Europe is typically presented as a product of modern economics, arising from excessive fluidities of labor and capital, and from social democracy's inability to keep afloat amid the turbulence. But the crisis has had its cultural dimension, too, arising from still other pressures, one of which, larger perhaps than is sometimes recognized, emerges from a tide of political Islam, or Islamism, across several swaths of the world. This is the pressure on the Western left to accommodate, in the name of anti-racism and Third World solidarity, as many Islamist principles as possible, in regard to blasphemy, gender roles, and the iniquity of the Jews—a pressure on the left, that is, to temper or creatively adapt various of its own historic fundamentals. The British and French incidents of a few months ago showed how powerful the pressure has become, in certain quarters of the European left. And a few incidents of that sort in America would rip a big wound in the Democratic Party.

You will perhaps remember the initial incident in the U.K., back in the spring. The argument over anti-Semitism in the Labour Party had been going on for a few years by then, such that, by 2016, there had already been an official intraparty inquiry, led by Shami Chakrabarti. Alan Johnson, the editor of *Fathom* magazine, submitted his own presentation to the inquiry and usefully described the problem as a matter of political ideology, with its root in a peculiar and distended anti-Zionism: “a modern anti-Zionism of a particularly excessive, obsessive, and demonizing kind, which has co-mingled with an older set of classical anti-Semitic tropes, images and assumptions to create anti-Semitic anti-Zionism.” The Chakrabarti report concluded that, here and there in the Labour Party, a “toxic atmosphere” did seem to have emerged. And the report proposed ways to control the toxin. Labour Party members were instructed not to call people “Zios,” nor “Pakis.”

But the report cleared the party as a whole. By extension, it cleared the party's leader. And, in this

way, the Chakrabarti report, instead of resolving the problem, deepened it. The exonerated leader, who was Corbyn, displayed his gratitude by appointing his exonerator, Shami Chakrabarti, to the House of Lords, which did not look good. A story about Corbyn and a Nazi-style wall mural in London (depicting hook-nosed Jewish bankers under a Masonic seal playing Monopoly on the backs of the dark-skinned oppressed of the world) was particularly unfortunate, with Corbyn likening the mural to something by Diego Rivera, then backing away with the explanation that he had not looked closely enough at it. But there were many incidents and anecdotes, and not all of them involved famous personalities and national events. And, in March 2018, the mainstream Jewish organizations in the U.K.—the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council—finally arrived at the view that, within the Labour Party, a culture of classic anti-Semitism had taken root. The two organizations drew up a formal complaint under the testy heading, “Enough Is Enough.” They went after Corbyn: “We conclude that he cannot seriously contemplate anti-Semitism, because he is so ideologically fixed within a far left worldview that is instinctively hostile to mainstream Jewish communities.” A demonstration at Parliament Square echoed the complaint, and a delegation of a dozen Labour MPs at the demonstration echoed the echo by showing that disgruntlement with Corbyn was not a Tory plot.

Corbyn responded by taking his seat among the hipster leftists at an anti-Zionist seder, which, as with his reward to Chakrabarti, was his way of putting his thumb in his critics’ eyes. Some of the Labour MPs who figured among the critics found themselves receiving a bit of abuse and calls for their expulsion. And, in that fashion, the dimensions of the crisis began to emerge.

The social-democratic parties of Europe arose in the late 19th century as a project to construct a newly enlightened and tolerant society on a social foundation of people who, in the past, had always been excluded from the world of respectability and power. The British Labour Party was a classic and noble example, which meant that, from the start, it became, in Margaret Hodge’s phrase (offered as part of her own parliamentary rebuke of Corbyn, nominally her leader), “the natural home for Jews.” Labour was the enemy of antique bigotries and of modernized bigotries. Labour was the anti-fascist party. Sometimes the Labour Party looked with comradely eyes on the Labor Zionist project in the faraway Middle East. The party’s sympathy for that particular project was never especially reliable, but, even so, it was a principled sympathy, and was generous and persistent, and it does antedate the Balfour Declaration, which makes it venerable.

And the venerable history has gone into extreme agony, such that, by April, the Labour Party’s fraternal counterpart in Israel deemed it appropriate to announce a rupture in its own relations with Corbyn. In July, still another round of denunciations of Corbyn got underway from within his own party, not just from Labourites who happen to be Jewish; and the Jewish newspapers in the U.K. had their unusually united say—until, by August, old photographs were turning up in the press of Corbyn posing for the camera with sundry prominent terrorists of the Palestinian cause (though he claimed not to have known who was who), and malicious remarks of his were turning up about the British Zionists or perhaps the British Jews that were guaranteed and perhaps designed to arouse a furious response (though he claimed to have been misunderstood). And here was a video of Corbyn thanking his Hamas hosts for a dinner in Gaza and praising them for running a democracy, of all things. And here was the distressing passive-aggressive best he could do in a major BBC interview to rebut his critics—until, by September, the party’s executive committee felt obliged to take up the matter of anti-Semitism one more time and discuss it formally and issue an official statement, which Corbyn tried to water down, and failed; and the failed effort succeeded in deepening the problem yet again. And nothing has indicated an end to these very angry and unprecedented quarrels anytime soon.

II.

The French incident took place two days after the early spring “Enough Is Enough” demonstration, and it revealed an anger at a different level entirely, as you might expect, given that, in France, a great mass of Jews have lately undergone experiences that are unimaginable in the U.K. Some 50,000 French Jews, or 10 percent of the entire Jewish population, are said to have decamped from one place to another within central France (or have emigrated to Israel) during the last few years, in order to escape quotidian persecutions from neighbors who have come to accept the Islamist doctrine. The intermittent massacres and murders of Jews in France and in Belgium have added up to a low-level protracted terror. And the most recent of those dreadful events, the murder in Paris last March of the elderly Mireille Knoll, became the occasion for the political incident.

The representative council of the mainstream Jews in France, the CRIF, organized a silent march of commemoration and protest. The CRIF was founded as France’s Jewish federation in 1943 under the German occupation, which means that, apart from representing the mainstream Jews, the CRIF represents a distinct historical memory. For obvious reasons, the CRIF requested that Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front, be good enough to stay

away from the commemorative march—not because Marine Le Pen is personally an old-school anti-Semite, but because her National Front is the old school itself. She attended anyway. Her appearance broke up the solemnity of the event by causing a lot of angry shouting, until the ruckus drove her away—as observed by Tablet magazine’s correspondent in Paris, Vladislav Davidzon.

And the CRIF requested that Jean-Luc Mélenchon stay away, as well. Mélenchon is Corbyn’s counterpart because he is the leader of the Unsubmissive France party—which, at least for the moment, has replaced the left wing of the Socialist Party and the old Communist Party as the main political organization of the French left. And Mélenchon’s relations with the mainstream Jews have likewise resembled Corbyn’s, with variations. Corbyn has spent most of his career cultivating a Third Worldist romance of the heroic Palestinian struggle against Israel, which leads him to shudder in horror at Zionism and its crimes and to bristle at the Jewish organizations and at Jews in general. But Mélenchon has cultivated a romance of exotic Latin American Marxists, of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez and the “Bolivarian” revolution in Venezuela—which leads him to do his own shuddering chiefly at the United States. Mélenchon is a more sophisticated man than Corbyn, more experienced, better educated, a better orator—a more attractive figure, all in all. Nobody takes him to be a man of hidden bigotries.

Still, the us-versus-them radicalism of Mélenchon’s domestic politics, combined with the fantastical nature of his beliefs about world affairs, leaves his critics feeling a bit uneasy. There is a fear that, like Marine Le Pen and her National Front, Mélenchon and his Unsubmissives may be quietly undermining the republican political culture in France. Nothing in this fear ought to be seen as especially Jewish. And yet, the Jews understand that a republican culture of tolerance is ultimately their best defender, and they do have their worries. Mélenchon’s followers debate how friendly their party should be to the Islamists (in the name of multiculturalism), or how condemnatory (in the name of secularism and the separation of church and state). But, either way, Unsubmissive France has ended up as anti-Zionism’s principal home on the French left. Mélenchon himself has ended up as Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions’ leading champion in France.

Anti-Zionist street protests got underway in the summer of 2014, at the time of the most recent of the full-scale Israel-versus-Hamas wars in Gaza, proclaiming solidarity with Hamas. At a demonstration in Paris—called by one of the smaller Trotskyist parties, not under Mélenchon’s leadership, but drawing on the public that is his—a street full of marchers broke into a cry of “Death to the Jews!” And

“Jew: Shut up, France is not yours!,” together with “Allahu Akbar!,” and “Jihad! Jihad! Jihad!,” which are not normally Trotskyist slogans. Such has been the cultural degeneration in nether regions of the extreme left. Mobs set out to attack synagogues in Paris and in the suburban town of Sarcelles, which is largely North African, Muslim and Jewish alike. The mob in Sarcelles attacked Jewish stores. And, just as Corbyn has systematically failed to notice the nature and meaning of anti-Zionism on the British left, Mélenchon managed not to notice what was going on among a significant portion of his own social base. Instead of rebuking the rioters, he congratulated them. It was the CRIF that issued an angry denunciation. Mélenchon responded by inveighing against the “aggressive communities that lecture the rest of the country,” by which he meant the CRIF, and not the people who were staging pogroms. And Mélenchon ended up with the sort of reputation that can be imagined.

These were the memories—an angry recollection of 2014 and of a history of smaller offenses or irritations—that led the CRIF, in 2018, to request that, like Marine Le Pen, Mélenchon be good enough to stay away from the silent march for the murdered Mireille Knoll. He attended anyway. He, too, was booed. There was some jostling, owing to the insistently thuggish and right-wing Jewish Defense League, which in France is the heir to the old Revisionist Betar. And the political significance of these French events is hard to miss, if you stop to consider that, in the first round of the 2017 presidential election in France, Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon attracted, between them, some 40 percent of the vote—which becomes still more striking when you recall that Corbyn’s odds of becoming prime minister someday soon are pretty good.

III.

And in the United States? No one will have failed to notice the accumulation of anti-Zionist energies, toying with the idea of calling for Israel’s exit from the scroll of nations, viz., the many BDS campaigns among university students; and the American Studies Association, whose professors have elevated anti-Zionism into an American Studies priority; and the National Women’s Studies Association; and the philosopher Judith Butler and her adepts; and the Presbyterian BDSers; and the Democratic Socialists of America, who, in becoming popular lately, have been taken over by a younger generation of anti-Zionists (“From the river to the sea/Palestine will be free!” chanted some of the delegates at last year’s DSA convention) and, even so, have begun to attract election-winning young politicians, here and there; and the victorious congressional candidate from

Detroit, Rashida Tlaib, a new-style DSAer, who turns out to be a one-state proponent of Israel's demise; and Angela Davis; and the Dyke March leaders in Chicago; and Leslie Cockburn, the defeated congressional candidate in Virginia with a distinguished career in the anti-Zionist book-writing field; and Keith Ellison, the newly elected attorney general of Minnesota, who has never been able to clarify his relation to Louis Farrakhan. And onward to Farrakhan himself, and to Farrakhan's followers in the leadership of the Women's March and among the California Democrats. And thus to the noble immigrants at Times Square several months ago, whose own chant, in Arabic, "*Khaybar, Khaybar, ya yahud, jaish Muhammad saya'ud,*" pretty much amounts to "From the river to the sea!" except with the military implications openly proclaimed (because Khaybar was the seventh-century battle in which Muhammad's army definitively crushed the Jews of Arabia, with the rest of the chant going: "O Jews, the army of Muhammad is coming").

But the question has always been about trans-Atlantic equivalences. Do the many American campaigners, student councils, minor and major politicians, immigrant activists, distinguished intellectuals and vigorous chants add up to the kind of political force that anti-Zionists have amassed within the radical left in Britain and France (and elsewhere in Western Europe)? Is there a possibility that, having assembled a great many supporters, the newly cheerful left-wing anti-Zionists in America will succeed in hollowing out whole portions of the culture of the traditional liberal left in the United States, on the European model? Or is anti-Zionism in our own country mostly an annoyance, perhaps larger and friskier than a university fad, but not vastly so, and easily brushed off? Is America, in short, different?

I do not have an automatic answer to this question. I wonder. A proper answer would require a systematic comparison of political cultures, European and American. Systematic comparisons are difficult to make, however. It would be necessary to come up with a solid and reliable understanding of the American left, its nature, proclivities, and traditions, with special attention to whatever is distinctively American. But does anyone have a solid and reliable understanding of the American left? An insight into the American left-wing heart of hearts, as it beats ever more ardently in 2018? I will return to this question.

This is the first part of an extended commentary on the American left.

The Foreign Policy of the American Left

*Second in a series on the American left:
Michael Walzer and Bernie Sanders*

By Paul Berman

November 18, 2018

I.

What does the American left believe about world affairs? Everyone knows what the American left believes about domestic affairs. The left believes that social conscience ought to be elevated into policy; extreme inequalities of wealth and social advantages ought to be narrowed; trade unions ought to be encouraged; idiotic bigotries ought to be combated; the rights of women, promoted; the rivers and forests, protected—and thusly, across a liberal and social-democratic terrain. Who opens a school, closes a prison, said Victor Hugo; and the American left agrees. But foreign policy is another matter.

It is difficult even to describe the texture of left-wing thinking on the topic. Michael Walzer has brought out a book called *A Foreign Policy for the Left*, in which he argues that, when people on the American left contemplate domestic affairs, they do so in a thoughtful, sober, and serious manner—or, at least, they make what Walzer considers to be an honest effort. But when those same people turn to world affairs, they slip into a different habit of mind, as if sliding from one lobe of the brain to another. The intellectual discipline loosens. The spirit of thoughtfulness fades, the information thins out. And downward plunge the well-meaning and otherwise upright leftists into the cups of faraway fantasy and political inebriation.

Naturally these habits and traits do not adhere to every last person with a left-wing orientation. The American left has its learned specialists on world affairs, who maintain their political commitments and, even so, remain sober, studious, lucid, grave, and admirable.

But the broad left-wing public, as Walzer pictures it, attaches no particular importance to the upright specialists and their teetotaling expertise. The left-wing public prefers, instead, to adopt foreign-policy opinions merely by invoking a tiny cluster of assumptions or beliefs, amounting to slogans or prejudices, which are deemed to be true, and therefore stand in no need of specialists and analysis.

Walzer pictures the cluster of assumptions and beliefs as a default setting on a computer, which goes automatically into operation as soon as the machine is booted up. The question of world affairs arises, and the left-wing public responds by thinking:

“Everything that goes wrong in the world is America’s fault.” No elaboration seems required. From that one assumption follow all the others. The assumption about everything being America’s fault carries the implication that American power, in addition to being sinister, is limitless; and the further implication that everyone else’s power adds up to naught. Alternatively, the assumption carries the implication that, even if American power does have limits, America’s arrogance does not. And, by failing to recognize the limits of its capabilities, arrogant America wreaks its damage by clumsily staggering from blunder to blunder. Less power for the superpower should be the left-wing goal, and more power for powerless international institutions. Whenever a terrible emergency becomes visible somewhere around the world, the responsibility for dealing with it should fall to the international institutions, and not to the unilateral, uncontrolled, piratical, and imperialistic United States. It may be that, as Walzer observes, no one on the American left actually puts any faith in the abilities of the United Nations or the International Criminal Court or any other international institution. Yet the American left, in its default mode, looks to the U.N. and the ICC anyway, and this is odd. Walzer detects a touch of make-believe in the left-wing enthusiasm for those particular institutions, which he describes as a “politics of pretending.” A politics of pretending implies a dishonesty. In Walzer’s analysis, a streak of dishonesty, too, figures in the left-wing default. Sometimes a broad public on the American left gazes upon authoritarian political movements and dreadful dictators in distant corners of the universe and likes to imagine that, far from being authoritarian or dictatorial, the movements and the dictators are boldly progressive, superior perhaps even to the U.N. and the ICC—though Walzer suggests that, in their inner thoughts, a great many people do know better. But they go on proclaiming their political fantasy, anyway, which amounts to an additional twist on the “politics of pretending.” There is the spectacular instance of left-wing delusion about the Islamist political movement—the left-wing supposition that something has got to be progressive about the Islamists, even if the Islamists appear to be medieval reactionaries; and the further supposition that Islamism’s enemies among Muslims and non-Muslims alike must surely be the actual reactionaries, even when the enemies appear to be liberals and progressives. Here is a “politics of pretending” in a double-twist pretzel version. Walzer’s chapter on this theme, “Islamism and the Left,” brings him to the edge of his patience, though not beyond (given that inexhaustible patience appears to be a philosophical principle, for him).

Only, why would large numbers of idealistic-minded people on the American left want to engage in this sort of foreign-affairs make-believe? What is the appeal in it? The appeal is to avoid thinking about the world beyond the United States. The same American left that puts serious thought into social and economic conditions at home cannot be bothered to put any thought at all into problems and conditions abroad. “Leftist inwardness” is the spirit. It is a provincialism that calls itself idealism.

II.

Or so argues Michael Walzer in *A Foreign Policy for the American Left*. I can imagine that some of his left-wing readers will shake their heads in disbelief, or, at least, will pretend to do so. They will complain that he has drawn a cartoon, and not a very friendly one at that, and he has been unfair to people who do think about the wider world. Or they will complain that, in drawing his cartoon, Walzer has relied all too cavalierly on his vague impressions of the left-wing scene. Is there anything to that complaint?

It is true that Walzer’s research technique consists of talking to friends and attending meetings and reading magazines and surfing left-wing sites—though I cannot really imagine a better method. The method, as it happens, rests on a lifetime of left-wing experience. The general accuracy of his impressions ought to be, in any case, obvious at a glance. Some things *are* obvious, even if no one has pointed them out. Besides, Walzer allows an occasional confirming factoid to intrude upon his analysis. One of those factoids turns up, as if by coincidence, on the first page of his book. He pretends to make very little fuss about it. The factoid is immense, though. It is irrefutable. It is Bernie Sanders’ 2016 primary campaign for the Democratic Party nomination.

The Bernie campaign was a momentous event in the long history of the American left. It marked a turning away from the principal tactical idea of the radical left during the last half century and more—a turning away from protest politics in favor of electoral politics, where power is to be found. It marked a turning away from a main way of picturing life, which is through a mix of identity-politics grievances and fantasies about distant events, in favor of a classic leftism of economic grievances and working-class solidarities. The question of world affairs arises, and the left-wing public responds by thinking: ‘Everything that goes wrong in the world is America’s fault.’

And yet, in regard to foreign policy, Bernie’s campaign conformed almost obsessively to the foreign-policy default position that Walzer has identified. Especially it conformed to the default’s most important aspect, which is a determined avoidance of foreign policy. Bernie’s opponent in the primaries ran on her foreign-policy credentials and

achievements, which were, respectively, vast and middling. Bernie responded by offering a few bitter condemnations of the Iraq War, and by shuddering in horror at Henry Kissinger, and by criticizing his opponent for barely mentioning the Palestinians in her speech to AIPAC. But mostly he kept his mouth shut. The political journalists expected Bernie to deliver a full-scale speech on world affairs, which they would have reported in detail. They insisted on it, after a while. Their insistence became news, for a moment or two. Or, if there was not going to be a speech, they wanted to know, at least, who were his foreign-policy advisers. Hillary's foreign-policy advisers were said to number in the hundreds. Nobody knew who were Bernie's, nor was his staff keen on revealing the names, which led to the supposition that maybe Bernie's team did not exist.

Eventually his staff came up with a number of names, which made for a comic moment because one person after another who was said to be on the team denied being any kind of adviser at all. The distinguished name of Michael Walzer appeared on the list. But Walzer, as he has told me, had never been an adviser, except in the sense that one day, a couple of years previously, the senator called the philosopher, and they discussed Syria on the phone.

From Bernie's standpoint, though, none of this mattered, and there was no reason to worry about the journalists and their demands. Crowds larger than anyone has ever seen in the modern American history of left-wing politics kept on sending in \$27 contributions to his campaign. They did so because they wanted their candidate to go on banging his drum on matters of economics and corruption here at home. They wanted to hear about the possibility of radical reform. Everyone loved free college tuition. And, among his cheering supporters, there appeared to be not the slightest demand for Bernie to say anything at all about the world beyond America's borders. Such was the historic campaign. Absolutely it was the proof that Walzer's cartoon portrait of the climate of opinion on the American left is, in fact, accurately drawn—"a near-perfect illustration," as Walzer puts it, of the American left and its position on foreign affairs.

Only, that was *before* the fateful day of Nov. 9, 2016.

III.

Afterward, the lights dimmed a little in America, and many things underwent a transformation, and among them was Michael Walzer's prime example of the default position of the American left: Bernie Sanders, the "near-perfect illustration." Bernie's transformation was a matter of thought and reflection. He ruminated at length over his foreign-policy silence, or so we may gather. And, in time, he brought the silence to an end. He was voluble about it, too, and he did it twice: at

Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in September 2017, which was the foreign-policy speech that everybody in the press had demanded in 2016; and again at Johns Hopkins, on Oct. 9 of this year, where the same ideas reemerged with greater simplicity. And in neither version did his views turn out to be what anyone would have predicted.

The appeal of the default position has always rested on a look of profundity—on a supposition that somewhere beneath the slogans and assumptions lies a bedrock of serious thought, a foundation of classical Marxism, perhaps, or a sober influence from the anti-colonialist theoreticians of long ago, or a layer of Christian reform from the social-gospel school. The supposition lends solidity to the slogans and assumptions. Only, the solidity does not exist, and neither does the bedrock—not for the broad left-wing public. There is no deeper philosophy. There is only the tiny set of unexamined default-position beliefs, afloat like dust motes.

And yet, the airiness of those beliefs turns out to have an unexpected virtue, which is flexibility. Someone who clings to the default position may declaim the slogans six days a week. But, come the seventh day, that same person, exhausted by his own dogmatism, may decide to entertain a further thought or two, oblivious or indifferent to the dangers of ideological inconsistency. And so it was with Bernie Sanders, in the course of the first of his foreign-policy addresses. Dutifully in that speech he deployed the concepts and slogans of the default position. He rehearsed the miserable consequences of American military power, as shown by the Iraq War, to which he attributed the problems of the Middle East as a whole. He recounted the American arrogance in Iran, Guatemala, and Vietnam in decades gone by. He invoked the virtues of the United Nations and international organizations. He worked in a few calls for economic equality and a climate policy. But then, having demonstrated his left-wing orthodoxy, Bernie evidently felt that he was entitled to turn on his heel and append an additional reflection.

Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, is the place where, in 1946, Winston Churchill announced the arrival of the Cold War by declaring, in a major address, that an "Iron Curtain" had fallen across Europe, separating the tyranny of the Soviet Union from the freedom of the West. Churchill was no longer prime minister, for the moment, but he was adored by the American public. And he was admired in the eyes of President Harry Truman, who accompanied him to the college auditorium and sat on stage throughout the oration. Churchill's purpose at Fulton was to drag America out of its national "inwardness" into the larger struggle for a democratic civilization. He looked back upon World War II, and he pictured it (in this speech, at least) as an

ideological struggle for democracy and human rights against the fascists. He wanted Americans to understand that, as of 1946, Stalin and the Soviets posed an equivalent challenge. He wanted the United States to resist. And, at Westminster College in September 2017, on that same auditorium stage, Bernie Sanders, having said all the right things to demonstrate his default-position bona fides, offered an extended salute to the internationalist and anti-totalitarian arguments of Winston Churchill.



Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. Left: 1946, Winston Churchill with Harry Truman. (Popperfoto/Getty Images). Right: Bernie Sanders, 2017 (Courtesy Westminster College).

This was *not* the default position of the American left. Not even historically was admiration for Churchill a left-wing sentiment. The American Socialist Party had shriveled into a wisp of a thing by 1946 or thereabouts, but out of the old party had emerged a scattering of individuals and political circles who added up to a faction or tendency, with institutional strength and a budget from the garment workers union and a few other corners of the labor movement. This was a social-democratic faction. The people in it regarded themselves as harder-nosed and better-informed on world affairs than the conventional liberals. And never would those people, the American social democrats, have chosen Winston Churchill as their hero. Churchill was a conservative. He was the enemy of totalitarianism, but he was the friend of British imperialism. If the social democrats had wanted to celebrate a hero or two, they might have looked to their own doughty selves, or to certain of their comrades in the British Labour Party or the Trades Union Congress. They might have settled for Harry Truman, who was, at least, a liberal. Bernie Sanders in 2017 nonetheless applauded Churchill. Maybe it was the effect of standing on the historic stage. Still, he also ascribed to the United States a vocation to promote democracy around the world, and this was a point that, in 1946, the American social democrats, a good many of them, might have approved. His concept of democracy promotion was not a military one, but he did want to be serious about it. At the United Nations in September 2017, Donald Trump had delivered one of his many world-affairs speeches that failed even to

allude to Russia's intervention in the election of 2016. And in Fulton, Missouri, the leader of the American left said:

I found it incredible, by the way, that when the President of the United States spoke before the United Nations on Monday, he did not even mention that outrage.

Well, I will. Today I say to Mr. Putin: we will not allow you to undermine American democracy or democracies around the world. In fact, our goal is to not only strengthen American democracy, but to work in solidarity with supporters of democracy around the globe, including in Russia. In the struggle of democracy versus authoritarianism, we intend to win.

IV.

A year later, in October 2018, in his second foreign-policy address, the one at Johns Hopkins, the homages to Winston Churchill were gone. But something of the global sweep of Churchill's instinct lingered behind, together with the impulse to see in the war against fascism a model for later challenges. In Bernie's interpretation:

There is currently a struggle of enormous consequence taking place in the United States and throughout the world. In it we see two competing visions. On one hand, we see a growing worldwide movement toward authoritarianism, oligarchy, and kleptocracy.

He attached the word "axis" to the growing movement:

I think it is important that we understand that what we are seeing now in the world is the rise of a new authoritarian axis. While the leaders who make up this axis may differ in some respects, they share key attributes: intolerance toward ethnic and religious minorities, hostility toward democratic norms, antagonism toward a free press, constant paranoia about foreign plots, and a belief that the leaders of government should be able to use their positions of power to serve their own selfish financial interests. He attributed global aspirations to the authoritarians, oligarchs, and kleptocrats. "The authoritarian axis," he said, "is committed to tearing down a post-World War II global order that they see as limiting their access to power and wealth." He took note of "a network of multi-billionaire oligarchs who see the world as their economic plaything." He noted the role played by the American president:

While this authoritarian trend certainly did not begin with Donald Trump, there's no question that other authoritarian leaders around the world have drawn inspiration from the fact that the president of the world's oldest and most powerful democracy is shattering democratic norms, is viciously attacking an independent media and an independent judiciary, and

is scapegoating the weakest and most vulnerable members of our society.

He saw a solution:

We need to counter oligarchic authoritarianism with a strong global progressive movement that speaks to the needs of working people, that recognizes that many of the problems we are faced with are the product of a failed status quo. We need a movement that unites people all over the world who don't just seek to return to a romanticized past, a past that did not work for so many, but who strive for something better.

The speech adds up to a thumbnail sketch of world events, drawn with a black pencil and a sense of drama. I blink in admiration at the phrase "oligarchic authoritarianism." It is a phrase out of Orwell's character in *1984*, Emmanuel Goldstein, who is the author of an anti-Big Brother tract called *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*. But, really, isn't "oligarchic authoritarianism" a pretty good description of Putin's political system? Naturally the thumbnail sketch omits a few particulars, namely, the specific realities in each new troubled corner of the world. It says nothing about mad ideologies (apart from a passing observation that Saudi Arabia, "a despotic dictatorship," "clearly inspired by Trump" in the current moment, has spent the last several decades subsidizing a "very extreme form of Islam around the world"). It offers not too much in the way of actual policies, apart from withdrawing America's support for the war in Yemen and reducing the defense budget, which are conventional views right now in the Democratic Party. What would Bernie have us do, positively speaking? He does not say. I wonder how much work he has put into the programmatic details. But the speech is interesting not because of the details. Everybody understands Trump's "America First" slogan. It is an old slogan. He borrowed it from the isolationists of the America First Committee in the early 1940s, for whom "America First" meant an America that renounced the principles of democratic solidarity and therefore had very little reason to get involved in foreign conflicts—an America that exuded sympathy for the fascist regimes of Europe, and was none too keen on the Jews: an America that calculated its own interests narrowly. Trump's version of the slogan in our own moment means pretty much the same thing, minus the special aversion for the Jews, except sometimes.

"America First" means an America that feels no obligation to defend democracy or democracy's institutions around the world—an America that feels, instead, a sympathy for oligarchical authoritarianism, and upholds a cash-register view of world affairs: an America that regards idealism as deception. The slogan could not be simpler, and yet it expresses a larger philosophy, or something of one, anyway—a parched philosophy, selfish, unimaginative, and

sulfuric with anger, but, still, a philosophy. And the philosophy allows Trump to ask the largest of foreign-policy questions. E.g., why should America stand up for its allies? Wouldn't America be smarter to treat its allies as commercial partners, to be rejected or abandoned as soon as the cash flow goes the wrong way? NATO—isn't it an anti-American scam? And all of this raises a question of a different sort, which is: What is the right way to answer those several points?

Hillary Clinton spelled out one way of doing so in her campaign book, with Tim Kaine, *Stronger Together*, in the section on foreign policy. America, in Hillary's eyes, ought to stand by its allies. And America ought to be thoughtful and active and generous on climate, on trade, on women's rights, and human rights. She laid out the positions in the Clinton style, which meant a laundry list of items, every one of them well-conceived, at least in my eyes. And yet, a laundry list may not be the ideal platform for addressing big questions such as: Why *not* adhere to a cash-register view of life? Or, in the degree to which Hillary did address the big questions, she did so mostly by invoking the major theme of her campaign, which was a cult of strength.

Only, what is the purpose of strength? In *Stronger Together*, she told us that safety was the purpose—quite as if the minimum goal of the world's superpower (which is not to get attacked) should also be its maximum goal. "Safer Together" was the name of the foreign-policy portion of her book. "Security" was the running head at the top of each new page. She never quite explained why her version of safety was preferable to Trump's.

The superiority of Bernie's thumbnail sketch lies, I think, in his ability to point to things that are larger than a laundry list, and grander than strength and safety. The worldwide struggle for democracy and justice is his cause, and solidarity is his principle. His evocation of these things is not especially sophisticated, in an international-relations kind of way. The diplomats in his audience at Johns Hopkins (he spoke at a center for international studies) must have muttered to themselves, as he went on speaking, "This man could benefit from professional advice." But there is something to live by, in Bernie's cause and his principle. And the global grandeur is to the point. Precisely it addresses Donald Trump.

"America First," in Trump's version, sounds like a call for an American withdrawal from strife and conflict around the world, but everybody understands that, even so, something in the call is radical in the extreme, which means that, in its fashion, it commands a grandeur of its own. The call is for a return to the 1940s, this time in order to follow the advice of the America First Committee of those days. It is a call for America to dismantle everything that

came out of the American victory in the world war, the advance for democracy, the international institutions, the notion of a democratic civilization. And something in Bernie's thumbnail sketch of world affairs likewise harkens back to the '40s—in Bernie's case, to some of those same American social democrats whose example failed to stir him when he contemplated Winston Churchill, but who do seem to linger ancestrally in his universe. The people who came out of the old American Socialist Party, Reinhold Niebuhr and a few others, were the very people who led the battle of opinion against the America First Committee. Niebuhr and his comrades organized a committee of their own, the Union for Democratic Action, which was left wing and internationalist at the same time, in favor of "a two-front fight for democracy—at home and abroad." Their committee evolved into a larger organization called Americans for Democratic Action, with funding and political support from the social democrat unions, which meant David Dubinsky and the garment workers. And, in the Truman years, Americans for Democratic Action played a main role in generating the post-WWII concept, not entirely false or dishonest (even if sometimes false and dishonest), of an American commitment to freedom at home and around the world. The social democrats and their liberal friends in those organizations saw the world in ruin from the world war, and they saw America's strength and the ideals that could be America's, and they looked for a foreign policy that might accord with social-democratic or New Deal principles, an internationalist policy, democratic, pro-labor, anti-totalitarian, and broadly in favor of dismantling the European empires.

Is that what Bernie has in mind for our own era—a progressive internationalism, seen from a working-class standpoint that, in olden times, the social democrats would have heartily approved, with American power as its tool? No, that would be too much. In neither of his speeches has Bernie contemplated the uses of American power. Nor does he seem to have contemplated the sort of independent or nongovernmental foreign policy that, in times gone by, the social-democratic trade unions used to conduct.

Still, from one speech to the next, something in Bernie's language does seem to be drifting in those directions, and the drift raises a possibility. In the 1940s, the moment had come for America to adopt a dramatically new foreign policy, and the political force that stepped in to propose a policy and promote it was the social-democratic wing of the American left—an aspect of American history that hardly anyone remembers. Why shouldn't someone from the American left of our own time, a freethinker, propose a foreign policy for our own moment, as well? If

somebody from the progressive wing of the Democratic Party wanted to break abruptly with the default-mode foreign-policy thinking of the modern left, if somebody wanted to revive a few of the instincts of the 1940s social-democratic left, updated and corrected for our own entirely different era, wouldn't the door be open?

But I have allowed my thoughts to wander out of the zone of the realistic.

V.

In reality, there are many obstacles to any such development, and one of those obstacles is the pesky little question of an obsessive anti-Zionism in some pockets of the left. And Bernie Sanders' career shows just how pesky the anti-Zionist obstacle can be.

Winston Churchill was known for his Zionist advocacy. But, in 1946, in his own speech at Fulton, he said nothing at all about the Jews and their national aspirations. And when Bernie Sanders stood at that same podium in 2017, he, too, said nothing, not one word, on those particular themes. This was strange, given that his purpose at Fulton was to break his own silence on foreign-policy themes. Nor did he do much to make up for the omission at Johns Hopkins, in his speech of last month. He devoted to Israel a single sentence, blaming Trump for encouraging the illiberal impulses of the Netanyahu government—which was a reasonable observation, but revealed nothing about his larger view. Only, how can this be? How can Bernie have said so little, when so many people have inquired into his opinion?

He alone could tell us. Still, I can guess at the developments that may have brought him to this point, beginning at the beginning. People from backgrounds like his in the Jewish immigrant working class tend to start out, on the simplest and most natural of grounds, as instinctive sympathizers with the Zionist project; and instinctive sympathy has been his own starting position. In one of his debates in 2016 with Hillary, he described himself as "somebody who is 100 percent pro-Israel, in the long run." He relishes the memory of his student socialist idyll in 1963, toiling for the brotherhood of man as a guest of Hashomer Hatzair at the kibbutz Sha'ar Ha'amakim, near Haifa.

He appears to have paid not too much attention to Israel in the years that followed. And whenever he has glanced at it more recently, the spectacle has taken him aback. Every new violent incident between Israelis and Palestinians leads him to suppose that, given how the balance of power has tilted over the decades, the conflict must surely be, at bottom, a battle between Israeli cruelty and righteous Palestinian protest. He rebukes the Israelis. He recoils at the poverty in Gaza. He applauds any champion of the Palestinian cause who speaks a language of peace and reasonableness.

And then, having rebuked and recoiled and applauded, he repeatedly has the experience—or so I picture him—of stumbling across additional and complicating details, which lead him to wonder if he hasn't been a little hasty in expressing a sympathy for this or that Palestinian protest. He condemned the Israelis for their repression of the Palestinian Great March of Return during the last several months, which seemed to him an act of excessive violence against a fundamentally nonviolent protest. Then he went on, after a while, to issue a second, solemn, newer, dismayed condemnation, this time of Israel and Hamas alike, the two of them together, as if he had lately begun to reflect on Hamas' role in the protest and the violent implications.

Repeatedly he has welcomed onto his staff or into the inner circle of his political campaign people who share his sincere indignation at the plight of the Palestinians but who, after a while, turn out not to share his sympathy for the Israelis, too. Linda Sarsour cut a prominent figure in his 2016 campaign, and, then again, became prominent, as well, for her remark about nothing being creepier than Zionism. This cannot have pleased the old kibbutznik. The organization Our Revolution emerged from his 2016 campaign, and, earlier this year, Our Revolution endorsed the candidacy for governor of Ohio of Dennis Kucinich, who has aligned himself with Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian war. Bernie cannot have been happy about that, either. He declined to bestow his own, personal endorsement on Kucinich (who lost the primary). And yet he was stuck with the reality that, because Our Revolution is thought to represent his own movement, Bashar al-Assad's name and his own were inevitably yoked together in press accounts of Ohio politics.

The authentic enemies of Israel in the American public do seem to notice the anti-Zionist buzz around him, and they are bound to wonder if, regardless of his Jewish roots, Bernie isn't someone like themselves, a serious proponent of "From the river to the sea!" They hope he is. And continually he is obliged to explain that it is all a mistake, and Israel is not, in fact, creepy in his own eyes. The single most striking statement he has ever made on the Middle East came during a town hall meeting with his own constituents in Vermont in 2012, some of whom expected him to denounce Israel forcefully in regard to the Gaza War of that year. He observed, instead, that Israel had come under missile attack and did have to defend itself. He got a little heated in making the point, and when the constituents insisted on their denunciation, and went on insisting, he shouted, "Excuse me, shut up!"—which suggested that his sympathy for certain kinds of anti-Israel outrage has its limits.

Wouldn't he be smart to straighten out these confusions? And wouldn't a foreign-policy address be

the place to do it, especially in a setting like Johns Hopkins last month, where no one was going to object to nuance and complication? I can only imagine that, whenever he thinks about doing anything of the sort, his politician's instincts wave him away. The default position of the modern American left, as Walzer describes it, does not necessarily approve of being, as Bernie says, "100 percent pro-Israel, in the long run." At Bernie's rallies, the ebullient crowds are bound to contain a small number of single-issue social-justice warriors eager to wave their imaginary scimitars and chant, "From the river to the sea!" together with a far larger number of people who, in the face of a grisly chant, can be counted on to bite their tongues—which suggests that, among his public, there is a serious need for political education. Bernie loves to educate, as it happens. Didactic oratory is his greatest gift. He loves to educate, however, only on themes that are domestic, economic, and working-class, with occasional detours into global warming. And his public cheers the lectures. But that is because he sticks to his themes.

The man is in a fix. It is his own doing, too. He and nobody else is the leader who has ushered the marginalized and protest-oriented radical left with its many wacky university ideas into the American political mainstream; but, over the course of the 2016 campaign, he abstained from telling his admirers where they should stand on foreign policy. Even now, after he has begun to lay out a foreign policy for the left, he has offered no guidance at all on Israel-and-Palestine in particular, except by making a few staff appointments that open the sluice to the tide of anti-Zionism. And in comes the tide, filled with voices clamoring to erase Israel from the map.

Some of the anti-Zionists whom he has helped to define as admirably progressive are going to end up with a measure of national glamour, too. This may have already happened in Michigan with the election to Congress of Rashida Tlaib, who displays an inspiring vigor on behalf of workers' rights but also turns out to be a champion of Israel's demise. Tlaib is one more member of the newly BDS-ified Democratic Socialists of America. And, with a few more victories by otherwise appealing people like her, aren't we going to discover that Europe's crisis of the radical left has crossed the ocean?

I have fretted over this possibility in a previous essay—the possibility that, under an anti-Zionist pressure, the culture of the liberal left in America may begin to buckle and collapse, as has already happened in large parts of the socialist or social-democratic left in the United Kingdom and France and other places, too. It is the possibility that "From the river to the sea!," which is a call for a pogrom, will begin to be heard in the Democratic Party itself, and Farrakhan will become an honored figure, and the spirit of anti-

racism and tolerance and universal rights will undergo a few defeats. No one who contemplates the American scene has failed to see the possibility, though it may be that, in the Democratic Party, no one has wanted to recognize just how far these developments can go, or how quickly the developments can take place. Something like that could happen, yes. It is imaginable. If it happened to the British Labour Party, why not to the Democrats?

VI.

And yet, and yet—when I tally up the left-wing similarities on one side of the Atlantic and the other, I keep stumbling on a difference. It is visible in the biographies of the top leaders. The British, French, and American leaders of the radical left of our moment, all of them, come from classic backgrounds in one corner or another of the pure and authentic left of the 1960s; but the corners are not identical. Jeremy Corbyn comes out of the radical Third Worldism of the British New Left in the 1960s, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon comes out of a sectarian French Trotskyism of those same years (namely, Pierre Lambert's Internationalist Communist Organization, a moderately influential semiclandestine faction within the French Socialist Party, for a while). Each of those currents was Marxist. And both of those men have maintained a Marxist habit of systematic thought on anti-capitalist themes and world affairs.

Systematic thinking leads them to gaze with hostility upon the European Union and the Western alliance as a whole (because the Western alliance is the power structure of capitalism and imperialism). And systematic thinking leads them to gaze with a degree of sympathy upon Vladimir Putin (because, even if Putin's right-wing style is not their own, his rejection of Western power represents an anti-capitalist resistance of sorts, therefore is to be applauded, and wasn't the Ukrainian revolution of 2014 an anti-democratic putsch?—which is Mélenchon's view especially). A decided proclivity for nonsensical fantasies about distant zones of the globe has dominated the Marxist imagination for the last 100 years, and the proclivity systematically induces Corbyn and Mélenchon, both of them, to cultivate a European fantasy of the exotic Third World—a romance of the nobly savage Arab resistance to the detested Zionist colonialists, in Corbyn's case (though he also admires the Latin American Marxists), and a romance of the Latin American demagogues and dictators, in Mélenchon's case.

Bernie Sanders went through his own phase of sectarian socialism at the University of Chicago in the early 1960s, which brought him into the ranks of the Young People's Socialist League, or YPSL. This was the youth affiliate of the old Socialist Party, or what remained of it, in hyphenated merger with the grizzled

trade union social democrats from the 1930s, the Social Democratic Federation. The combined organization, the SP-SDF, was not very large in the early 1960s, but neither was it insignificant. Its members counted for something in the leadership of the AFL-CIO. People from the SP-SDF were central to the civil rights movement in those years, beginning with A. Philip Randolph, no less, and his assistant, Bayard Rustin. And, in matters of world affairs, the SP-SDF was rigorously anti-fantast.

Possibly Bernie wasn't much of a YPSL. Some 20 years later, when he was mayor of Burlington, Vermont, he gave his municipal approval to the solidarity movement with the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, which some of the hardline anti-Communists in the SP-SDF of the 1960s would have advised him against—though some of the others would have approved, given that, in the beginning, the Sandinistas promised to be democrats. Sandinista solidarity appears to have been, in any case, strictly a minor episode in Bernie's career. Mostly his foreign-policy thinking has conformed to the default mode that Walzer has described, with his new phase emerging only now, with its hint of something resembling a social-democratic internationalism. And all of this gives him a different quality than anything that can be seen in his European counterparts. In the European sympathizers with Putin there is a chilly spot for the Jews and the Jewish state—icy, in Corbyn's case. But in the American enemy of oligarchical authoritarianism there is a warm spot.

The anti-Zionists and authoritarian fantasists among Bernie's supporters find him endlessly frustrating for these reasons. You can read about Bernie's shortcomings in Truthdig, where he turns out to be a major sellout, a non-socialist because a non-anti-imperialist, and a tool of the sinister Democratic Party. The anti-Zionists and the fantasists yearn for an American Corbyn. They want a national leader who will denote as realistic their own fictions and dreams about faraway dictators; and will usher the fictions and dreams into the American mainstream; and will say nice things about Hamas and bad things about Israel; and will offer an appalling speech to the Democratic National Convention; and will stand shoulder to shoulder with the outright bigots; and will drive everyone with a Jewish soul out of the left, except for a pitiful handful.

But America has produced no such leader. America has produced Bernie Sanders. America is different. Not different at every moment, but, even so, different. Only, *why* is America different? I will return to this question next week.

This is the second of a three-part commentary on the American left.

The Philosophers and the American Left

Third in a series on the American left: a tale of buried treasure

By Paul Berman

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I.

The American left, which has sometimes been poor in institutions, has always been wealthy in political philosophy—and you can see the wealth and its significance in two books of our own moment, one by the late Richard Rorty and the other by Michael Walzer. Perhaps Rorty's book is not *completely* of our moment. The book is *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, which came out from a university press in 1999 and lay in slumber for 17 years, until the catastrophic Election Day of 2016. Then the book awoke, and *Achieving Our Country* became a publishing sensation, such that, even today, it appears to be selling fairly well, for a book of its nature. Its success is owed to a single passage on page 90. Rorty wondered on that page what would happen if, one day, America's trade unionists and unskilled workers, the people who do not live in prosperous suburbs, ever came to notice that, in the American government and among the American elites, no one at all was even trying to defend them from the economic and social consequences of modern industrial trends.

He wrote:

At that point, something will crack. The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for—someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots. A scenario like that of Sinclair Lewis' novel *It Can't Happen Here* may then be played out. For once such a strongman takes office, nobody can predict what will happen. In 1932, most of the predictions made about what would happen if Hindenburg named Hitler chancellor were wildly overoptimistic.

One thing that is very likely to happen is that the gains made in the past forty years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals, will be wiped out. Jocular contempt for women will come back into fashion. The words 'nigger' and 'kike' will once again be heard in the workplace. All the sadism which the academic Left has tried to make unacceptable to its students will come flooding back. All the resentment which badly educated Americans feel about having

their manners dictated to them by college graduates will find an outlet.

He was a genius. It is not just *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, his masterwork. It is that one passage!

His goal in *Achieving Our Country* was to revive an American left that, in his view, had taken a wrong turn in the later 1960s and '70s, and had ended in a ditch. He applauded the many aspects of social progress that had gotten started in those years. He saw a partial virtue in what might be described as identity politics and the culture of political correctness, which were products of that period. The university left came into existence, and he was glad to see that, as a result, college professors had begun to instruct their students to refrain from personal cruelty.

But the university left had made a mistake. It had fallen under the influence of the postmodernist professors, who led their adepts into an infinity of mini-causes and controversies over language. The university left had ended up losing sight of the primary purpose of any left-wing movement, which ought to be the maxi-cause of the working class. And Rorty proposed a rectification.

He was a little bashful about describing his proposal, and a little boastful. He wanted to hearken back to the political traditions and the worldview that he had absorbed as a child (he was born in 1931) in the bosom of his family, whose history on the American left happens to have been glorious. His grandfather was Walter Rauschenbusch, the Baptist theologian from the turn of the 20th century, who propounded what used to be called the "social gospel," or Christian socialism. Rorty's father, James Rorty, was a literary man, a poet and essayist, who played a lively role in the circle of socialist or social-democratic intellectuals around the philosopher Sidney Hook—who was himself a protégé of the greatest or, at least, the most American of the American philosophers, John Dewey. The people around Hook were champions of the labor movement in an exalted version, which prompted them to be the enemies of totalitarian movements of every kind, right wing and left wing.

With family contacts like those, young Dick Rorty found himself hanging out at the Harlem office of A. Philip Randolph, a particular hero of his, who concentrated in his own person all the causes of the day: civil rights, labor, socialism, and the defense of democracy. Even as a boy, Rorty was a romantic of the best of the best of the American left. And, in *Achieving Our Country*, his idea was to do for the American left something like what he had done for modern philosophy in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, which was to strip away the outdated and the pointless, and get at the heart of things.

He wanted to retain the moral sense and social conscience of his grandfather, the theologian—and wanted, at the same time, to strip away the merely theological. He wanted to retain the trade-union loyalties and civil-rights affiliations and anti-totalitarianism of his father and the Hook circle—and wanted, at the same time, to strip away the Marxist grandiosity that figured for a while in those people's thinking, back in the 1930s. He proposed a thoughtful revival, instead, of the ideas of Walt Whitman in *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic Vistas*. Whitman looked on America herself as a kind of religion, except without a theology—a secular and poetic religion of democracy, with an aspiration for social justice and the liberation of the ordinary individual, and a further aspiration for the liberation of the world. In Rorty's thinking, a progressive American patriotism along Whitman's lines would be capable of gathering up the infinity of scattered and narrow identity politics of the modern university-influenced left and rendering the *pluribus* into an American *unum*, accessible to all.

He wanted to invigorate the philosophy of democracy that John Dewey had drawn in part from Whitman—democracy as an eternal project for endless social progress, democracy as a way of life and a way of thinking—which became Hook's idea, and became his own. And he considered that, if only those ancient inspirations could be conjured back into life, they could generate the newer left that he was looking for—the newer left that was going to assimilate everything good and useful that had come out of the New Left and the university left of the last few decades, and was going to shuck off everything noxious and foolish, and was going to renew the long-lost left-wing connection to working-class life, and was going, therefore, to be able to fend off the Trump-like demagogueries and the dictatorship that he already foresaw creeping across the nonsuburbs. What would social justice look like, in the eyes of the newer left? Michael Walzer has something to say about this. He has said it repeatedly and in many variations, and this year he has said it in a book that I have already had the occasion to discuss, his *A Foreign Policy for the Left*—though I discussed only one dimension of the argument, and not its other dimensions. In that book he describes the extreme simplicities of the American left in regard to world affairs—the simplicities that lead earnest left wingers to suppose that everything bad that happens around the world is America's fault, and to suppose that America will never do anything good. And he offers a criticism.

He points out that sometimes bad things happen around the world that are not, in fact, America's fault. And sometimes American power, even military power, can be deployed in a helpful manner—though

only with constant self-examination, a Walzerian principle, and scrupulous caution. He considers that humanitarian interventions might sometimes be a good idea, under extreme circumstances. He reminds us that democratic solidarity across the continents is in the American vein. He notes with admiration the Jacksonian radicals of the mid-19th century, who wanted America's democrats to intervene in some fashion on behalf of the beleaguered European revolutionaries of 1848—even if he draws a distinction between humanitarian interventions, which might be military, and democratic solidarity, which ought not to be military.

But mostly he proposes a way of thinking about these questions—a method of thinking, as opposed to a set of dogmatic rules. He advises us to be nuanced, instead of one-sided; to think in shades, and not in black-and-white oppositions. He reminds us that bad guys typically come in pairs, as if from opposite sides of the room, which means that we have to contemplate battles against two enemies at the same time—not just the Islamist terrorists and tyrants (for instance), but also the anti-Islam bigots. He offers, in effect, an analytic procedure, which has been his theme in one book after another, and in his *Dissent* magazine essays. It is a procedure for thinking ethically about everything and its opposite—war, civil life, the secular, and the sacred.

The most influential of his books has been *Just and Unjust Wars*—on the ethics of war (his point being that even war requires ethical judgment and a way of arriving at it)—which has become a staple of American military education. His *Spheres of Justice* ought to be equally influential, or even more so, for people whose concern is social justice. He asks the question that hardly anybody thinks of asking, which is, namely, what *is* social justice? Everybody claims to be for it—to be left wing is to make a fuss about it—but what *is* it? And he proposes an answer that, in the long history of the political left, other writers and philosophers may have toyed with, but nobody else seems to have analyzed quite so clearly or elegantly. Social justice is many things, and not just one thing; and the many things deserve our respect. Such is his contention. He quarrels with John Rawls, who considers that social justice is what reasonable people would take it to be, if only they had the opportunity to ask themselves; and he quarrels with Karl Marx, who, in his principle contention, satisfies himself with the idea that social justice is fundamentally a matter of money. Rawls and Marx are Platonists, in Walzer's view. They believe in the One. Social justice in their eyes is a single thing. Walzer is anti-Platonist. He considers that, even if the opinions of reasonable people are reasonable, and even if money is indispensable, social justice will still mean various things, all of them important or even crucial. There

are matters of wealth, but also matters of access—to education, or to professional and personal opportunities, or to public parks, or to the arts, or to religious freedom, or to recognition and dignity in the eyes of other people. And, if social justice means different things, there must be different ways of arriving at it.

He proposes, in these ways, to liberate the left from itself—to liberate the left from its own antiquated categories of understanding, which, in his analysis, turn out to be far too straitened to accommodate the amplitudes of human nature. His idea and Rorty's are, in that respect, the same. Rorty tells us to liberate ourselves from the foolish mythologies of a certain left of the last half century. And Walzer tells us how we should go about thinking, once the liberation has been achieved—how to think in a complicated manner, suited to a pluralist world, with “complex equality” as our goal.

Only, is there a place for this kind of thinking right now, in the middle of the battle, so to speak? I think there is a place. There is certainly a need.

II.

During the last 150 years or so, the American left has advanced in a nearly mathematical pattern of waves, one wave after another—waves of popular insurgency, which rush forward and linger a while, then get pulled back by a nasty undertow and other forces, only to rush forward again, a generation later. There have been four of those waves in the past—in the 1870s and '80s; in the 1910s; in the 1930s and '40s; and in the 1960s and '70s, continuing into the '80s and maybe beyond. A fifth such wave is unmistakably upon us right now—the new insurgency that got underway with Occupy Wall Street in 2012 and continued into Bernie Sanders' Political Revolution and the Women's March and has lately brought a lot of people, the progressives, into the Democratic Party. And each of these waves has engendered its own destructive undertow.

The authentic philosophy of the American left is not a nihilism. It is not a program for eliminating anyone. It is a program for including everyone.

The left-wing undertow over the many generations has consisted of a turn to violence, or a dream of violence, or a support for the mass violence of faraway movements on other continents, or a dream of mass elimination—with the actions and dreams supported by just enough people to inflict a terrible wound on a larger left that was never really guilty. In the 1880s, there was a bomb-throwing turn by an anarchist wing of the labor movement—which devastated the larger labor movement. At the end of the 1910s, there was a turn away from the democratic and labor left in favor of Bolshevik dictatorship—which, together with some renewed terrorism, pretty

much destroyed the Socialist Party and damaged a variety of unions. In the 1930s and '40s, there was the strange popularity of Joseph Stalin in a large corner of the left—which brought about any number of American misfortunes. In the late 1960s and early '70s, there was a trend for guerrilla Marxism and Maoist miniparties among the left-wing student leaders and in one wing of the black movement—which largely destroyed the New Left of those years. In our own moment, there is the mania for eliminating the faraway Jewish state, or, at least, the mania for singling out the Jewish state for unique obloquy—with consequences that we will see, or perhaps are already seeing.

The left wingers who have been drawn to these perverse causes over the generations have always thought of their own motivation as compassion, or solidarity, or a keener fidelity to the principles of the left than everyone else's. But something psychological has always entered into the motivation. It is an impulse to outdo the excitements of rebellion by cultivating the forbidden thrills of violent transgression. It is rebellion, transformed into nihilism. And something theoretical has entered the motivation. It is the allure of left-wing doctrines that, in calling for violent attacks and the elimination of entire populations, appear to have achieved a beautiful simplicity of analysis. These are the doctrines that might call for the eradication of the business class as a whole (as per a crude anti-capitalism), or of the Ukrainian peasants (which was Stalin's program), or of the Jews of the Middle East (which is the anti-Zionist program). A panache of intellectual prestige can attach to these kinds of shocking simplicities—a panache of the avant-garde, which, by adding to the allure, adds to the destructiveness.

But those are the ideas of the left-wing undertow, the ideas that undo the left—the ideas that represent a rebellion of sorts against the left. The authentic philosophy of the left itself, the American left, is entirely different—the dominant philosophy, I mean, which has principally governed the political imagination of the repeated waves of left-wing insurgency. The authentic philosophy is not a nihilism. It is not a program for eliminating anyone. It is a program for including everyone. It is an idea about the American Revolution—an idea about democracy as a universal and revolutionary project, ever expanding and deepening.

This kind of thinking can sometimes look a little feeble, in comparison to the philosophies of violent elimination—can look like a sentimentality, or like a folk belief, or like a conformity to the official American culture. It can look like something without contours—like a wispy set of phrases, suitable for oratory but not for serious thought.

But there is no reason for the authentic philosophy of the American left to look feeble or sentimental or unsophisticated or wispy. This was Rorty's point in *Achieving Our Country*. The ideas have a definite contour. They are the ideas of the greatest of the American thinkers, from Whitman to Dewey and onward to Dewey's comrades and philosophical heirs, unto Rorty and his friends. The ideas amount to a left-liberalism, with a few hints of a theory of history, too. They amount to a liberalism because they offer a philosophy of human rights. And they amount to a liberalism because they offer a philosophy of procedures—the procedures of law, or of philosophical investigation, as in Rorty's pragmatism, or of ethical analysis, as in Walzer's thinking. Then again, they amount to a leftism because social solidarity and egalitarianism are their principles, and not just rights and procedures. They amount to a leftism because the worker is their social ideal, the worker who does things, and not the aristocrat or the moneyed heir, who does nothing. The ideas hint at a theory of history because—in Whitman's version, anyway—they postulate that all of the human past has pointed to a democratic future; and the history of social progress in America accords with the inner truth of civilization; and what is true of America is true of the world—which may not be the case, but, then again, seems often enough to be the case to be inspiring.

The philosophy of the American left is what Rorty describes and Walzer exemplifies. It adds up to something grander than Marxism. In principle, it ought to confer a strength on the American left that has lately begun to flourish so impressively—a double strength, if only anyone were to tease out the possibilities. The left-liberalism ought to make it easy to recognize the absurdity of people who admire Vladimir Putin (such people exist), or admire Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro (they, too, exist), or focus their rage at the tiny faraway state that happens to be a Jewish state (they are legion). The philosophy of the American left ought to make it easy to identify those people, and easy to put them in their appropriate corner, and easy for the American left to stand up and proclaim its own message.

This ought to be, in Rorty's argument, a patriotism. It ought not to be a mindless patriotism—a patriotism of the flag and the slogans and the stupid "USA" chant. It ought to be a rich and interesting patriotism—a patriotism that takes the trouble to define and analyze the ideas and principles of the liberal left, and insists on identifying those ideas and principles with America herself.

Everybody understands that, in the political battles to come, the Democrats and Republicans are going to fight over the meaning of Trump's slogan, "America First." But what is the alternative to "America First,"

and do the Democrats know how to present it? I have pointed out in an earlier essay that, back in the time of the original America First Committee, which was the 1940s, "America First" expressed an American sympathy with fascism. And the opposition to "America First" came from people with backgrounds in the old Socialist Party, who formed a committee of their own. This sort of thing is exactly what Rorty had in mind in *Achieving Our Country* when he observed that American patriotism is the proper home of the left.

Why shouldn't the opposition to "America First" in our own time likewise be led by people on the left? The establishment Democrats will never do it properly, and that is because, being establishment Democrats, they are politicians above all, and are attuned to the polls, which is not the same as being attuned to the grandeurs of American civilization. But the insurgent Democrats, if they are people of the left, ought to be able to identify the grandeurs. The insurgents ought to see something large and thrilling and deep in the patriotic idea. Patriotism ought to be their cause, and they ought to be the ones who lead the charge. *They* ought to lead a preliminary charge against the anti-Zionists and the Farrakhanites and any lingering Chavistas, who think of themselves as left wing or progressive. And, having clarified their own program, *they* ought to be the ones to lead the charge against "America First"—lead the charge by summoning America to her own best principles, which are their own principles, which add up to democracy in all its complexity and procedures and aspirations.

But I do not pretend to be describing what exists. I am describing ideas that I find in books, which amount to possibilities, which add up to a proposal, which I submit to the enormous public that constitutes the American left.

This is Part Three of a series of commentaries on the American left.



Paul Berman is Tablet's critic-at-large. He is the author of *A Tale of Two Utopias*, *Terror and Liberalism*, *Power and the Idealists*, and *The Flight of the Intellectuals*.

Tablet

The Roots of American Anti-Semitism

The Christian Identity movement, white supremacy, and the future of homegrown anti-Jewish terror

By Stuart Wexler

November 1, 2018

Studies of genocide show that those who kill their neighbors must dehumanize them before such attacks are widely accepted. In America, white Americans had been dehumanizing blacks and unleashing violence on black bodies for 300 years before the rise of the re-formed Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, when the organized targeting of Jews by hate movements began. The small population of Jews who lived in America throughout the 17th, 18th, and most of the 19th centuries did so in an environment of relative tolerance, backed by the assurance of the letter written by President George Washington, a slave owner, to the Hebrew Congregations of Rhode Island, stating that “the Government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

Yet while American Jews avoided direct attack by the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and 1930s, anti-Semitism itself was beginning to change as a small group of anti-Semitic radicals within the Klan moved from passivity to aggression, giving rise to a native-born American anti-Semitic movement whose radical ideology helped inspire the murder of 11 congregants at Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life synagogue. Auto tycoon Henry Ford played a key role in this transformation. Through his widely circulated *Dearborn Independent*, Ford popularized alarming slurs against the Jewish people, borrowing from the fraudulent and anti-Semitic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to accuse Jews of a secret, global financial conspiracy to undermine the United States and the western world.

At the same time, a man who helped publish Ford’s periodical, William J. Cameron, became interested in and promoted a school of pseudoscientific anthropological thought that repositioned Jews in the history of Judeo-Christianity. Cameron argued that the 10 missing groups from the lost tribes of the House of Israel (Israel’s Northern Kingdom), upon being overcome by the Assyrians, fled to the Caucasus, and populated that region. The remaining two tribes of Israel, the so-called House of Judah, eventually migrated to and settled in Europe. The latter were the true chosen people: Anglo-Europeans. European Jews, those who had been immigrating to

America in droves in the three decades before, were in fact descendants of Mongol-Turkic Khazars.

This strange stew of white supremacy, anti-Jewish conspiracy baiting, and racialized anthropology—which began overseas as British-Israelism, and morphed in the United States into Anglo-Israelism—is central to the white nationalist ideology that continues to pursue and enact violence against Jewish targets. It is an ideology that, even if he may not realize it, helped fuel Robert Bowers’ rage against Jews.

America’s own homegrown anti-Semitic movement was codified by West Coast seminarians toward the end of WWII, and was branded as Christian Identity by the late 1960s. While adherents of this movement often shared sympathies with the Ku Klux Klan, and some were even members, they also embraced the idea of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy and the notion that White Europeans were the true chosen people. Yet they faced a problem in trying to get normative Christian doctrines to accommodate these ideas. Even if they could situate Jews in another geographic location, Christ would still include Jews as people capable of salvation.

Christian Identity (CI) believers wanted to go one step beyond those Christians who, in the past, had persecuted Jews for supposedly rejecting Jesus. If Jews were as devious and immoral as these men believed, if they were to become an enemy that even Jesus could not forgive and love, then Jews must not be human at all.

The seminarians “solved” their theological dilemma through an idiosyncratic interpretation of the Book of Genesis and the creation story. They argued Eve engaged in a sexual relationship not only with Adam (producing Seth, the seed line for white Christians), but with the serpent, the physical manifestation of Satan himself. This second relationship produced Cain, and the seed line for those who proclaim to be Jews in the modern day, but who are, in fact, impostors. In the Christian Identity interpretation of the Bible, Noah’s flood only wiped out part of the world’s population. The surviving demonic offspring of Satan (Jews) included the Pharisees who torment Jesus as well as the “so-called” Jews who had settled in Asia. Jesus, his disciples, and the earliest Christians, meanwhile, were descendants of the real chosen people from the bloodline of Seth who (per their speculative anthropology) formed the House of Judah and who become Anglo-Europeans; those Palestinian Jews who rejected Christ in his lifetime, and the Mongol-Turkic Khazars, were literally impostors who could not and would not have accepted Christ. Instead, impostor Jews were and are engaged in a secret, centuries-long, cosmic conspiracy against white Europeans, manipulating people of color (subhuman “mud people” in Christian Identity

theology) against whites. God would defeat that conspiracy in the Battle of Armageddon, a literal race war.

One strain of CI thought, popularized by radio evangelist Wesley Swift (one of CI's founding seminarians) from his outpost in Hollywood, argued that devotees must help initiate and wage this holy race war. Swift's charismatic radio sermons attracted hundreds of thousands of listeners and reached CI followers across the country through a network of white supremacists who distributed his audiotapes. Those sermons routinely combined theological exegesis with commentary on current events; frequently they described a Jewish-run global conspiracy (Marxist in nature) that hijacked the U.S. government and manipulated blacks in the civil rights movement. As Swift's influence grew in the 1960s, he also increasingly became fixated on astrological signs of the impending End Times. Provocative violence, the kind that could accelerate Armageddon, became that much more important.

Some of the men who became Swift's most active followers in the 1960s were part of one of the earliest documented anti-Semitic terrorist groups in the United States, the Columbians. With WWII just having ended, the Columbians, who were headquartered in Atlanta, harassed blacks and Jews, vandalized their property, and spread anti-Semitic propaganda. When law enforcement raided their headquarters in 1947, they found a stockpile of weapons, and vague plans to use provocative violence to ignite a sectarian war.

Several Columbians went on to become active in anti-Semitic and racist violence. One of the youngest members, Ed Fields, joined his friend, Nazi sympathizer and fellow Georgian J.B. Stoner, in creating the Christian Anti-Jewish Party in the 1950s. When they failed to attract enough members, they reorganized their group as the less outwardly hostile National States Rights Party (NSRP). While presenting an image of being just another politically minded anti-integration group, the NSRP matched their disdain for blacks with a fierce antagonism towards Jews. Nearly every senior member of the NSRP was a devotee of Wesley Swift.

Federal and local authorities fingered J.B. Stoner as the mastermind of a wave of bombings against mostly Jewish but also black targets from 1957-1958. Largely forgotten now, these coordinated attacks included the bombing of Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (better known as The Temple) in Atlanta, and gained national attention, eliciting strong rebukes from President Dwight Eisenhower. The handful of men arrested for the crime inculpated Stoner, but then recanted, once Stoner's friend and fellow lawyer, KKK Grand Wizard James Venable, became their lead attorney. By 1965, the California attorney general, Thomas

Lynch, identified the NSRP as one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the nation.

The next great wave of anti-Jewish violence in America occurred a decade later, again under the inspiration of Christian Identity and Rev. Wesley Swift. This time, a secret team of terrorists, under the authority of Mississippi KKK Grand Wizard Sam Bowers (no known relation to Robert), spent months bombing Jewish and black targets in the Magnolia State, including the Temple Beth-Israel, one of the South's oldest Jewish institutions. The Anti-Defamation League eventually contributed the money that law enforcement used to pay informants who lured Bowers' hit squad into a deadly sting.

The lull in anti-Jewish violence between the two waves of temple bombings can largely be attributed, again, to the different dispositions among Southern whites toward anti-black and anti-Semitic violence. Stoner and Bowers both tried, at various times, to redirect KKK groups toward anti-Jewish attacks. Both failed, and Stoner was even kicked out of the KKK for his violent strain of anti-Semitism. This is not because the Klan had become more egalitarian; like other white supremacist groups, they prominently featured anti-Jewish tropes in their rhetoric. But to risk criminal prosecution by going after Jews, when they could instead visit violence upon blacks with relative impunity, seemed out of place at a time when civil rights activists sought to undermine the so-called Southern way of life.

So Bowers and Stoner, and other CI devotees, changed tactics. Rather than use obscure biblical passages to try and convince rank-and-file Klansmen and supremacists to join their violent cause against Jews, they infiltrated and became leaders of right-wing groups without telegraphing their true intentions. "The typical Mississippi redneck doesn't have sense enough to know what he is doing," Bowers once told an FBI informant, "I have to use him for my own cause and direct his every action to fit my plan."

If they could harness the anger of whites against blacks, they reasoned, they could incite the same holy race war through indirect means. Wesley Swift assured them that Jewish manipulation lay behind the civil rights movement anyway. And Swift was promising, in a climate of increased social upheaval, that Armageddon was around the corner.

Some CI-influenced groups did attempt to target Jews in the mid-1960s but with little actual success. The Minutemen, a forerunner to the militia groups of the 1990s, sponsored several near-miss attacks, including raids on three leftist Jewish camp retreats. Police caught the would-be attackers with an arsenal of weapons that would impress the Army Rangers. Such stockpiles of weapons were common and consistent with the CI idea that a holy war was imminent.

“Kooks they are, but harmless they are not ...,” one law enforcement official told reporters. “It’s only due to their incompetence, and not any lack of motivation, that they haven’t left a trail of corpses in their wake.”

While many of the Minutemen may simply have been anti-government extremists, the leadership of the group consisted overwhelmingly of Swift’s top aides and associates. Consistent with this, the Minutemen’s anti-government propaganda almost always implied that a secret Jewish cabal ran Washington, D.C. in the interest of global communism. Following Swift’s death, devotees of Christian Identity became more open and brazen about their beliefs as the promise of a large if unwitting following dwindled, after the failure to push back the civil rights movement led to a steep decline in KKK membership. Christian Identity leaders then launched groups like the Posse Comitatus, the Aryan Nations, and others, whose names are still familiar today.

By the late 1980s, a prominent terrorism expert, Bruce Hoffman, argued that every significant right-wing terrorist group in the nation fell under the influence of Christian Identity ideology. Hoffman wrote this after a decade of high-profile acts of domestic terrorism. The Order, a group that included a number of Christian Identity believers, plotted domestic assassinations, murdered Jewish radio host Alan Berg, and attempted to counterfeit U.S. currency in hopes of destabilizing the U.S. financial system. The Covenant Sword and Arm of the Lord engaged in a number of low-level, sometimes bungled acts of terrorism; they were also arrested with chemicals that they hoped to use to poison the New York City and Washington, D.C. water systems. In both instances, near-siege-like raids became necessary to subdue the groups.

Law enforcement deserves substantial credit for undermining the anti-Semitic, racist Christian Identity terrorist groups of the 1980s and ’90s. Although their efforts sometimes led to unintended consequences, the FBI infiltrated these groups for decades, often turning member against member, and capitalizing on the inherent paranoia within each group to destroy them from within. The net effect was to push these groups into smaller and smaller units, from large group to cell-based and finally, to lone wolf.

By the 1990s, lone wolf Christian Identity terrorism became so common that a guidebook, Richard Kelly Hoskin’s *The Vigilantes of Christendom*, helped launch what can best be described as a terroristic ethos of self-radicalization within the ideological framework of the Christian Identity movement. So-called Phineas Priests operated on their own, but under the influence of Hoskin’s teachings; lone wolves attacked abortion clinics, gays and, of course Jews. In an echo of this weekend’s mass shooting, Buford Furrow, an apparent “member” of the Phineas

Priesthood, opened fire with an assault-style weapon at the North Valley Jewish Community Center in 1999, badly wounding five people.

That same year the FBI published a warning, entitled the Meggido Project, about the threat of domestic terrorism with a new millennium approaching. Noting that Christian Identity was the “most unifying theology for a number of ... diverse” white supremacist groups, the bureau asserted that “Christian Identity adherents believe that God will use his chosen race as his weapons to battle the forces of evil. Christian Identity followers believe they are among those chosen by God to wage this battle during Armageddon and they will be the last line of defense for the white race and Christian America.”

The same report also identified the group that would become the next great threat to Jews and people of color: radical Odinists, who embrace a more “muscular” supremacist ideology that they believe to be rooted not in Christianity but in the religion of the Vikings. As CI loses its allure, more and more supremacists have been turning to these ideas. Robert Glenn Frazier, the lone wolf former militia leader who used a shotgun to murder three people outside a Kansas City Jewish community center and retirement community in 2014, was a believer in this form of Odinism. Although his victims turned out to be Methodists, his intent was to mass murder Jews. Frazier’s anti-Semitic bona fides trace back to his time assisting members of the Order when they were on the run (and against whom, he later testified). Back at that time, he published a letter vowing that his militia group would “begin the race war and it will spread gloriously throughout the nation.”

Radical Odinism’s resemblance to Christian Identity in its anti-Jewish and racist aspirations is not accidental. A Christian Identity minister, James Warner, provided the raw materials to some of its earliest founders. To the extent that drawing distinctions between the two supremacist theologies is important, one needs to pay close attention to biblical references. Christian Identity believers deploy a host of selectively chosen, out-of-context passages to justify their wholesale revisionist view of God’s relationship to mankind. Rarely does one find, for instance, a mainstream Christian cleric placing a great deal of weight in John 8:44. “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires,” Jesus tells a group of Jews in that verse. “He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” By citing the passage on its own, CI followers elide a set of inconvenient facts: that Jesus was specifically directing his “you belong to ... the devil” remarks to a subgroup of Jews, the

Pharisees; that he had been challenged by the Pharisees as he was preaching to another group of Jews at the Temple courts; and that he had just promised those other Jews the possibility of salvation if they followed his message. But taken literally and on its own, John 8:44 could justify the premise that “Jews are Satan’s children,” which undergirds Christian Identity theology.

Indeed, that is exactly how Robert Bowers used the passage on social media before he walked into the Tree of Life temple, opened fire with his AR-15 rifle, and killed Daniel Stein, 71; Joyce Feinberg, 75; Richard Gottfried, 65; Rose Mallinger, 97; Jerry Rabinowitz, 66; brothers Cecil Rosenthal, 59, and David Rosenthal 54; husband and wife Bernice Simon, 84, and Sylvan Simon, 86; Melvin Wax, 88; and Irving Younger, 69. He wanted to kill more, he shouted to police, he wanted to kill “all Jews.”

In 1999, the year of the Meggido Report, Buford Furrow was one of only several supremacists who attacked Jewish targets. In September of 1999 *The New York Times* ran a headline : “Synagogues, Responding to Violence, Add Security as High Holy Days Near.” The article described a “year of high-profile anti-Semitic violence.” That year, the FBI recorded 1,289 reported anti-Semitic incidents, the highest number on record before 2017. Yet law enforcement, the Jewish community, and the country as a whole did not give in to fear. If we continue to be brave, without becoming complacent about the dangers posed by white supremacists, we can hope that what we are seeing now is another bad moment in a resurgence of hatred whose direction has thankfully proven so far to be cyclical rather than linear and uncontained.



Stuart Wexler, a historian and a teacher, is the author of *America’s Secret Jihad: The Hidden History of Religious Terrorism in the United States* and *Killing King: Racial Terrorists, James Earl Ray, and the Plot to Assassinate Martin Luther King Jr.*, co-authored with Larry Hancock.

Tablet

When Experts Ignore the Truth About Israel and the Palestinians

By Jonathan S. Tobin / JNS.org

September 26, 2018

When *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman offers up a Middle East peace plan, the world stops and listens. Or at least it used to. The three-time Pulitzer Prize winner has been opining about the region for decades, and the shopworn feel to his advice is beginning to feel about as tired as a prose style that remains as awash in clichés today as it ever was.

In 2002, when Friedman sought to play midwife to a peace initiative from Saudi Arabia, the result was a public-relations coup for the columnist/author, even if it turned out that there was less to the idea than met the eye. But it isn’t likely that his latest set of suggestions for Middle East peace — in which he offers the Palestinians a plan for putting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a pickle — will cause much of a splash. Friedman still writes as if he was uniquely positioned to speak truth to both sides and the world is hanging on his every word.

It isn’t. But that doesn’t mean that his writing is insignificant, not only because he retains his influential perch at the *Times*. Friedman has evolved over the years into a pitch-perfect indicator of conventional wisdom. If you want to know what is wrong with the thinking that dominated US foreign policy until the Trump administration — and what the people who believe they will run things again after they hope Donald Trump is swept out of Washington — then you should read Friedman’s columns.

That’s why his latest contribution to the ever-growing pile of schemes to fix the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is worth a look, even if it is as much of a non-starter as the rest of the genre. It also demonstrates anew that although Friedman has almost certainly forgotten more about the Middle East than Trump has ever learned, the administration for which he has so much contempt may actually have a better handle on the conflict than the veteran commentator.

We will soon be celebrating Simchat Torah, and Jews throughout the world will dance with Sifrei Torah in their synagogues,...

The passage of time since the publication of his book *From Beirut to Jerusalem* in 1989, which made him a foreign-policy rock star, has not been kind to Friedman. The conversation, especially at the left-

leaning *Times*, about foreign policy has fundamentally changed in the last two decades. At a moment when the paper's readers are far more interested in resisting Trump than in helping him succeed, Friedman's columns seem out of touch. Though his pretensions are still insufferable, his goal remains the creation of a kind of consensus about policy that doesn't fit in with the polarized environment in which we now live. As such, even the most critical of his readers can almost sympathize with the plight of a writer who seems to want everyone, even Trump, to be smart as he thinks he is, rather than to simply eviscerate the administration.

Friedman's column states a great deal that is true about the situation. He's right that Hamas is "a curse on the Palestinian people," and that it is "pursuing a strategy of human sacrifice in Gaza." The columnist is also correct to sum up the strategy of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as one of "I'm going to hold my breath until you turn blue." Its refusal to negotiate with the United States and Israel is as unhelpful to Palestinians as its endemic corruption. The latter could use some smart advice, and Friedman is only too ready to pluck some from the bottomless pit of his self-proclaimed wisdom from which he has been drawing for decades.

He urges the PA to tell America's moderate Arab allies that they will engage with the United States if the Trump negotiating team, led by presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner, agrees to redraw its peace proposal to include a demand for a contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank with a capital in part of Jerusalem. That would, Friedman argues, give the plan the support of the Arab world and put Netanyahu in a spot where he can't say no. The result would mean an end to the prime minister's center-right government and its replacement by one that would be pro-peace.

Like all the smart-alack wisdom Friedman's been selling since he gave the first President George H.W. Bush's secretary of state, James "bleep the Jews" Baker, the idea to tell Israelis to call him if they were ever serious about wanting peace, it all sounds so simple.

But it never occurs to Friedman to ask why they have rejected similar proposals in the past. After all, John Kerry spent years begging the Palestinians to accept just such a deal to no avail when he was President Obama's secretary of state. The PA walked away from a similar scheme when Ehud Olmert and the George W. Bush administration pressed it upon them. The same thing happened when Ehud Barak and the Clinton administration made similar proposals at Camp David and Taba in 2000 and 2001.

The problem with blind faith in a two-state solution to the conflict isn't with the logic of two states for two

peoples as an abstract idea; it's that the Palestinians have never been particularly interested in the concept. While the chances of Trump and Kushner brokering the "ultimate deal" are virtually nil, they understand that their predecessors' refusal to hold the Palestinians accountable for their support for terror and refusal to seriously negotiate are part of the problem, not the solution.

Friedman considers such insight to be intolerably pro-Israel, and the result of a corrupt deal between Trump, Jewish campaign donors, and Christian supporters. Leaving aside Friedman's history of being willing to encourage antisemitic smears about US support for Israel in order to attack his *bête noire* Netanyahu, the problem here is that he simply won't accept that even the "moderates" of the Fatah party that run the West Bank are as bogged down in irredentism and hate as Hamas.

If the Saudis and other Arab governments seem to have given up on the Palestinian cause in recent years (even if they can't say so publicly), it's because they know this. They regard their tacit strategic alliance with Israel a higher priority than pandering to the Palestinians.

Friedman thinks that Trump should listen to him and get to work "twisting everyone's arms" or else stick to "building condos and golf courses." If peace on those terms were possible, Trump would probably do just that. But he isn't willing to make the same mistakes as the last four presidents, who thought that Friedman knew what he was talking about. Which just goes to show that even though Friedman knows a lot more about the subject than Trump, the president's instinctual distrust of experts like the famed columnist is actually pretty smart.



Jonathan S. Tobin is editor in chief of JNS — Jewish News Syndicate. Follow him on Twitter @jonathans_tobin.

The Algemeiner

From Balkan nationalism to Zionism: was the Jewish State born in Serbia?

Israelis are increasingly heading to the Balkans for leisure and adventure. But our history with Serbia goes back a lot farther.

By Ronen Shnidman

November 3, 2018

Dear Reader,

As you can imagine, more people are reading *The Jerusalem Post* than ever before. Nevertheless, traditional business models are no longer sustainable and high-quality publications, like ours, are being forced to look for new ways to keep going. Unlike many other news organizations, we have not put up a paywall. We want to keep our journalism open and accessible and be able to keep providing you with news and analyses from the frontlines of Israel, the Middle East and the Jewish World.

President Reuven Rivlin visited Serbia this past July to participate in a ceremony with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic renaming a street after the Zionist visionary Theodor Herzl in the Belgrade neighborhood of Zemun. This unusual event, which marked the first ever visit by an Israeli president to Serbia, received less coverage than would be expected from most Israeli news outlets.

It begs the question: What was Herzl's connection to Zemun, and why would the Serbian government name a street after him?

The answer may surprise most Jews and even many ardent Zionists. The intellectual roots of political Zionism and the Jewish state did not start with the refined emancipated Jews of fin-de-siècle Vienna or Paris, and they certainly don't begin in Poland. Zionism's journey traces back to a pious Sephardi rabbi in what was then the Serbian border town of Zemun at the edge of the Austrian Empire. It was this rabbi who taught Herzl's grandfather and father and likely planted the seeds of the Jewish state, some 70 years before the First Zionist Congress in Basel and 90 years before the Balfour Declaration.

Moving from Balkan nationalism to Zionism

Historians in the past focused on difficulties secular emancipated Jews like Theodor Herzl had integrating into the rapidly developing European societies of Western and Central Europe at the end of the 19th century. However, Herzl's exposure to the idea of reconstituting the Jewish nation predates his coverage of the Dreyfus Affair as a journalist or even his encounters with elite antisemitism as a law student in Vienna. Instead, it can be traced back to his father's family's roots in Zemun (also known by its old German name Semlin) and the influence of the community's Sephardi rabbi, Judah Ben Shlomo Hai Alkalai.

Alkalai is today acknowledged as a precursor of the modern Zionist movement, but his ideas are usually mentioned in passing if at all. Likewise, there is very limited scholarship regarding how this Sephardi rabbi on the edge of an empire came to his revolutionary ideas for the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. Historians and literary experts have pointed to the influence of the radical interpretations of the Bible from the Kabbala as a source of inspiration (as was the case with Rav Abraham Isaac Kook). While it is certainly possible that the rabbi's knowledge of Kabbala played a role, what has been ignored is the influence of the early national revolts in the Balkans against Ottoman rule, in particular by the Serbs, and its possible influence on the ideas of a young Rabbi Alkalai.

Alkalai was born in 1798 in Sarajevo in what was then the Ottoman Empire and which today is Bosnia and Herzegovina. He came from a prominent family of rabbis whose roots trace back to Spain before the Jewish expulsion, and his father moved the family to Sarajevo from the large and well-established Sephardi community in Thessalonica. After spending years acquiring a traditional education, including rabbinical ordination and studying with kabbalists in the Holy Land, at the age of 27 Alkalai became the communal rabbi of the town of Zemun in what was then on the military frontier of the Austrian Empire. He served as rabbi for both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi members of the town's small Jewish community, according to information found in the Jewish Historical Museum's archives in Belgrade.

In his first work, *Shema Yisrael* ("Hear O Israel"), published in Belgrade in 1834, Alkalai provides a radical re-interpretation of the well-known Jewish prayer. In Alkalai's reading, the quote from the Bible, "Hear O Israel" is actually a commandment to gather all of the children of Israel together as one. This

singular body, Alkalai says, should be some sort of national congress that will supervise the general return of the Jewish people to the land of their forefathers. He also says that the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel would require the recreation of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem or the election of a political leader, known from the rabbinical literature as the Messiah son of Joseph.

Taking from Kabbala and Serbian nationalism

After the Damascus Blood Libel in 1840, Alkalai's work acquired a more urgent nature and his writings included a stronger kabbalistic dimension. He declared in his work *Minhat Yehuda* ("The Offering of Judah"), that a 100-year process of redemption of the Jewish people through voluntary means had begun. However, the book also stated that if the Jewish people did not unite and achieve an ingathering of the exiles during these 100 years, the next 100 years (from 1940 to 2040) would witness a terrible involuntary ingathering of the exiles accompanied by the outpouring of God's wrath.

What is interesting is that in Alkalai's earlier writings he places greater emphasis on the need for unity among the Jewish people for the return to the Land of Israel to be achieved. "It is easy to reconcile two states, but [hard to bring together] two Jews!" Alkalai wrote according to a chronicle of the Jewish community in Zemun written by Danilo Fogel.

Alkalai's focus on the importance of unity, as with other aspects of his writing, may have been influenced by his study of Kabbala. However, it is hard to overlook the influence of the Serbian uprisings against the Ottoman Empire that engulfed the region surrounding Zemun in the first two decades of the 19th century. The uprisings led to the founding in 1817 of the semi-independent Principality of Serbia and eventually to de jure independence for the Kingdom of Serbia with its capital, Belgrade, just across the river from Zemun. It was Serbian intellectuals of this era who coined and adopted the rallying cry for Serb nationalists ever since, "Only unity saves the Serbs."

The Serbian uprisings were the first successful national uprising against the Ottoman Empire, which controlled the Land of Israel and predated the emancipation of the Jews by the Habsburgs by 50 years. Perhaps Alkalai sought to emulate the national success of his Serbian neighbors? In fact, his advocacy for the reunification and return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel had a very practical bent as well.

"Although based on the values of Judaism and Kabbala, Alkalai's plans for the future of his people in the Holy Land were very practical," says local Serbian Jewish historian Oliver Klajn. "He envisioned buying land and creating settlements comprised mostly of Jews from the Ottoman Empire, since they would face fewer legal impediments than Jews from elsewhere." According to Klajn, Alkalai even founded in Zemun a society dedicated to the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, which was active among several Jewish communities in Serbia's largest cities.

Starting in the 1850s, Alkalai moved to a position that success in re-establishing the Jewish people in the Land of Israel would require the support of prominent Jews in Western Europe and the assistance of the European powers. Alkalai established in 1852 the short-lived Society for the Settlement of Eretz Israel in London. More importantly, he started touring across Europe to raise support for Jewish resettlement in the Land of Israel in the larger Jewish communities outside the Balkans.

Planting 'Der Judenstaat's' seeds

The Herzl family originated in either the Sudetenland (modern-day Czech Republic) or Hungary but moved to Austrian-ruled Serbia in the period immediately following the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718. While the Herzl family were Hungarian Ashkenazi Jews, they married Jews from local Sephardi families that moved to the region around Belgrade earlier under the rule of the Ottoman Turks. Documents maintained in the Jewish community archives (much of which were destroyed during World War II) note that Simon Leib Herzl, Theodor Herzl's paternal grandfather, was a pious and active member in the Jewish community of Zemun and a well-respected merchant. Theodor's father, Jacob Herzl, was also born and raised in Zemun before relocating to Budapest around the time of his marriage to Herzl's mother, Jeanette Diamant. However, Theodor Herzl saw his grandfather at regular intervals until the latter's death when Herzl was 19 years old and had moved with his family to Vienna.

Simon Herzl was a shofar blower of the community served by Alkalai, and he and his son Jacob appear to have studied the rabbi's ideas. According to a monograph on Alkalai found in the historical archives, the elder Herzl studied in particular Alkalai's book *Kol Kore* ("A Voice Calling"), which called for Jewish nationalism in 1848, the year of nationalist revolutions took place in Central Europe and in the Austrian Empire in particular.

However, some later literary scholars, such as McGill professor David Aberbach, suggest that Theodor Herzl and his book *Der Judenstaat* (“The Jewish State”) may have been more influenced by Alkalai’s *Goral L’ Adonai* (“A Lot for the Lord”). The latter book, published in 1857, almost 40 years before *Der Judenstaat*, laid out a political program for uniting the Jewish community and gaining external support from major world powers to re-establishment a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. Like Alkalai before him, Herzl traveled across Europe to enlist the support of prominent Jews and non-Jews alike for the creation of a Jewish state. The major difference is that Herzl succeeded in generating real interest among the non-Jewish political elite in Europe and created a lasting Zionist political infrastructure within the Jewish community.

Interestingly, several descendants of relatives of Theodor Herzl and Rabbi Alkalai who stayed in Zemun would become prominent members of the Zionist movement in Yugoslavia in the 20th century. One, David Alkalai, would represent Serbian Jewry at the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 and from 1924 would serve as president of the Zionist Alliance of Yugoslavia.

Balkan Zionism’s forgotten halcyon days

The Zionist movement would find fertile ground in pre-World War II Yugoslavia, and of the roughly 10% of Jews who survived the Holocaust many were former members of the Zionist youth groups. However, while Serbia’s government has demonstrated pride in the illustrious past of its Jewish community, this history is almost entirely unknown, even among educated Serbs today. “The Zionist movement in Yugoslavia was big and very important, but unfortunately we do not know much about it,” says Barbara Panic, the curator at the Belgrade’s Jewish Historical Museum.

It’s not just an issue of the much-reduced size and importance of Serbia’s once-thriving Jewish community, but also an unintended casualty of an educational agenda that sought to de-emphasize ethnic histories and particularism in Communist-era Yugoslavia.

“When I was school-age, we learned about the history of America and of Europe,” adds Panic. “Serbs do not know much about Theodor Herzl or about Judah Alkalai. In Serbian primary and secondary school, we do not learn much about our own history.”

THE JERUSALEM POST

French court to rule on Nazi-era looted Pissarro painting

American owners, patrons of Washington and Tel Aviv Holocaust museums, say they didn’t know it was seized from a Jewish collector

By Juliette Montesse



‘La cueillette des pois’ (‘Picking Peas’) by Camille Pissarro, painted in 1887. (Public domain, Wikimedia Commons)

PARIS, France (AFP) — A French court will rule Tuesday on an American couple’s appeal against an order to hand over a painting they bought which had been looted from a Jewish collector during World War II.

Bruce and Robbi Toll, wealthy art collectors, bought the painting “La Cueillette” (“Picking Peas”) by Impressionist master Camille Pissarro in 1995.

They say they did not know it had been seized from Jewish collector Simon Bauer in 1943 by the anti-Semitic wartime French government which collaborated with the Nazis. But in November, a French court ruled that Bauer’s descendants were the rightful owners of the painting, which the Tolls bought at Christie’s in New York for \$800,000. The verdict mirrors other legal disputes over art and property looted from Jewish owners by the Nazis which were subsequently sold on to often unsuspecting new owners.



Jean Jacques Bauer, who recovered a valuable Pissarro painting, reads the court decision prior to an interview with Associated Press, in Paris, November 7, 2017. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus)

Bauer was dispossessed of 93 paintings in 1943 by the anti-Semitic wartime French government.

The wealthy businessman narrowly escaped death when a train drivers' strike stopped him from being sent to a concentration camp.

Bauer recovered a few of his paintings after the war, but never *La Cueillette*, which Pissarro had painted in gouache in 1887.

'Bought in good faith'

Bauer died in 1947, two years after the end of World War II.

His family spotted an opportunity to get the Pissarro painting back when it went on display at the Marmottan museum in Paris last year during a retrospective of the artist's work.

They argued in court that the Tolls, experienced collectors who made their fortune in real estate, must have known the painting was on a list of looted artworks.

But the couple, who are patrons of the Washington and Tel Aviv Holocaust museums, insisted they had no idea it had been seized from Bauer.

The court accepted their argument that they bought it in good faith.

"It is not Mr Toll, who bought this painting at public auction in 1995, who should pay for the crimes of Vichy," their lawyer Ron Soffer told AFP in November, referring to France's puppet regime under the Nazis.

Ahead of Tuesday's appeal ruling the painting has been kept locked up by the Musee d'Orsay and Orangerie museums.

Out of 650,000 pieces of art stolen by the Nazis, about 100,000 had not been returned by 2009, according to figures released at the Holocaust Era Assets Conference held in the Czech Republic that year.

A government decree announced Tuesday that France would boost the powers of the commission which awards compensation to victims of Nazi looting during World War II.

The move, promised by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe over the summer, means the Commission for Compensating Looting Victims (CIVS) will now be able to launch an investigation on an individual's request and recommend appropriate compensation.

This includes artworks that have made their way into public collections or national museums, according to the decree published in the national gazette.

In 2011 a raid on a rubbish-strewn flat in Munich uncovered hundreds of priceless paintings, including works by Picasso and Matisse, that had been stolen by the Nazis. The flat belonged to Cornelius Gurlitt, an octogenarian whose father was one of four art dealers tasked by the Nazis with selling the art.

An additional 239 works were found at a house he owned in Salzburg, Austria.

Times of Israel

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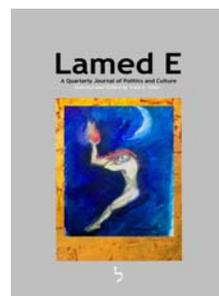
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