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Against Antisemitism

Julian Langer

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“Can the Jewish problem be resolved within the bounds of history? That is a tragic question. Whatever the answer may be, the solution does not seem to lie in assimilation, the nineteenth century’s hypothesis which did honour to its humanitarian feelings. Today, alas, we are not living in a century of mercy, and the events we are witnessing give us little hope of seeing the problem solved by the fusion of Jews with other peoples. Besides, we must observe that this solution would have meant their disappearance. There is likewise no room for optimism on the ground that this riddle will be answered by the establishment of an autonomous Jewish state, in other words by Zionism.”

Nikolai Berdyaev, Christianity and Anti-Semitism

At this point it is true to say that I am grieving and revolted. I am revolted by worsening antisemitism around the world and close to home. I am revolted by the awful violences enacted by

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the state of Israel and others, which are so often used as rationalisation, reason, Cause and justification for antisemitism. I am grieving my loss of belief in the idea that there are spaces in the world where Jews might be less likely to experience extreme violence, simply for being Jews. I am also grieving my loss of belief in an anti-racist milieu and culture that would revolt against antisemitism, as I have witnessed it to revolt before other examples of ethnic-violence.

In order to be upfront about my meanings in this piece, I will go a little further into the matter of my meaning regarding the terms “ethnicity” and “antisemitism”. With regards to “ethnicity”, I am by no means seeking to encourage the notion that the categories of racial-collectives are real or true, and that folk need be defined by them. It is true though that we live in a cultural reality that includes racialisation and ethnic groupings, and that reality exists in a way that is not real and still existent - this is another example of the Maya/illusions paradox, where something (race/ethnicity in this case) is a reality that is not real and still exists. With this, it is true to say that I am a Jew and that the ethno-religious group called “Jews” exists, as the reality of racial-collectivisation exists; whilst it is also true to say that race and ethnicity are not real. Moving to my meaning in using the term “antisemitism”, I am using it in the way intended by Wilhelm Marr, who coined the term, intended, as a rationalised hatred of Jews (and not other peoples who use languages under the Semitic group), as is the use of the term I have found most often and am most familiar with. The criticism that I am not including other groups here that could be called “Semitic” is one that I am entirely prepared to accept; with it noted that I have only ever found this appeal to occur alongside the allegation that Jews do not experience antisemitism and ought not be considered as a Semitic people - and that I am entirely opposed to any and all racist violence and logic.

The seductive rationalisation that the ending of anti-semitism lies within salvation provided by Jewish-statism, with Jewish politicians and army - generally called “Zionism” today - is clearly a falsehood; as described by anti-Zionist Jewish-autonomist Simon Dubnow, a “opiate for the spiritually feeble” (a harsh but seemingly fair description). It is a falsehood and a lie in the same way that it is a lie that any ethno-nationalism provides liberation for those it claims to liberate, as much as it is a lie that statism provides salvation for women, labourers, non-human living beings, anyone - any state merely substitutes one mode of violent repressive exploitation for another. It takes little empathy to appreciate how the notion of salvation through statism remains attractive. I can appreciate that many Jewish folk want to believe in this idea after the Shoah, just as I can understand Greens wanting to believe that government protections will end ecocide, or labourers wanting to believe that a state described as “socialist” will end the horrors of industrial capitalism, or women wanting to believe that female politicians and CEOs equates to the dismantling of patriarchy.

No, it is apparent that a successful Zionism does not mean the ending of, or salvation from, antisemitism. Statism/Leviathan, that Nietzsche called cold monster and new idol, offers salvation to none. This is equally true for the opponents of Zionism, who I would encourage to look at all statist rationalisations and appeals to nationalism, with, at the very least, intense skepticism - I would not consider it liberation for Palestinian folks to find the violence of the Israeli state ending, only to be subjected to a violently repressive Islamist-state-machine through a party like Hamas, a nationalist state that brutalises and industrialises citizens into utter conformity or death, an exploitative western-corporatist so-called “democratic” puppet-state, or any other. To echo the words of Daniel Boyarin and Shuli Branson, “no state solution” seems the most desirable approach, though certainly not an easy or simple

one, and I am skeptical of the idea of “solution”. I am attracted to the notion of the Diaspora Nation, as a nation that is not a nation, that is encouraged with the call for “no state solution” (It is also worth affirming that there have been examples of so-called opponents of statism embracing antisemitism, including Proudhon and Bakunin. Many so-called anarchists I know today have pushed for support of Hamas, Hezbollah and Iranian-state propaganda, seemingly under the stupefied logic of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”.)

It feels worth noting at this point that the Zionism I have been writing about is vastly different to spiritual-zionisms, such as those espoused by Moses Hess, Ahad Ha'am, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber and Hillel Zeitlin, many of which are closer to metaphysical-anarchisms and utopian libertarian-socialisms, than nationalist and statist Zionism - I am perhaps most appreciative of Zeitlin's utopian-socialist (I'd change the word “socialism” here for “tribalism”) spiritual-zionism, with its affirmation of Earth as the divine promised land. The Zionism of the nationstate, constructed for participation within the Empire of *realpolitik*, was rejected by many of those who sought for a zionism of spiritual and ethical renewal for Jewish peoples - to draw from Hess' differentiation of Rome (as Empire) and Jerusalem (as spiritual renewal), the Zionism of the nationstate is that of Rome. In feedback for a draft of this essay, from one of the two Jewish-anarchist friends I sent this to, it was put to me that, if I am going to reference this differentiation in meanings and vision here, then I should go into the history of spiritual-zionisms within the larger, explicitly pushing for the nationstate, political movement of Zionism, or not mention at all. While I do not feel it is needed for this piece to go into this history, as this is a piece on antisemitism rather than a detailed deconstruction of Zionism, that this history exists and is frequently confusing is worth affirming, and I would encourage anyone interested in the subject of Zionism to consider this history.

by no means enough. As absurd and unreasonable as it is to say, the final words to this piece, to my mind and heart, in my wild-primal core, perhaps partly out of desperation but more so of love, must be, have to be, can only be, the Hebrew word meaning “to life” that is l'chaim, l'chaim, l'chaim, l'chaim!

guably as old as history/History (I am reminded of Camatte's description of history/History as the wandering of humanity), displaced by the violence of Empires, as being a problem or a question. Instead, I want to ask about the antisemitism problem and question antisemitism. To restate Berdyaev's question: can the antisemitism problem be resolved within the bounds of history/History/(the wandering of humanity)? Like Berdyaev, I feel doubtful towards assimilation into the Totality and of statism answers - both of which are located within the bounds Beryaev questions. Outside of the bounds of history/History/statism/the wandering of humanity, perhaps we might find answers to antisemitism - maybe also autonomy for other diasporic folk seeking to survive amidst Empire?

At the point of closing this piece, the grief is here with the question of what comes after the last full stop? Individuals who I have known are sure to be relishing this moment of unsafely for Jewish folk and the rising nationalist presence within the political arena with glee, and I am glad for the distance that exists between us today. I remember those pushing the image of the swastika within the star of David with the absurd rationalisation that such imagery challenges the state of Israel. I remember former friends whose solidarity with Palestine became morphed into sympathy for neo-Nazi conspiracy theories and hatred for Jews. I remember being told by my Opa of his family's migration to Palestine from Poland, as refugees, then to South Africa and eventually London; I think about the worsening anti-migrant nationalism upon these isles and across the world, with intense revolt. I think about the poetry of the Jewish metaphysical anarchist Benjamin Fondane about the Jewish experience of violence and exile. I look over a message from one of the Jewish-anarchist friends, who provided feedback for this piece regarding the lack of pushback against antisemitism, where they affirm that they are experiencing similar struggles with this. The Yiddish expression of exasperation *oy gevalt*, meaning "oh violence", comes to my mind, but this is

Returning to the subject of statism; faith in an all-powerful state, of which Israel is clearly the most powerful, is upheld perhaps most intensely by those who advance the logic of conspiracy. This has been pushed by those wanting to deny the existence of antisemitism, with claims that the Bondi Beach massacre was a false flag event orchestrated by the Israeli state rather than it being carried out by two individuals sympathetic to the Islamism of ISIS in revenge for Israel's violence towards Palestinian folk, often falsely rationalised as done to end antisemitism. The online pushes for conspiracy theory remind me of Fredy Perlman's words in his essay *Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom*: "*I could start by noticing that the new anti-Semite is not really so different from any other TV-watcher, and that TV-watching is somewhere near the core of the choice (I include newspapers and movies under the abbreviation for 'tell-a-vision')*". In this case the internet is now the principal vehicle for the spectaclisation of "*tell-a-vision*". What I notice most of all about the conspiracy theorist, who seeks to Enlighten through their telling-a-vision, is the little awareness of the darkness of not-knowing that they are ecologically situated within, and how their vision may be obscured by all manner of falsehoods and the technologies of misdirection - we might be in positions of not-knowing, partial-knowing, full knowing, and cannot authentically say which on this matter. My desire for sincerity compels me to affirm that I of course do not know whether this was a false-flag event or not, with conspiracy theorists also residing in the bewildering terrain of uncertainty. However, I do not have faith in the idea of all-powerful states that are capable of choreographing the construction on events in this way, and so can say, with authenticity, that I do not believe in the rationalisations of conspiracy theorists. Let's also not forget that very often the push for conspiracy centres Jews as evil overlords and liars, like with Holocaust Denial, the

International Jewish Conspiracy and The Great Replacement Theory.

So now the question that comes to me is that of, where are the true opponents of antisemitism today? Knowing that Zionism and its political supporters across the world - be they states, media outlets or whatever else - are nothing of actual revolt against antisemitism, where are the rebels and folk who are prepared to resist this racism and stand alongside Jewish folk, as they have done for many others? I have seen no real resistance against antisemitism, with it frequently barely acknowledged, by anti-racist individuals, groups and international media outlets, who I consistently know to speak out against racism. I have looked to local groups to see if there is anything of opposition or recognition of what is happening to Jews across the world. There has been barely a reply. One of the Jewish-anarchist friends I sent a draft of this essay to responded with their thoughts being that there is a lack of pushback against antisemitism today (in the styles of Black Lives Matter and #MeToo) for reasons focused on Jews being such a small minority that they yield little electoral influence, the subtle mystique of Jews (that leads many to believe that Jews are fine without support from activists or institutionally overly protected), and that the association with Israel has tarnished the image of Jews in popular culture. My instinct is that this friend is largely on-point, which I am unwilling to accept as rationalisations for the relinquishing of opposition to antisemitism by those who claim to rebel against racism. David Baddiel wrote in his book *Jews Don't Count* that: "*Jews are somehow both sub-human and humanity's secret masters ... it's this racist mythology that's in the air when the left pause before putting Jews into their sacred circle*". Perhaps they are scared of being accused of supporting Zionism? Perhaps they feel that they would betray the people of Palestine if they oppose violence towards Jews? What renders Jews to be not worthy of anti-racist solidarity, if not some form or another of racist mythology regarding Jews? I don't

know. My ability to empathise with folk who are scared by the notion of being accused of being supporters of Zionism exists in conflict with my revolt towards such a lack of integrity and decency - all manner of cynicisms also come to mind. In his book *In Job's Balances*, Lev Shestov wrote that in "*his life man [sic] often changes from audacity to subservience ... in the end he usually obeys*" and it seems that many of those who have considered themselves to be voices and supporters of the audacious rebel opposing racism, now embrace the subservience of obeying a push for racism towards Jews, rationalised as anti-Zionist.

My motivation in writing this is not to articulate resentment or embrace anything of victimhood, but to voice anger and encourage revolt. The history of violence towards, repression of and the forced displacement of Jews is a long one, but it is not something that I have any desire to sit in; the only guarantee of the future is eventual death/extinction (this mass extinction event might include the animals we call humans and all those called Jews - perhaps). The possibility of the presence of revolt is here: this I believe! I utterly believe in the possibility of resistance and rebellion against antisemitism today. Outside of the spectacles and political machines, I have no doubt that there are folk and individuals revolted by antisemitism and opposed to its spread and violence. And as much as all racisms were born at one point or another and will therefore die, I am sure that antisemitism will eventually die - my want is for that to be as soon as possible, or (as many Orthodox Jews like to say) "*speedily and in our days*".

My mind returns to the question Berdyaev asks: "*(c)an the Jewish problem be resolved within the bounds of history?*" The more I think about the idea of a Jewish problem, or even the milder framing of the Jewish question, the more I revolt against it. Are Jews a question or a problem to be answered or solved, presumably by non-Jews? I do not embrace the idea that a people whose legacy of ancient displacement, a diaspora ar-