

Ms. Weir Goes to Washington

by Harry Clark September 9, 2016

The scurrilous attack in summer, 2015 on Alison Weir and *If Americans Knew* by Jewish Voice for Peace and US Campaign to End the Occupation, has threatened Weir and her audiences with violence. On March 30, Weir spoke at the Walnut Creek, CA public library, about her book *Against Our Better Judgment*, about Zionist influence on foreign policy. A few weeks before, Weir had been warned by Walnut Creek police of hateful on-line incitement to disrupt the talk; the threat referred to the JVP-USC material against Weir. The Walnut Creek Parks and Recreation Department received phone calls from people planning to protest the talk.

The talk, sponsored by the Mount Diablo Peace and Justice Center and Rossmoor Voices for Justice in Palestine, was well-attended, including by members of Stand With Us, an Israel propaganda outfit. They protested with signs and handed out fliers, also referring to the JVP/USC material. At the talk, five protestors seated themselves in the front row, and more stood at the back of the hall holding signs. During the talk, SWU protestors shouted repeatedly at Weir, prompting some audience members to call for them to stop. Only by speaking loudly, directly into the microphone, could Weir make herself heard.

Helen Lowenstein of SWU, a significant donor to pro-Israel organizations, according to Weir, was escorted from the hall by Walnut Creek police. She struck an audience member who was recording her, and was arrested and taken away in handcuffs. The Bay Area Jewish press decried an outbreak of anti-Semitism in their version of events.¹ As of this writing, the Contra Costa County district attorney's office has not prosecuted Lowenstein. One supporter later wrote to Weir, "Alison, your equanimity was extremely impressive—I think that really strengthened the message, because it made clear that facts and reason are on our side and the Zionists are nasty bullies." Weir said that she didn't actually feel calm, but was glad it seemed that way.

Weir, a journalist in the Bay Area, became interested in the Palestine question upon the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada, uprising against Israeli occupation, in fall, 2000. She became an activist and founded *If Americans Knew*, dedicated to informing the public, following her return to the Bay Area from

a two-month trip to Palestine in early 2001.² JVP was at that time also based in the Bay Area, and Weir felt some of them were from the outset whispering accusations of anti-Semitism, for her endorsement of the Palestinian right of return and a single democratic state. For a decade and more, Weir and IAK published studies of the media, reports on Israeli human rights violations, historical articles, and videos, about many aspects of the Palestine issue, in Palestine and the US. Weir traveled and spoke extensively, gaining a wide following. At the same time attacks on Weir by left Jewish groups and individuals continued.³

In 2014, Weir published independently a book, *Against Our Better Judgment. How the U.S. was used to Create Israel*,⁴ 93 pages of dry prose and 135 of footnotes and bibliography, which has sold an extraordinary 27,000 copies, according to Weir.⁵ None of her facts are new, but many are obscure, and their sum acutely depicts Zionist influence in the US from before World War I to Israel's establishment. She notes the formulation in 1913 of the *Parushim*, Hebrew for "Pharisees," a secret society of elite US Jews, dedicated to the advancement of Zionism. The *Parushim* took an oath of secrecy, and were told to regard their commitment "as greater than any other in your life—dearer than that of family, of school, of nation."⁶ Many *Parushim* were also publicly Zionist; the oath and secrecy reveal their fanaticism.

The *Parushim* were founded by Horace Kallen, an academic who devised the idea of "cultural pluralism," as an alternative to the "melting pot" model of American liberalism. Pluralism allowed liberalism to accommodate a degree of ethnic identification. The *Parushim* were the least "ethnic" of American Jews, their backgrounds assimilated German Jewish, not the ethnically distinct Yiddish of the immigrants who arrived by the million starting in 1880. The "Jewish distinction" to which they aspired was Zionist racialism, the myths of the "Jewish people" and "land of Israel," not the actual (non-racialist) Yiddish culture. Kallen's "cultural pluralism" exploited liberalism in order to advance Jewish separatism, exploited Jewish success under liberalism in order to subvert it, showing how insidious Zionism is, how tempting and corrupting to Jewish intellectuals.⁷

The eminent jurist Louis Brandeis was a member of the *Parushim*, and he resigned his public affiliations upon his appointment to the Supreme Court by President Wilson in 1916. Yet Brandeis remained covertly active for Zionism and other causes through a network of associates and proteges, notably Felix Frankfurter,

who was also appointed to the Supreme Court, in 1939, and carried on the pattern. This was highly unethical, later scholarship has argued.

As early as November, 1915, Kallen suggested to a well-placed British friend that Britain declare support for Zionism in order to encourage US Jewish support for US entry into World War I, an idea that gained wide currency, and may have played some role in the US decision. Certainly, it produced the Balfour Declaration of November, 1917, by which Britain promised to facilitate creation of “a Jewish national home” in Palestine. Zionists were in the US delegation at the postwar peace conference at Versailles, as well as represented by their official delegation, and the Balfour Declaration became part of the postwar settlement in the Middle East.

These and myriad other facts doubtless aroused JVP, whose chief objection to Weir is her emphasis on the Israel Lobby, mainly Jewish institutions, as the chief reason for unconditional US support for Israel. JVP claims, after Noam Chomsky and others, that the US-Israel relationship is due to Israel’s value as a US “strategic asset,” and that the Lobby is powerful only when it supports US interests. The first article in JVP’s 2004 book *Reframing Anti-Semitism. Alternative Jewish Perspectives* bemoaned “the Jewish conspiracy theories of some on the left,” those for whom “a Jewish conspiracy is much simpler” than the “complexity” that belies any decisive Jewish influence.⁸

The US Campaign to End the Occupation shares that aversion to the Israel Lobby critique. In 2011, Medea Benjamin and Code Pink called for a national demonstration against the annual meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, AIPAC, at which the top of the federal government and half of Congress make obeisance. (<http://www.counterpunch.org/2011/05/30/move-over-aipac/>) US Campaign and JVP have never attempted to organize such a demonstration, and they carefully “endorsed” it, while doing nothing to encourage turnout, and moving to suppress it. Phyllis Bennis, a perennial figure at the US Campaign, and a minor writer on “strategic asset,” has long opposed efforts to disseminate the Israel Lobby critique.⁹ She refused to debate the Israel Lobby with Jeffrey Blankfort, on the grounds that it “wouldn’t be useful,” echoing verbatim the demurrals of Chomsky, Beinín and JVP Per Mitchell Plitnick.¹⁰ Somehow, despite her “strategic asset” advocacy, Bennis wound up presiding over the related program of talks about

the Israel Lobby at the Code Pink AIPAC protest.

Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, authors of the celebrated *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, were unavoidably featured in the plenary sessions, while Stephen Sniegoski, author of *The Transparent Cabal. The Neoconservative Agenda, War in the Middle East, and the National Interest of Israel* was proposed, but rejected. Alison Weir and other writer-activists, including Jeff Blankfort, photographer and journalist,¹¹ Janet McMahon of *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*¹² and Grant Smith of Institute for Research: Middle East Policy¹³ were relegated to a workshop in the basement, which was very well attended. Code Pink repeated the event in 2012, and the Israel Lobby critics were allowed only to hold an event in the hall afterward, with the hall stripped of all Code Pink identifying material, and the audience invited to further events scheduled elsewhere at the same time. One hundred twenty-five remained in the hall to hear the Lobby critics. In 2013, the critics were banned from the program altogether.

Bennis was a “board-nominated” candidate for the JVP board of directors election in August, 2016. A “board-nominated” candidate is the JVP leadership’s way of instructing the membership how to vote, and Bennis was duly elected. The nomination may have been in view of services rendered over the years. Speculation in Washington last summer focused on Bennis as the *éminence grise* of the attack on Weir, though details were naturally scarce.

All of the candidates for the JVP board save one were board-nominated or incumbent, as in earlier elections; the first-ever “self-nominated” candidate lost. The election required a quorum of 20% of the JVP membership, or 1250, which was achieved only in the final hours of a 10-day period of on-line voting. This gives the impression of an organization run by and for an autocratic leadership, licensed by a small minority willing to select among the list of approved candidates, a democratic facade common on the authoritarian left. It is also perhaps common in the organized Jewish world that the leadership is accountable mainly to itself and its donors, while presuming to define the collective destiny.

JVP claims great importance as “a national organization closely connected to a growing grassroots base. We have 200,000 supporters on our email list, 10,000 individual donors, over 60 chapters across the United States, a staff of 25. . .” After twenty years of existence, JVP is really about 1300 people nationwide, less

than 5% of the number who purchased Alison Weir's book in two years. Their donor base is less than 40% of the readership Weir garnered in two years. If Americans Knew has 16,000 on their email list, and 175,000 Facebook followers, all as a byproduct of research, publication and speaking, with no attention to organization building. The programs, literature and outreach of JVP suggest that building the organization is their main task. Like the rest of the Israel Lobby, JVP has little to do with the views of the American people, but imposes itself by being relentless, highly organized, and lavishly funded.

Its 2013 tax return, the latest available, filed May, 2015, shows revenue of \$1.407 million and expenses of \$1.144 million.¹⁴ The amount of \$280,382 was retained, adding to net assets now totaling \$709,141, overwhelmingly in "cash, non-interest bearing" (\$97,832) and "savings and temporary cash investments" (\$607,802). Most of the expenses were for salaries (\$651,073, 9 staff). Total expenses were divided among \$773,288 for "program service," \$168,127 "management and general," and \$202,664 for "fundraising." Program services were described as "Trainings for students, rabbis and chapter leaders. . . vigorously protested against the war in Gaza in summer 2014. . . production of six-minute video explaining the situation in Israel/Palestine." The Gaza war began on July 8, after the end of the tax year, which ran from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. JVP has apparently claimed expenses not incurred in the tax year.

The claimed "close connection to a grassroots base" may be judged by the disbursements for "chapter expenses" on the tax return, \$23,783, an average of \$400 for each of the claimed 60 chapters, confirming the impression of an autocratic leadership clique backed by a small minority of members. JVP has since announced \$2 million raised, no doubt in part to be added to \$700,000 assets, as Palestinians beg on-line to fund their educations and other luxuries. The tax return does not disclose funding sources, which are categorized as "fund-raising events," and "other contributions, gifts, grants, and similar amounts."

The JVP membership was not consulted by the leadership over the campaign against Weir, and criticism erupted when the attack became public in the spring of 2015. The online JVP member forum, which in early July replaced an email list, was full of discussion, much it opposed. In mid-July Stanford professor Joel Beinin, historian of the modern Middle East and founding member of JVP, contributed his own attack on Weir. At the end of August, after two months of mutiny, the forum was taken off-line for a month, with stern

warnings about “civility,” a familiar censor’s ploy, and at least one person was ejected. When the forum opened again in October, there was no further discussion of Alison Weir.

(This writer had access to the forum as a dues-paying JVP member. The forum guidelines state that material should not be used without permission, but also state that material should be considered public. JVP’s attack on Alison Weir is a public matter.)

Beinin recounted his personal “disassociation” from Weir over her “objective anti-Semitism”

In light of the ongoing debate about JVPs decision to disassociate from Alison Weir, I’d like to offer the following:

My own experience with AW goes back about a decade, when I was on a panel with her sponsored by the San Jose Peace and Justice Center. She spoke about her then recent study of the New York Times reporting on Israel/Palestine. (<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/media/nyt-report.html>) The study itself is based on good research and documents what many of us have long known about the NYT’s coverage of the conflict and the frequent conflation of its news perspective and editorial views.

The problem begins when she explains why this is the case. The text of the study only hints at her explanation: that the NYT’s reporting is “inconsistent with normal journalistic standards.”

Did the NYT report accurately on the Vietnam War, the revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Nicaragua, the Iranian revolution, the 2003 Iraq War (before or after)? Did the Washington Post or the Wall Street Journal? We know that they did not.

Under questioning at this event, AW did not acknowledge that the corporate media as well as NPR generally report international issues in line with US foreign policy. Rather she said that the disproportionately Jewish ownership of the NYT and other media (this much is true) explained its approach to I/P.

This is an objectively anti-Semitic view because it attributes unique capacity to Jewish power and money to distort reporting (and ultimately government policy) on this issue. It does not consider that both media reporting and US policy on I/P are consistent with the imperialist character of US policy everywhere in the world. I tried to speak with AW after the event, but she was not moved in the slightest by anything I offered. I have personally declined to appear on the same platform as AW since then.

The phrase “consistent with” is meaningless, designed to hide the radical differences between “US policy everywhere in the world” and policy in the Middle East. It is a truism that the Middle East is the most subjugated subsystem in the international relations system. Since 1945 the US has written further ghastly chapters, beginning with the destruction of Arab Palestine in the late 1940s by Zionism. The nascent Israel Lobby secured US support for partition of Palestine against the advice of the US military and diplomatic

establishments. It also obtained vital, illegal, clandestine military and economic support from US Jewry, to which was added official aid after the Israel Lobby obtained diplomatic recognition for the Jewish state. Beinlin is a cardinal to Noam Chomsky's pope on "strategic asset" dogma, which has ignored the debut of the quasi-sovereign Israel Lobby, until a recent, untenable attempt to impose the "asset" view on the 1940s.¹⁵

The intermediate origins of US Middle East policy lie in the reaction against the left and liberal cultural and political movements of the 1950s and 1960s, represented by Ronald Reagan's political career, culminating in his election as president in 1980. The Jewish neoconservatives were key allies in the reaction. The term was invented by the socialist Michael Harrington, to describe a group of Jewish intellectuals, journalists and academics, mostly Democratic, even Marxist in their youths, who opposed the political and cultural ferment of the 1960s. Their fundamental concern was US support for Israel, a concern that deepened after the June, 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the anti-war Democratic presidential candidacy of George McGovern in 1972, and the October, 1973 Arab-Israeli war. The neocons opposed the policy of detente with the Soviet Union of President Nixon and national security advisor Henry Kissinger, then under attack from the right, and supported the "rollback" of Soviet communism. President Jimmy Carter's heterodoxy over Israel confirmed the neocons' antipathy toward the Democrats; they were firm supporters of Reagan in the 1980 election, and many received national security appointments in his Administration.

It is argued that the neocons were important in Reagan's rise and election. Their eastern establishment connections and liberal backgrounds gave credence to Reagan's hard-line anti-Communism, and prevented him from being characterized as a far-right warmonger, as Senator Barry Goldwater had been in his presidential bid in 1964. Allied with the Israel Lobby, the neocons helped pass Reagan's foreign policy agenda in Congress. This ascendancy marked the takeover of the traditional right by neoconservatism. That right (e.g., Goldwater) was fiercely anti-communist, but indifferent to Israel, often anti-Semitic (not Goldwater, whose father was Jewish, though he was raised Protestant), and isolationist, where the neocons were pro-Israel and sought war for "regime change" and "nation-building," especially against Israel's enemies.

The neoconservatives funded new and captured existing think tanks, and purged traditionalists and installed their personnel. The Republican Party was transformed the same way, "at least in regard to its

national security policy; there they have replaced not only the traditional conservative figures, but also the more moderate establishment wing that was identified with the elder George H. W. Bush.”¹⁶ The conservative flagship *National Review* succumbed, and the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* became a neocon platform, a decade before Rupert Murdoch founded Fox News as the Wurlitzer organ of the right.

Paul Wolfowitz was the leading neocon in the government. In the Defense Department in 1979, he chaired a 1979 study emphasizing an Iraqi threat to the Gulf oil fields, which was then so outlandish that Defense Secretary Harold Brown feared alarming Iraq and Saudi Arabia if the study should leak. Wolfowitz joined the Reagan State Department in 1981, where he became “one of Israel’s strongest supporters in the Reagan Administration.”¹⁷ After Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August, 1990, Wolfowitz and Defense Secretary Dick Cheney unsuccessfully advocated an attack in western Iraq that threatened Baghdad and the Saddam Hussein regime, and protected Israel.

Outside the government, “George Bush’s success in leading the American public into war might never have been possible without the energetic cooperation of the [neoconservative] punditocracy.”¹⁸ The punditocracy “celebrated American military prowess with a degree of reverence that bordered on worship. Then, in the war’s aftermath, they proceeded to ignore many of its considerable costs, as well as nearly all the fundamental questions it should have raised.”¹⁹ The January, 1991 congressional war vote was the closest since the War of 1812, and the Israel Lobby may well have provided the margin. AIPAC’s influence “was crucial, especially in helping the White House pick up Democratic support. . . Democrats who have benefited from large contributions by pro-Israel political action committees were among the swing votes, and the administration said that having pro-Israel liberals behind the resolution made it easier to hold moderate Republicans as well.”²⁰ (Professor Beinlin viewed the war as the fruit of abstract oil interest and militarism, omitting the politics of actual decisions.²¹)

The neocon ascendancy in the Reagan and Bush Administrations was continued in the Clinton Administrations by Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk, creatures of the Israel Lobby if not neocons themselves. Ross served in the Carter Defense Department under Wolfowitz and with interruption in the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations. Ross and Martin Indyk, then an AIPAC “research director,” co-founded the

Washington Institute for Near East Policy in 1985, which became a key node of pro-Israel personnel and policy. Indyk became director of Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, a post Ross had held a decade before, while Ross became special coordinator for the Middle East.

In defeating Iraq in 1991 the US had prepared the ground for an opening to Iran, after supporting Iraq against Iran in their 1980-89 war. The Iranian leadership was receptive and US foreign policy experts and business interests favored it, but Indyk imposed “dual containment” of Iraq and Iran, which was also designed to coerce Iran to stop supporting the Lebanese Hizbollah and to cease its nuclear research program. By 1995, resistance to dual containment welled up, as opposing equally two states that were bitter enemies seemed pointless and expensive, and Iran awarded an oil concession to US firm Conoco. Yet the Israel Lobby prevented Conoco from accepting the concession, and strengthened the sanctions on Iran, against adamant opposition from a substantial business lobby of firms with stakes in Iranian and regional markets.²²

Out of power, the neoconservatives grouped themselves in think tanks as “essentially a ‘shadow defense establishment.’”²³ In 1996 one group wrote the “Clean Break” manifesto for an Israeli think tank, urging the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime as the key step in reordering the region to secure Israel. In 1997, a wider group of neoconservatives and radical gentile allies founded the Project for a New American Century, which pressured the Clinton Administration to attack Iraq. PNAC members took national security positions in the George W. Bush administration, and Clean Break became “‘a policy manifesto for the Israeli government penned by members of the current U.S. government.’”²⁴ The 9/11 attacks gave the war party its opening.

Osama bin Laden’s path to jihad began in his youth, in reaction to the burden of Arab defeats, in 1948, 1956 and 1967. His father hated Israel passionately, and his mother noted her son’s moody piety and acute concern for Palestine. Young bin Laden concluded that Arab failures were due to their abandonment of Islam, above all of jihad. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan let him practice his beliefs, by assisting and helping lead the “Arab Afghans” who came to join the war against the USSR. The experience deepened and radicalized bin Laden’s outlook and view of Islam’s enemies, and produced Al-Qaeda.

The US did not “create” Osama bin Laden. The CIA had no contact with bin Laden in the 1980s, while

he was supporting the Arab fighters, and later fighting, in Afghanistan.²⁵ The Arab contribution to the Soviet defeat was negligible, though bin Laden distinguished himself in battle. Bin Laden disagreed with the acknowledged leader of the Arabs, Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian Islamic scholar, and one of the few scholars who acted on his principles. Azzam opposed forming an Arab organization separate from the Afghans, and only after his assassination in 1989 did bin Laden emerge as leader of what became Al-Qaeda.

Bin Laden called Palestine “the mother of all Islamic issues,” and it was the primary motive for the 9/11 attacks.²⁶ “The notion of payback for injustices suffered by the Palestinians is perhaps the most powerfully recurrent in bin Ladens speeches. . . Speaking just before the 2004 presidential elections, bin Laden himself voiced amazement that Americans, deceived, he supposed, by their government, had yet to understand that he had struck America because ‘things just went too far with the American-Israeli alliances oppression and atrocities against our people.’”²⁷ The 9/11 attacks let the war party contrive grounds for invading Iraq, and strong-arm the rest of the government, leading to the cardinal disaster. (Joel Beinin’s account of the 2003 Iraq invasion states that “the pro-Israel lobby, whose principal Jewish component is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), became a significant force in shaping public opinion and US Middle East policy after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.” Its influence predates World War I and it matured in the 1940s. This is one of many questionable statements in my view.²⁸)

Stephen Walt dates “the decline of the American empire” from the 1991 Gulf war. “Indeed, one could argue that this invasion was the first step in a train of events that did enormous damage to the United States and its position in the world.” Walt argues that the 2003 invasion “wrecked Iraq” and “destroyed the balance of power in the Gulf and improved Iran’s geopolitical position.” (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/08/02/when-did-the-american-empire-start-to-decline/>) The replacement of centuries of Sunni rule by Shia put Saudia Arabia and its Gulf allies on the warpath against the “Shia axis” of the Lebanese Hezbollah, Alawi-led Syria, Iraq and Iran. The US animus against Iran (mainly a function of the Israel Lobby), Gulf machinations, and Turkish prime minister Erdogan’s grandiose, neo-Ottoman ambitions have led to the attempted dismemberment of Syria. Russia has intervened to protect its own interests, leading to imminent collision with the US as of this writing.

US Middle East policy is the worst thing in world affairs since the Axis aggression of the 1930s and 1940s. It is fundamentally a Jewish Zionist design, laid on a foundation of Israeli militarism and irredentism, advocated most crucially by the US neocons and the Israel Lobby and their Israeli allies interested in balkanizing the Middle East. In 1982 Israeli journalist Oded Yinon published in the World Zionist Organization journal *Kivunim* (“Directions”) the article “The Zionist Plan for the Middle East,” which was translated by Israel Shahak, the late Israeli human rights activist and faculty member at the Hebrew University.²⁹ Yinon argued that Israel could break up all the Arab states and Iran into ethno-religious statelets that it could dominate. “Syria will fall apart, in accordance with its ethnic and religious structure, into several states.” Iraq’s “dissolution is even more important for us than that of Syria. Iraq is stronger than Syria. In the short run it is Iraqi power which constitutes the greatest threat to Israel. . . In Iraq, a division into provinces along ethnic/religious lines. . . is possible.” Zionists and Israeli foreign policy makers had long floated such designs, which compel surrender to Israel’s domination of Palestine. Israel and the neocons wanted the US to overthrow Saddam Hussein in 1991, but had to wait for the 9/11 attacks.

Obviously, the interests of the military-industrial complex were congruent with those of the neocons. The war party at the top of politics is comprised of gentile radical nationalists like Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Cheney, as well as the neocons and the wider Israel Lobby. The neocon-radical alliance dates from the 1970s, and they and the Israel Lobby were not junior partners, but key enablers, in the Reaganite reaction, in the 1990 Gulf War, dual containment, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the ghastly sequelae. The argument can be made, in my view, that Zionism has radicalized US foreign policy, has activated potentialities in the US imperial polity, from coercing US support for Zionism in the 1940s onward, that would otherwise not have existed.

The Middle East has become the “eastern front” of the US empire, what eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were to Nazi Germany, site and sight of its most depraved deeds and ideologies: the “clash of civilisations,” the “war on terror,” Islamophobia, and the burgeoning US police state. US Middle East policy is “about oil” like the Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1941 was “about Russian oil and wheat.” In both cases we look to radical nationalism, militarism and genocidal racism.

US policy in the Middle East is not *consistent with* US policy elsewhere, it is on a different plane entirely, in its destructiveness, at home and abroad, and also in its US advocates. In the matter of media coverage, which exercised Joel Beinin, Mearsheimer and Walt found that the Israel “lobby’s perspective on Israel is widely reflected in the mainstream media in part because a substantial number of commentators who write about Israel are themselves pro-Israel.”(169) Media critic Eric Alterman found that for “reasons of religion, politics, history and genuine conviction the punditocracy debate of the Middle East in America is dominated by people who cannot imagine criticizing Israel.”³⁰ Their tabulations are dominated by Jewish writers, editors and publishers. It appears to be a qualification for *New York Times* Israel correspondents and op-ed columnists to have a son in the Israeli military, or be married into the Israeli establishment.³¹ No Latin American dictator, no South African apartheid regime, ever enjoyed such partisanship.

Beinin continued:

As she has become more prominent Alison Weir (along with the Council for the National Interest and Washington Report on the Middle East) has become a major spokesperson for the view that the US-Israel alliance uniquely (unlike US alliances with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, for example) harms US national interests (which she does not define). While this is objectionable in its own right, it might not be a sufficient reason for JVP not to associate with her. Her uncomfortably frequent association with types like white supremacist Clay Douglas right wing racists like The American Free Press, and the anti-gay, anti-Jewish pastor Mark Dankof make her a liability for the movement.

CNI and *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* focus on Israel because they were founded by US government officials whose careers were damaged or destroyed by the Israel Lobby. CNI and WRMEA understand the role of Israel, together with its US lobby, as a dynamic, radicalizing, destabilizing force, central to the catastrophe wrought by the US in the Middle East. A conference on the Israel Lobby organized by CNI, WRMEA, and IRMEP in 2014 featured an impressive array of former government officials who catalogued Israel’s damage to the US and found that Israel is if anything an enemy, not an ally or a “strategic asset.”³² Beinin, Chomsky, et al. ignore this vociferous criticism from national security veterans, who in their view can only be deluded about “US interests.” Nor is it clear that CNI and WRMEA support the current US relationships with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

The nominal cause of JVP’s “disassociation” and US Campaign to End the Occupation’s expulsion of If

Americans Knew was interviews she gave to right-wing journalists (among hundreds given to other outlets), such as Clay Douglas, an obscure figure with a tiny audience who is trumpeted as another Hitler by the Southern Poverty Law Center. All parties to the attack on Weir denounced Douglas as a “white supremacist” and anti-Semite. Douglas’s blog states:

We Americans were born in a country founded on a violent and treacherous land grab from the original inhabitants, who themselves did not deal in real estate sales or mortgage fraud. Virtually every treaty made by the US government was broken by the US Army, which conducted the first modern extermination program, today known as “ethnic cleansing.”

The legal system of a country based on African slavery and extermination of its natives can only be an exercise in fraud and hypocrisy.³³

The version of Douglas’s web page from last summer, when the attack on Weir became public, is available on the Wayback Machine internet archive.³⁴ It holds a picture of Sitting Bull, overlaid with the “Twelve Lakota Virtues,” from Unsiiciyapi (Humility) through Woksape (Wisdom). A biography page states, about the 1960s, “we stopped a war,” and recounts pursuits and avocations from head shops, marijuana legalization and libertarianism, to marine businesses, motorcycle manufacturing, firearms, making documentary films and writing novels.³⁵ Douglas has clashed with authorities ranging from his former father-in-law, to the federal government (near-fatally), to the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League. Douglas’s web pages also detail interests in Donald Trump, chem trails, Bitcoin, survivalism and other popular obsessions. The pages are crude, obviously made by a self-taught programmer.

JVP was especially incensed that Douglas cited the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the Russian anti-Semitic forgery, among other anti-Semitic references on his pages. Douglas is not the only critic of Israel to cite the Protocols. The late activist and scholar Tanya Reinhart referred to the “present situation with the US lobby—as if the Protocols of the Elders of Zion had come to life.”³⁶ TV comedian Jon Stewart referred to the “elders of AIPAC” in a piece on presidential candidate pandering.³⁷ Veteran Israeli politician Uri Avnery wrote that “if the authors of the falsification were to return to the scene of their crime today, they would rub their eyes in disbelief: this figment of their sick imagination looks like coming true.”³⁸

Whether one views Douglas as an anti-Semite, or someone with a crude, ugly misapprehension of the real problem of Jewish power, perhaps depends on whether one views the Israel Lobby thesis as “objective

anti-Semitism” or basically valid. JVP and End the Occupation collapse the complex, contradictory personality of Douglas into a “hate” figure in order to smear Weir (after SPLC and the Jewish obsession with right-wing populism, rather than elite Zionism, as the font of evil).

Beinin uses vague, menacing, show trial language like “associating with” and “consorting with” to make granting interviews seem sinister and ominous. Rather than being spurned, it is probably better that far right audiences hear about distinctions between the Jewish public and organized Jewish leadership, as Weir drew, and hear that Muslim opposition to the US is the product of US policies, not Islamophobic motives. Douglas, and other right-wing outlets that interviewed Weir, such as American Free Press and Mark Dankof, have also interviewed Jewish critics of Zionism like Ilan Pappé, Jennifer Loewenstein and even Rebecca Vilkomerson of JVP, as well as many non-Jewish critics, who were not attacked for anti-Semitism by JVP and US Campaign.

Beinin concludes:

The most fundamental question that any movement must ask is, “Who are our friends and who are our enemies?” Alison Weir has chosen to consort uncritically with people who are not friends of any progressive, anti-racist movement for social justice. If she had done it once or twice or if she acknowledged it as an error, it might not be a major issue. Doing it repeatedly and affirming that there is no problem about this as long as she does not explicitly endorse the views of her interlocutors is naive at best. Whatever her intentions, this behavior gives our enemies more credibility when they assert that support for Palestinian rights, criticism of Israeli policies, BDS, and anti-Zionism are necessarily anti-Semitic.

JVP should oppose AWs “soft” anti-Semitism just as we would oppose the more naked form of those she consorts with. This is both a matter of broad progressive principle and of particular importance for us as a Jewish organization. We cannot be maximally effective in supporting Palestinian rights if there is any basis for our enemies to claim that only Jews who consort with anti-Semites (or people who are “soft” on anti-Semitism) support Palestinian rights.

Joel Beinin

The “most fundamental question that any movement must ask” is what it stands for. JVP stands for, among other things, Jewish control of the Palestine movement, behavior as old as “the occupation” itself. A generation ago New Jewish Agenda sought to remove from progressive politics the goal of reducing US aid to Israel.³⁹ Today JVP seeks to suppress the Israel Lobby critique, and uses the charge of anti-Semitism for its ends, just like mainstream Jewish groups. Weir was accused of violating the “anti-racism principles” of

the US Campaign to End the Occupation, by unnamed member organizations.⁴⁰ The “anti-racism” principles claim to “oppose Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, all forms of racism, and any other expressions of bigotry directed at any person or group.”⁴¹ JVP also claims that “our central tenet is opposition to racism in all its forms.”⁴²

The “anti-racism principles” were drawn up in 2013, likely as part of a long-term plot against Weir. The “principles” mention only anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which was protested.⁴³ There are no Islamophobes in Palestine ranks, and “anti-racism principles” are unnecessary to oppose Islamophobia. The “principles” ignore the history and literature of Zionism as a form of racism,⁴⁴ and of Jewish anti-gentilism in the “diaspora.” This suggests that the purpose of the “anti-racism principles” is to support accusations of anti-Semitism, a common gambit of “anti-racist” politics world-wide. The insistence of US Campaign and JVP that they “oppose all forms of racism” while they use “anti-racism principles” that omit Zionism to mount a show trial over anti-Semitism calls to mind Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

This was so egregious that, last summer, when the campaign against Alison Weir was at its height, the JVP leadership promised a “Zionism study group” to which members could “apply,” which would formulate a position on Zionism. Unsurprisingly, the idea died, until one member raised the question again this spring, and was eagerly seconded by eight other members. Facing another mutiny, Professor Beinin again donned his commissar hat to explain why taking a position on Zionism was inadvisable. Unlike his charges, Beinin understands that examining Zionism would expose the racialism and racism on which JVP is based. Like the discussion of the attack on Alison Weir, the Zionism study group discussion died.

In April, 2010, Dave Gahary of American Free Press interviewed Rebecca Vilkomerson, then and now executive director of Jewish Voice for Peace⁴⁵ Vilkomerson gave Gahary a second interview in August, 2012.⁴⁶ On both occasions Gahary was full of praise, perfectly sincere and constructive, giving his listeners an opportunity to hear Jewish protest against Israel, and the interviews ended on polite, even cordial terms.

Within a few days of the second interview Vilkomerson was denounced by Kenneth Stern, the American Jewish Committee's "director on anti-Semitism and extremism," for giving the interviews.⁴⁷ The attack came at the end of a screed by Stern against "anti-Israel activists [who] have sought to shoehorn Israel into the nomenclature of apartheid-era South Africa," namely, the BDS campaign. Vilkomerson thereupon denounced "a despicable anti-Semitic and racist website that ran an interview with me," claimed that she had been deceived by the interviewer, and had tried to have the interview taken down.⁴⁸

JVP states, "we are compelled to make sure the world knows that many Jews are opposed to [Israel's] actions." In JVP's logic, those who most need to know that "many Jews are opposed" are the followers of web sites like AFP, whose apprehensions of Jewish power range from the false ("Holocaust Hoax") to the factual ("9-11 Cop Who Arrested Dancing Israelis Speaks"). Denouncing the source of perfectly sincere interviews about JVP's activism as "despicable, anti-Semitic and racist" suggests that JVP knows anti-Semitism is utterly marginal in the US, and does not fear it. Rather JVP seeks to condemn any and all criticism of Jewish power as anti-Semitic ("objectively" so), no matter how much that power resembles the Protocols, from its own anti-gentilism and triumphalism, and from its identification with organized Jewry, rather than with a Palestine or secular movement. This identification is JVP's "strategy" and personality.

JVP national director Rebecca Vilkomerson stated: "We are trying to create a space in the Jewish world where we can express our criticism as Jews without needing to apologize for ourselves."⁴⁹ "I think part of our job as the Jewish wing of the [Palestinian solidarity] movement, is to facilitate conversations inside the Jewish community... So, I think its very important to think sort of how we plan a wedge... So, I think that the more and more we can sort of put that wedge in, saying the Jewish communitys not agreeing on these issues, the more we'll make progress."⁵⁰ Former deputy director Cecilie Surasky seems anguished most of all by the hostility of official Jewry. " 'It's very painful to do this work and it's very hard... I do not use the word McCarthyite lightly.' " "Jewish organizations in San Francisco have 'banned us [JVP] from the Jewish public square.' "⁵¹

In practice, being "the Jewish wing of the Palestine movement" and "facilitating Jewish discussions" mean constituting a separate moral standard for "Jews." In practice, JVP reduces criticism of Zionism and

Israel to the bare minimum in order to appeal to Jewish audiences.

JVP's "mission statement" (explains that it seeks:

A U.S. foreign policy based on promoting peace, democracy, human rights, and respect for international law.

An end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

A resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem consistent with international law and equity.

An end to all violence against civilians.

Peace among the peoples of the Middle East.⁵²

The term "occupation" has been misleading from the start. Within a few months of the June, 1967 war, Israel annexed and began to settle what it called "Greater Jerusalem" (to which it added later), expelled another 200,000 Palestinians from the West Bank, adding them to the 1948 refugees, and began settling the Golan Heights, soon followed by the West Bank ex-Jerusalem, and Gaza. It is correct to refer to the *colonization* of the occupied territories since 1967. Criticizing "the occupation" implies that the condition is still transient after nearly 50 years, and is distinct from Israeli society itself, when it expresses the fundamental settler-colonial impulse of Zionism, and its assertion of racial superiority.

Leading Israeli critics such as Yeshayahu Leibovitz and Israel Shahak, both former faculty members at the Hebrew University, long since likened Israel's policies to those of Nazi Germany, as did Hajo Meyer, a Dutch Reform Jew and survivor of Auschwitz. By 1969, "the late Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, began to talk of the inevitable 'Nazification' of the Israeli nation and society. By the time of the Lebanon War he had become an international celebrity because of his use of the epithet 'Judeo-Nazi' to describe the Israeli army."⁵³

In 1974, Israel Shahak wrote:

I am not afraid... of the comparison with "that which befell the German people between the two world wars." I am not afraid to say publicly that Israeli Jews, and with them most Jews throughout the world, are undergoing a process of Nazification. . .

... It includes—exactly as it did in Germany—not only those among us who are in my opinion real Nazis, and there are a lot of those, but also those who do not protest against Jewish Nazism, so long as they think it serves Jewish interest... .

... I am trying to act before it is too late.⁵⁴

Hajo Meyer gave an interview shortly before his passing in 2014.

“If we want to stay really human beings, we must get up and call the Zionists what they are: Nazi criminals,” Meyer said. The hate of the Jews by the Germans “was less deeply rooted than the hate of the Palestinians by the Israeli Jews,” he observed. “The brainwashing of the Jewish Israeli populations is going on for over sixty years. They cannot see a Palestinian as a human being.”⁵⁵

JVP’s language of “ending the occupation,” and “peace, democracy, human rights, and respect for international law,” is not heroic and exemplary, but an insult to the victims.

Rather than address the role of the Israel Lobby and the massive US official support to Israel, the chief responsibility of US citizens, JVP’s main activity has been the BDS (boycott-divestment-sanctions) campaign. In 2005, when 170 Palestinian organizations within and without Palestine called for BDS against Israel, they made no distinction between Israeli activities in pre-1967 Israel and in the territories conquered in the June, 1967 war. Even before the 2005 call, in 2003, JVP stated that they do “not now endorse a boycott of all Israeli products, but we disagree with claims made by some members of the Jewish community that such a boycott would necessarily be anti-Semitic.”⁵⁶ As Marc Ellis explained: “Progressive Jews want to walk the fine line of remaining inside the Jewish mainstream with the hope that one day they will become the leaders of a reformed, ethical Jewish establishment.”⁵⁷

This was a vain hope. The mildest BDS initiatives to divest holdings in occupation-linked companies, at the TIAA-CREF retirement fund, on college campuses, and in Christian churches, were fanatically opposed by US organized Jewry, from Israel, and even by Israeli diplomats in the US, who haunted student governments and food co-ops. The actions of the churches show the overwhelming Jewish pressure on American institutions.

The 2014 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA approved by 310 to 303 an anti-occupation divestment resolution that was attacked as anti-Semitic by American Jewish organizations from J Street and the *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper⁵⁸ rightward,⁵⁹ and denounced by Israeli prime minister Netanyahu.⁶⁰ The resolution stated: “This action on divestment is not to be construed or represented by any organization of the PC(USA) as divestment from the State of Israel, or an alignment with or endorsement of the global BDS (Boycott, Divest and Sanctions) movement.”⁶¹

At the same time, in a 54-8 vote, the Commissioners, the highest church body, disavowed the critical

Zionism Unsettled. A Congregational Study Guide, published by the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the PC-USA, and required the disavowal to be noted in all church literature catalogs.⁶² The title, condensed and edited from a theological study, is still available on the Israel-Palestine Mission web site.⁶³

At the 2016 General Assembly, the PC-USA rejected a motion to boycott Hewlett-Packard products, despite its large military business,⁶⁴ passed a motion opposing RE/MAX Realty's sales of properties in the occupied territories,⁶⁵ and passed a motion "On Prayerfully Studying the Palestinian Civil Society Call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions" after amending it to include consulting "resources that oppose this BDS movement" and "our interfaith partners who oppose the BDS movement."⁶⁶ It also voted to "answer with action on another resolution" a resolution to withdraw from the US Campaign to End the Occupation, which it called a "divisive coalition." " 'This one-sided political coalition's website (<http://www.endtheoccupation.org>) reveals that its agenda includes seeking "to isolate Israel economically, socially, and culturally," and promoting "comprehensive divestment" against Israel, while overlooking anti-Israel aggression.' " "The BDS movement claims to be a human rights campaign to secure justice for Palestinians, yet its stated goals make it clear that its true goal is to see the de-legitimization and end of the Jewish State."⁶⁷ The resolution on Prayerfully Studying the BDS call "answered" the US Campaign withdrawal resolution.

The Presbyterian resolution quoted a Methodist resolution about leaving the US Campaign,⁶⁸ the fruit of their own deliberations on Palestine, which were likewise furiously attacked.⁶⁹

The liberal Christians are terrified to question the racialism of Israel simply because it is Jewish. Jewish Voice for Peace betrays them by substituting its "anti-occupation" critique for the long-standing analysis of Zionism as a form of racism. The condescending sop that BDS is "not anti-Semitic" conceals the failure to condemn Zionism, including the US Israel Lobby, forthrightly, which leaves church people and other critics defenseless.

While a corporate campaign against international security firm G4S supports the thousands of Palestinian prisoners in the prisons G4S manages in Israel, including the hunger strikers, for the most part, divestment from "the occupation" is the most oblique, irrelevant gesture that can be made. It implies that corporate profits are the chief enablers of Israel's actions, and attributes chimerical power to institutional investment

choices. BDS, anti-occupation or not, ignores the official US support for Israel which ought to be the chief concern of US citizens, and the Israel Lobby that drives it. BDS proponents have no answer to the question of how BDS will change US policy.

The Palestinians call for academic and cultural boycott of Israel⁷⁰ was taken up by the American Studies Association, which in December, 2013 voted by a 2-1 margin for an academic boycott of Israeli institutions.⁷¹ The ASA action was seconded by the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association.⁷² Unlike JVP's anti-occupation BDS, these initiatives affirmed that Israel itself, not "the occupation," should be sanctioned, and affected Israeli Jewish institutions and personnel directly. These initiatives were attacked with demonic fury by the Israel Lobby.⁷³ JVP stood aside, stating during the ASA discussion: "While Jewish Voice for Peace takes no position on academic boycotts, we do not believe that boycotts to pressure Israel to abide by international law are inherently anti-Semitic."⁷⁴

An academic boycott resolution in the American Anthropological Association in spring, 2016 failed by 39 votes of 4,807 cast (2,423-2,384), and the Israeli minister of "public security and strategic affairs," tasked with opposing BDS, crowed about his intervention despite his near-defeat.⁷⁵

On the culture front, Roger Waters of Pink Floyd had questioned an Israeli engagement in 2005 and by 2011 was in complete opposition,⁷⁶ joined by writer Alice Walker, poet Remi Kanazi and others.⁷⁷ A steady stream of high-profile artists have declined to perform in Israel, but many others are terrified of damage to their careers.⁷⁸

The fraction of Israel's trade from products originate in the settlements is negligible, and only curtailing trade with Israel proper will have an effect.⁷⁹ Europe is Israel's leading trade partner, thanks to the 2000 European Union Association Agreement, whose Article 2 contains human rights provisions that have been the basis for calls to abrogate the agreement, ignored but growing.⁸⁰ European consumer boycotts of Israeli products have had an effect.⁸¹

In early 2015, JVP finally threw in the towel. "JVP has long participated in the global movement to hold Israel accountable through nonviolent economic pressure, and we've done so by focusing on Occupation-specific targets. . . Today, the idea that there is a clear economic, political, or social separation between

‘Israel’ and ‘the occupation,’ has been widely discredited.” “BDS initiatives offer academics a way to oppose Israeli institutional complicity in the denial of Palestinian access to education.”⁸² JVP quoted an Israeli analysis from 2010, five years prior to their statement, about the indivisibility of the Israeli economy and “the occupation.”⁸³ Obviously, responsibility for “the occupation,” and all Israeli policies, has always rested with the government and people of Israel.

The Israeli government in 2015 branded BDS a “strategic threat,”⁸⁴ allocated \$25 million for a counter-campaign,⁸⁵ and staged a conference at the UN,⁸⁶ all this supplementing covert, sometimes violent attacks and threats on BDS campaigners.⁸⁷ In the guise of fighting BDS, the Israel Lobby is attempting to define the occupied territories as Israeli in US trade policy and to impose those terms on US trading partners.⁸⁸ The Israel Lobby has also succeeded in making BDS illegal in state legislation.⁸⁹

The Israel Lobby, which JVP sought to avoid confronting through BDS, overwhelmed BDS when it acquired critical mass. In response JVP can only “support the right to boycott,” not present any serious analysis of the force behind the anti-BDS campaign. The Mearsheimer/Walt Israel Lobby critique was difficult to ignore, and in late 2006 JVP started Muzzlewatch,⁹⁰ which, in a typical, minimal formulation, “tracks efforts to stifle open debate about US-Israeli foreign policy,” rather than, say, “efforts to drive the US into genocidal wars against Muslim nations, wars that incite terrorism against the US.” Muzzlewatch tapered off in 2015, probably because the Israel Lobby’s total war on critics prompted the founding of the Palestine Legal defense organization.⁹¹ JVP organizes Jews-only demonstrations over Israel against American Jewish institutions, to showcase “Jewish dissent” for the gentiles,⁹² and enlists the gentiles in “transforming the Jewish community” such as its unavoidable support for the Jewish National Fund, a key Zionist instrument, if not challenging its grip on foreign policy.⁹³

JVP practices “legislative advocacy,” claiming, amidst genocide and the clash of civilizations, that “members of Congress are paying increasing attention to our message that all people deserve justice, fairness, and equality.”⁹⁴ In addition to the executive, “the U.S. Congress has proven an even more consistent, unrelenting agent in making Israel a regional behemoth impervious to world-wide criticism,” a role scripted by the Israel Lobby.⁹⁵ To address this requires a cultural transformation in our view of the Israel Lobby, its

damage to the US (and to Israel), and of Zionism's claim on "Jewish identity" and gentile conscience.

The bulk of the "Palestine movement" exists to prevent such a transformation. The Israel Lobby critique was suppressed when Code Pink slipped the leash and called a national demonstration against AIPAC, something JVP and US Campaign have not done in two decades of existence. JVP and USC carefully "endorsed" it, but did not promote it, and it is now carried on by ANSWER and Palestinian group Al-Awda, neither a member of USC.⁹⁶

JVP's minimal critique favors *the Jewish people*, which for JVP is an ontological category, a view it shares with Zionism, which was a response, not simply to anti-Semitism, but to liberalism and the "threats" of emancipation and assimilation. The fundamental opposition of Zionism is not Jewish settler vs. Arab indigene in Palestine, but Jew vs. gentile everywhere.

Russian Zionist ideologue Ahad Ha'am sought to create a "'spiritual center' [that] would counteract the assimilatory trends threatening the Jewish people," for "it was assimilation, not antisemitism, that threatened the Jewish people most compellingly."⁹⁷ This complemented the racist anti-Semitism that arose at the same time, which Ahad Ha'am reciprocated. He disowned his daughter when she married a non-Jew, declaring that "the state has no daughters," and dismissed the offer of a friend to convert the young man because "for non-religious Jews like himself even after a hundred such conversions, 'a goy remains a goy'" who could not "'change his soul from within.'"⁹⁸

Ha'am's contemporary Leon Pinsker stated: "the Jews comprise a distinctive element among the nations under which they dwell, and as such can neither assimilate nor be readily digested by any nation." "The proper, the only solution, is in the creation of a Jewish nationality, of a people living upon its own soil, the auto-emancipation of the Jews; their return to the ranks of the nations by the acquisition of a Jewish homeland." "We must give up contending against these hostile impulses [anti-Semitism]. . . we should abstain from it as a waste of time and energy."⁹⁹

From this ideological affinity, Zionism cooperated with anti-Semitic movements down to and including Nazism, most notoriously in the Transfer Agreement of 1933, which broke the promising Jewish-led boycott of Nazi Germany. Zionism invariably favored its political designs in Palestine over the fate of imperiled

Jews, through World War II and the Judeocide, and after the war.¹⁰⁰ The Judeocide happened because of Hitler and Nazism, not because Zionism had not yet established a Jewish state. Had Hitler conquered the Near East, Palestine would have been no refuge.

The JVP video “Israel Palestine Conflict 101,”¹⁰¹ which claims to be a “short, historically accurate introduction to the Israel Palestine conflict,” begins with the question, “What would happen, if you built a refuge for a persecuted people, in a place where another people already lived?... Many Jews fled harsh persecution in anti-Semitic Europe, especially the Nazi Holocaust.” JVP presents Zionism as necessary, embracing its racialism and ignoring its illiberalism. “Zionists encouraged massive integration to historic Palestine, at that time a British colony, where Jews had an *age-old connection* [speaker’s emphasis], and where small Jewish communities had long existed among larger groups of indigenous peoples.”

Despite JVP’s insistence on difference and separatism, the Palestinian Jews were indigenous; religious practice in late Ottoman Palestine was syncretic, with Jews, Christians and Muslims frequenting each other’s religious festivals.¹⁰² The “land of three [separate] faiths” was a British invention. The Palestinian Jews opposed Zionism on traditional religious grounds, and for its harm to their Arab friends and neighbors. “Most of those [Jews] who inhabited the Land of Israel resented the arrival of the Zionists in the late 19th century.”¹⁰³ Jacob de Haan, an Orthodox Dutch Jew, journalist and writer, who had settled in Palestine and come to oppose Zionism, became the representative of the devout Jews. He advocated for them against Zionism to the British Mandate, notably against the power of the Zionist-run Jewish Agency to tax Jewish activity, and pursued anti-Zionist diplomacy with the receptive King Abdullah of Transjordan. He became a marked man to the Haganah, the Zionist paramilitary force, and was assassinated by them in 1924.¹⁰⁴

The *age-old connection* was strictly a religious conceit, never intended to be realized. The Talmud states that God imposed on Jews three oaths that proscribed Zionism. The “great majority of traditional Judaism’s most important rabbis interpreted the three oaths and the continued existence of the Jews in exile as religious obligations.”¹⁰⁵ There were 5,000 Jews in Palestine, and 250,000 Muslims, at the end of the 18th c. Religious Zionism was invented by Russian Jews in the late 19th c., not by Palestinian Jews.

Shlomo Sand, historian at Tel Aviv University, in *The Invention of the Land of Israel*, showed from

academic sources that the term *Eretz Israel*, “land of Israel,” was used religiously only from around 150 CE, and was “invented as a changing territorial space subject to the rule of ‘the Jewish people’” by Zionism.¹⁰⁶ Today in Israel the term is a ubiquitous anachronism, e.g., “the prehistoric land of Israel,” “the land of Israel under Arab occupation,” or “the land of Israel under Crusader rule,” and is inserted in translations of ancient literature and in histories by Israeli academics.

In *The Invention of the Jewish People*, Sand argued that there was no mass expulsion of Jews from Judea, neither from the Babylonian conquest, nor from the Roman suppression of Jewish anti-pagan revolts. The growth of Judaism around the Mediterranean was due to proselytizing and conversion, not migration. Farther afield, the Himyar kingdom in today’s Yemen converted in the 4th c, as did the Khazar kingdom around the Black Sea in the 8-9th c. The large central European Jewish population may have descended from the fallen Khazar kingdom, or from pagan converts. With the establishment of Israel, “Jewish genetics” attempted to establish a biological basis for Zionism, disguised as research on Jewish genetic diseases. Sand marvels that once, “anyone who argued that all Jews belong to a nation of alien origin would have been classified at once as an anti-Semite. Nowadays, anyone who dares to suggest that the people known in the world as Jews (as distinct from today’s Jewish Israelis) have never been, and are still not, a people or a nation is immediately denounced as a Jew-hater.” (*The Invention of the Jewish People*, 21)

In *How I Stopped Being a Jew*, Sand stated: “Nowhere is there to be found a way of life common to all so-called secular Jews.”¹⁰⁷ “I am today fully conscious of never having been a secular Jew, understanding that such an imaginary characteristic lacks any specific basis or cultural perspective and that its existence is based on a hollow and ethnocentric view of the world.”¹⁰⁸

JVP today has a rabbinical council, but it was not founded as a religious organization, and does not call itself one. Its “interfaith” activity, in addition to imposing the minimal “anti-occupation” critique, hounds the Christian left about anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.¹⁰⁹

Whether religious or secular, JVP’s “Jewish politics” exploits Palestine to control the gentile discussion, reduce the issue to an internal Jewish debate, and promote JVP as organized Jewish life. JVP’s language is complacent and anodyne because JVP is not concerned mainly with Palestine, but mainly with “being

Jewish,” which has never been more successful. Naturally, people are interested in their ancestry and background, but this is a personal, individual matter, including a religious conscience. Collective *völkisch* politics at best distracts from our shared responsibility for the state of Israel and the mortal threat that it poses to all of us.

JVP is merely the current exemplar of a fifty year-old problem. Like “their cosmopolitan Jewish predecessors in the pre-World War I Socialist party and in the student movement of the 1930s, the Jewish New Leftists [late 1950s-early 1960s] did not desire to be tied to particularistic primordial groups and identities. They wanted instead to be part of a universalistic movement.”¹¹⁰ This normal secularism was swept away in a tsunami of *völkisch* politics with Israel’s dramatic victory in the June, 1967 war. This is not limited to activism, nor to one avuncular commissar-professor, but includes the leading intellectuals of the Jewish left, such as those on JVP’s “advisory board”, including Noam Chomsky and Judith Butler.

In his first collection of writing on the Middle East, *Peace in the Middle East?*(1974, republished as *Middle East Illusions* in 2004 with additional material), Chomsky passed off Zionist youth movement dogma from his teenage days as “radical analysis.” Zionism was held to be a revolutionary force working in the interest of the Arab masses against the British Empire and the Arab *effendi* class. The kibbutz, the key institution of Zionist settlement, was an example of anarchist, collective decision making. Binationalism was an offer to share the land with the Palestinians.

Chomsky has yet to abandon these views. In 1985 he acknowledged that Arab-Jewish cooperation was a Zionist pipe-dream, but in 1999 repeated his defense of binationalism, despite the fact that all its proponents sought Jewish demographic parity and majority. He acknowledged the racism of the kibbutz and its role in Zionist settlement, but still attempts to “abstract away the external environment” and defend it as an “anarchist ideal.” He has never cited Gershon Shafir’s outstanding study, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, which discusses the kibbutz as a racist instrument of Ashkenazi Jewish settlement, derived from German attempts to oppose a Polish “demographic threat” in the eastern Reich in the late 19th c.¹¹¹ Nor has Chomsky ever cited Boas Evron’s *Jewish State or Israeli Nation*, which argues for secular Israeli Hebrew nationality, to supersede Zionist Jewish nationality. Zionism’s “radicalism”

was racial, not social.

In a 1972 article, Chomsky stated:

The Zionist opposition to assimilationist tendencies was, in my opinion, justifiable, but not if it leads to an emphasis on the profound significance of purity of nation and race. Even if it were accurate to claim that the enlightenment view of human unity is disintegrating, I cannot accept that this process of disintegration is to be regarded with favor (nor is the 'enlightenment view' incompatible with forms of social organization that permit those who wish to retain ties of national identification).¹¹²

Vague language about "ties of national identification" cannot obscure the fact that Zionist "Jewish people" ideology is not "compatible with the 'enlightenment view,'" but has from the outset constituted "purity of nation and race."

Chomsky claims that Ahad Ha'am was "very sympathetic to the Palestinians," but the first full translation of his best known article on that subject viewed his concern as strictly instrumental, "much ado about little."¹¹³ Chomsky dismissed Shlomo Sand by explaining Zionism as a work of "imagination," after Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*.¹¹⁴ Chomsky claims that Ahad Ha'am anticipated Anderson, in distinguishing between the "historical Moses, if there was such a person," and the Moses of "national mythology." "Sand debunks the historical Moses, but from Ha'am's point of view, it makes no difference."¹¹⁵

Zionism was certainly imaginative, as Jews in the late 19th c lacked national characteristics, such as language, culture and territory, as the Zionists frankly admitted (overlooking the actual Yiddish quasi-nation, which they despised). The epic fakery that Sand describes recalls the race theories of Nazism and South African apartheid, with which Zionism and Israel had close affinity. The illiberalism and bigotry of Ahad Ha'am and Pinsker, the messianic claims to Palestine, and the view of Arab inferiority, of Ben-Gurion and his cohort even before World War I¹¹⁶ pointed at the start to today's Judeo-Nazism, the terminus of racialist "imagination," a comparison made by Jewish critics cited above.

Judith Butler, the philosopher and comparative literature scholar at UC Berkeley, wrote a post-modern mystification of "Jewishness." She began "seeking to debunk the claim that any and all criticism of the State of Israel is effectively anti-Semitic."¹¹⁷

If I succeed in showing that there are Jewish resources for the criticism of state violence, then I will have managed to show that a Jewish critique of Israeli state violence is at least possible, if not ethically obligatory. If I show, further, that there are Jewish values of cohabitation with the non-Jew that are part of the very ethical substance of diasporic Jewishness, then it will be possible to conclude that commitments to social equality and social justice have been an integral part of Jewish secular, socialist, and religious traditions. . . it has become necessary to reiterate this argument over and over against a public discourse that assumes any criticism. . . is anti-Semitic, or anti-Jewish, not in the service of the Jewish people, or in no way in line with what we might generally call Jewish values. In other words, it would be a painful irony indeed if the Jewish struggle for social justice were itself cast as anti-Jewish.¹¹⁸

Butler assumes that “Jewishness” is threatened, and seeks to defend it. She acknowledges Israeli state violence, but does not examine its “Jewishness.” She does not consider the US sources of Israeli state violence. She refers to a “public discourse” that perpetually accuses critics of Israel of anti-Semitism, while not reflecting on its origins. By “Jewish values of cohabitation with the non-Jew” Butler means in Palestine, eight thousand miles from where she lives and works. She has nothing whatever to say about the Israel Lobby and Jewish politics in her native land.

If Butler succeeds in her abstract quest for “Jewish resources for the criticism of state violence,” she risks “making resistance to Zionism into a ‘Jewish value’ and so asserting, indirectly, the exceptional ethical resources of Jewishness. . . The opposition to Zionism requires the departure from Jewishness as an exclusionary framework for thinking [about] both ethics and politics.” (2) This is solved by establishing “the relation to alterity as constitutive of identity, which is to say that alterity *interrupts* identity, and this interruption is the condition of ethical relationality.”¹¹⁹ The “relationship to alterity” challenges

the idea of “Jewish” as a static sort of being, one that is adequately described as a subject. If to “be” that subject is to have already entered into a certain mode of relationality, then the “being” gives way to a “mode of relatedness” . . . one that “interrupts” or challenges the unitary character of the subject. . . some demand from elsewhere lays claim to me. . . and only through this fissuring of who I am to I stand a chance of relating to another.¹²⁰

This ethics “is Jewish/not Jewish, and its meaning lies precisely in that conjunctive disjunction.”¹²¹ This is Butler’s point of departure. On the above analysis, Jewish Voice for Peace, on whose advisory board Butler sits, does not constitute a successful example of “relational ethics.” It is engaged with “alterity” just enough to make “Jewishness” legal, which does not mean ethical.

While Butler states that her aim is “not to stabilize the ontology of the Jew or of Jewishness,”¹²² her relational ethics appears to stabilize it dynamically, in perpetual oscillation with “alterity.” The self is not engaged with a general “alterity” but with different parts of it, with spouse and family, friends, colleagues, comrades, customers, fellow citizens, in a variety of settings from the intimate to the occupational to the public. Why does Jewishness anchor the self, rather than constitute, for the autonomous individual, another facet of “alterity?” One’s association or dissociation with Jewish alterity is a free choice.

The dissolution of Jewish ontology changes the task from finding “Jewish resources for a critique of [Israeli Jewish] state violence” in order to defend “Jewishness,” to finding universal resources for a critique of that violence in order to defend all of us, whom it threatens. Those resources existed before the Jewish left was seduced by the *Volk*, and before post-modern scholars devised relational ethicality.

The Yiddish milieu of “Jewish socialism” was not universal, and socialism was universal, but not Jewish, embodying Butler’s “Jewish/non-Jewish conjunctive disjunction.” The Yiddish proletarians were born into “Jewish alterity,” into the impoverished and oppressed Yiddish-speaking society in the Russian Empire, unlike 21st c Americans, whose Jewish alterity is elaborately constructed. Even without “relational ethics,” the Yiddish proletarians felt with absolute conviction that their liberation was part of the liberation of all, in the spirit of the Communist Manifesto: “The working men have no country. . . In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.” Rosa Luxemburg (neither Yiddish, nor proletarian, nor “Jewish” in any identifiable sense apart from her ancestry, who does not appear in Butler’s book) wrote in prison a famous passage, the brilliant apotheosis of this view:

What do you want with this theme of the “special suffering of the Jews”? I am just as much concerned with the poor victims on the rubber plantations of Putamayo, the Blacks in Africa with whose bodies the Europeans play catch. You know the words that were written about the great work of the General Staff, about Gen. Trotha’s campaign in the Kalahari desert: “And the death rattles of the dying, the demented cries of those driven mad by thirst faded away in the sublime stillness of eternity.” Oh that “sublime stillness of eternity,” in which so many cries have faded away unheard, they resound within me so strongly that I have no special place in my heart for the [Jewish] ghetto. I am at home in the entire world, wherever there are clouds, birds and human tears.¹²³

Reform Judaism proclaimed the universalism of its liberal, bourgeois constituency in 1885: “We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel’s great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.”¹²⁴

Israel Shahak evoked “the modern, secular [non-]Jewish tradition,” which he dated from Spinoza, who was expelled by his Amsterdam synagogue, in a uniquely severe decree, for reasons unknown but doubtless linked to the modern ideas he had begun to propound. Spinoza is viewed as the greatest of the 17th c rationalist philosophers, for whom “all philosophical problems bottom out in intelligibility itself.”¹²⁵ Zionism claims Spinoza as the “first secular Jew” (there must be such a creature), but Shahak’s view of Spinoza as the first in a brilliant line of ex-Jewish secular moderns is much more apt. On this basis Shahak categorically rejected Zionism and its racialist views, which he viewed as anti-modern recidivism.

Shahak was born in Warsaw in 1933, survived the Judeocide with his mother, an aunt and cousin, and emigrated to Palestine in 1945. His self-discovery of modern, secular humanism was remarkable given his experience, and disproves the common idea that the Judeocide necessarily qualified or interrupted that identification. Likewise, the great Reform anti-Zionist Rabbi Elmer Berger, born in 1908, helped lead a rear-guard action against the Zionist statehood campaign in the 1940s, in the American Council for Judaism, and remained active for Palestinian rights until his passing in 1996. He was celebrated in the Arab world, and the Institute for Palestine Studies published his books. The Marxists Isaac Deutscher (1907-1967) and Maxime Rodinson (1915-2004), survived World War II and the Judeocide with their internationalism intact, never swayed by the chimerae of Zionist socialism and Jewish peoplehood. Nor was the Israeli Socialist Organization, Matzpen, founded in 1962 by alumni of the Zionized Israeli Communist Party. All these parties were far more critical of Zionism and Israel than the US Jewish left. None of them appear in Butler’s book.

Butler does discuss the *völkisch* Martin Buber, mostly incorrectly in my view, and I also feel that she

over-Judaizes Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin. Chomsky found it “characteristic of American ethnic minorities that they tend to support the right-wing forces in the national societies to which they often retain a cultural or economic connection. The American Jewish community is no exception.”¹²⁶ Clearly this conservatism also applies to the (hegemonic) Jewish critique of Palestine.

This is not to deny that the Jewish left opposes “the occupation” and criticizes acutely Israel’s crimes. Its refusal to condemn Zionism, and its refusal to acknowledge the Israel Lobby’s radicalization, reduce its criticism to courthouse haggling. “Okay, we’ll cop a plea on the war crimes, but don’t break up our gang, and don’t try and hang the Israel Lobby rap on us, or the deal is off!” The permanent reproach charges that opposition to Israel is irreducibly anti-Semitic, which is Jewish essentialism about gentiles, anti-gentilism, the counterpart of gentile essentialism about Jews, anti-Semitism. Philip Weiss attributed Chomsky’s adamant deprecation of the Israel Lobby to anti-gentilism.¹²⁷

The Jewish left, no less than the mainstream, recalls Israel Shahak’s observations about the persistence of pre-modern sensibility.

In the countries of east Europe as well as the Arab world, the Jews were liberated from the tyranny of their own religion and their own communities *by outside forces*, too late and in circumstances too unfavorable for genuine internalized social change. In most cases, and particularly in Israel, the old concept of society, the same ideology—especially as directed at non-Jews. . . have been preserved. This applies even to Jews who joined “progressive” or leftist social movements. . .

. . . a great many Jews are nostalgic for that world, their lost paradise, the comfortable closed society from which they were not so much liberated as expelled.¹²⁸

The subordination of liberalism to *völkisch* politics, left, right and center, confirms that American Jews don’t fear anti-Semitism, but are quite confident, to say the least. As Peter Beinart observed, “privately, American Jews revel in Jewish power. But publicly, we often avoid discussing it for fear of feeding anti-Semitic myths.”¹²⁹ Or confirming them, as in the references to the Protocols noted above, the attack on Alison Weir, and the thuggish disruption of her talk in Walnut Creek.

Such reveling has for 50 years suppressed the critical tasks: 1) a critique of Zionism and the *Jewish people* idea as Jewish race doctrine, opposing Jew and gentile everywhere; 2) a candid analysis of the Israel Lobby, from its debut in World War I to its maturity in the 1940s to its present cumulative radicalization; 3)

recovering classical liberalism, the antipode to Zionism, and to anti-Semitism.

The liberal Count Clermont-Tonnerre spoke for Jewish emancipation in the French National Assembly in December, 1789, in another famous passage. The

adversaries of the Jewish people attack me. This people, they say, is not sociable. . . The worst of these reproaches is unjust; the others are only specious. . .

No doubt these religious oddities will disappear; and if they do survive the impact of philosophy and the pleasure of finally being true citizens and sociable men, they are not infractions to which the law can or should pertain.

But, they say to me, the Jews have their own judges and laws. I respond that is your fault and you should not allow it. We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. It is repugnant to have in the state an association of non-citizens, and a nation within the nation. . . In short, Sirs, the presumed status of every man resident in a country is to be a citizen.¹³⁰

The quasi-national organized Jewish society and sensibility violate the liberal compact that Clermont-Tonnerre outlined. Their quasi-sovereign power usurps the democratic sovereignty embodied in the US government, as famously stated in the Preamble to the Constitution. “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union. . . do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”¹³¹ The principle of democratic sovereignty, however corrupted and attenuated, makes the government accountable to its citizens, as the If Americans Knew web site states. “In a democracy, the ultimate responsibility for a nation’s actions rests with its citizens. The top rung of government—the entity with the ultimate power of governance—is the asserted will of the people. Therefore, in any democracy, it is essential that its citizens be fully and accurately informed.”¹³²

Alison Weir entered politics to address her fellow citizens, and was attacked by the left Jewish establishment of *völkisch* sophistication, a variation on Jefferson Smith’s Washington reception in the Frank Capra movie. The liberal foundations of the modern world remain the only way of addressing the issues raised by Zionism and the state of Israel, as Weir understands, if the Jewish left does not.

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