

Why Boycott Israel? Because It's Good for You

by Gabriel Ash / June 23rd, 2007

Part I

The boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel's Apartheid scored an important victory recently when the British University and College Union (UCU) decided to circulate "the [full text](#) of the Palestinian boycott call to all branches for information and discussion" and "encourage members to consider the moral implications of existing and proposed links with Israeli academic institutions." The UCU resolution is in fact [quite moderate](#). Nevertheless, it raised the profile of the campaign and elicited a round of shrill, wall-to-wall condemnations, from newspapers, foundations, politicians and governments. Shockingly, not a single media mogul (or any mogul, for that matter) is in favor of the boycott!

The major argument for boycotting Israel is that it is the right thing to do. And it is. But for those of us who live off wages and depend on public services, it is also the smart thing to do – especially in Europe, where the BDS campaign is now facing a vocal onslaught. Support for Israel is an important pillar of an islamophobic, anti-immigrant and pro-war front, which includes many in the political leadership of Europe; their final prize is finishing off the welfare state. In the second part, I will also show that it is this front – not the UCU – that is heir to Europe's historical anti-Semitism.

Europe's political leadership is not merely opposed to boycotting Israel. The European Union, supported by politicians in every European country, has joined the US and Israel in a policy of siege, starving Palestinians of aid, medical supplies and food. The policy punishes Palestinians for daring to democratically replace a corrupt and ineffectual leadership. The EU supports Israel's demands for Palestinians to unconditionally surrender: one sided "renouncement of violence," and one-sided "recognition of Israel." Israel, of course, is free to continue assassinations and bombing and need not recognize any Palestinian rights. Furthermore, European aid money, both public and private, is deployed strategically to help entrench the occupation, increase Palestinian dependency and discourage resistance. At the same time, as [Alexander Yakobson writes in Ha'aretz](#):

European countries recently gave their full support to Israel joining the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. European funding for joint research and development projects with Israel - which the UCU wants stopped - is more extensive than ever before, and can only be expected to expand further. Economic ties between Israel and the European Union have grown closer in recent years, in step with the calls for boycotts. New agreements have upgraded Israel's position and opened doors that had previously been closed.

Why all this love? It is no secret that most European bureaucrats, journalists, observers and NGO workers, those who have had any real contact with Israel, harbor few illusions about it. The feeling of the French Ambassador to Britain, Daniel Bernard, who referred to Israel in private as "[a shitty little country](#)," is emblematic. European policy cannot be explained by the actual beliefs of the professional class that implements it. Complicity is dictated to them from above. Nor is this love for Israel the result

of simple electoral politics. Pro-Israeli lobbies in Europe don't have as much clout yet as in the US. And the European public generally sees [Israel's intransigence as a threat](#).

Israel, while not big, is a valuable commercial partner. Additionally, Israel's occupation creates needs, especially in military hardware and construction. [Many European companies directly benefit from contracts](#). French Veolia, for example, is set to build a rail system for the settlements around Jerusalem. Irish CRH holds a large cement monopoly in Israel. There is also longstanding European support for maintaining the neo-colonial world system. Europe's businesses are profiting heavily from continued Southern dependence and corruption. If we needed another reminder, the [British BAE Saudi bribes scandal](#) came just in time. European capitals usually support the US when a radical challenge to neo-colonial dependence emerges, as for example in Haiti, Venezuela, and Lebanon.

But protecting profitable business falls short as an explanation. The strong support for Israel by leaders such as Blair and Sarkozy threatens Europe's relations in the Middle East and perilously alienates its large immigrant communities. It is not driven by business as usual. On the contrary, it is led by an ideological kinship animated with revolutionary zeal and supported by the needs of financial capital to liberate itself from the chains of the welfare state. It is guided by a renewed desire to melt all that is solid into thin air. Israel's great friends in Europe – Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy, Bernard Henri-Levy, Angela Merkel, Joschka Fisher, Lord Levy, and many more – are the shock troops of the neoliberal assault on European society, its workers and public services. What's left of Palestinian land is on the breakfast menu. But dinner's *piñ@ce de resistance* will be served from the butchered European welfare state – education, high wages, job security, followed by healthcare and retirement.

Is this a "conspiracy?" Not in the cinematic sense of a powerful cabal meeting in secret and issuing marching orders. But there are plenty of secret and public conversations taking place through which the different elements of financial and political elites – the institutions, the corporations, the media, the civil society pressure groups, etc. – hone their common interests and learn to align and "conspire" – to speak in the same language and rally around common causes and strategies. Describing exactly how this alignment takes place is important and difficult. My purpose here is limited to the easy part – to sketch this ideological front and to identify its purpose by recognizing the historical patterns it repeats.

Support for Israel, Assault on Society

After WWII, the specter that used to haunt Europe was invited to sit at the table and given a small plate in return for no longer moving furniture at night. This arrangement, known as the welfare state, made possible the rebuilding of a capitalist Europe. But it was expensive. With the Soviet Union no longer, Europe's capital is asking itself why it should continue paying. The financial world has a clear agenda. It is not made in Brussels or in Whitehall. If at all, it is made in the City of London. It is drummed up almost daily in the pages of *The Financial Times* and weekly in *The Economist*. European wages are too high. Social services are too lavish. Workers are living too long, working too little, enjoying too much time on the French Riviera. "Europe" (namely the financial owners) cannot afford it. It makes European labor "uncompetitive". There is too much "rigidity" in labor markets (i.e., too much stability in people's lives). And taxes, needless to say, are far too high. What really hurts is that financial profits are too low and stock markets below the moon. The rich have been up in arms for decades now, withholding their investment money or sending it overseas, where labor is cheap and obedient. This has sent European unemployment figures into the double digits. Governments,

captured by a shallow competition between so-called socialists and so-called Christians, are doing their part, whittling down the welfare state on the one hand, and guaranteeing profits for the needy wealthy on the other. Privatization is the preferred tool, and it works wonders “ for investors. British Rail, for example, has been a great success story “ for investors. In the UK “ credit Margaret Thatcher “ the work is almost done, although Blair’s government is still struggling to [euthanize the National Health Service](#). Major privatization drives were also pushed through in France and Germany. But the assault on public services ground to a halt thanks to stiffer popular resistance, notably from trade unions. France, with 2006 profits at only 5% of GDP, is where lines are now drawn in the sand.

To do what elected governments cannot, the EU was transformed from an idea to put an end to war to a strategy in the class war, its high offices staffed with the faithful and entrusted with a mission to undermine labor’s bargaining power. Monetary policy was transferred to the European Central Bank, where Jean-Claude Trichet is now in charge of [using interest rates to help bosses stare down unions](#). But even this strategy took a beating when the French public voted down the proposed neoliberal European constitution. A ferocious ideological war for the neoliberal model (a.k.a. TINA “There Is No Alternative) succeeded in eliminating heterodox thinking from the mainstream. But the public refuses to buy the neoliberal prescriptions. It is a law of European politics. Every government that pushes neoliberal reforms gets clobbered in the polls. Yet thanks to the strength of TINA, no government can follow any other course. The outcome is a tired and demoralizing stalemate. A corrupt, off-putting political class rules with a self-serving and anti-democratic credo, which Tony Blair exemplified: the role of leadership is to shove unwanted policies down the throat of an unwilling public, and suffer the resulting loss of public support with stoic equanimity. But in the long run, you cannot run a parliamentary democracy with 20% approval rates.

What can capital do in the face of this stubbornness? The answer, I think, can be summed with a quote from Tom Friedman, one millionaire ideologue (and firm supporter of Israel) who can spot an uppity French worker from a mile, blindfolded: “[give war a chance](#).” (Interestingly enough, Friedman’s columns usually fall into one of three bins: Israel good; bombs good; low wages good.) From theory to practice, Britain’s New Labor is the model of linking warmongering abroad with the neoliberal assault on workers at home: a foreign policy of joining forces with the US and Israel in the Middle East and a domestic policy of destroying services and pandering to the financial markets. Blair quite profitably destroyed the Labor party as the party of labor. And do I need to mention [Blair’s profound disappointment](#) with the boycott campaign?

In France, the tougher battleground, newly elected Sarkozy is ready to double down for the market. Here is how Armand Laferrere, Sarkozy’s former adviser, [explains the new President’s plans to out-Blair Blair](#). Domestically,

[T]he President campaigned as a radical reformer of the main weaknesses in the French social compact. The French economy is handicapped by insufficient productive activity and the high price of labor. Therefore, he promised both to put people back to work“[and replace] the jungle of French labor laws with a single kind of work contract. Public-sector unions have blocked reforms before; therefore, he promised to make it mandatory to keep a minimum level of public services even in the case of a strike“; the President promised to finally give universities the power to run themselves and apply for external funds on top of their taxpayer-funded base.

And as for the foreign counterpart of this domestic plan of lowering wages, privatizing higher education and breaking labor unions:

[R]ecent election results allow me to say that my own cultural bias in favor of America and Israel will be more reflected in French foreign policy than it has been for half a century.

Laferrere made these comments in front of a crowd of neo-conservative fanatics at [JINSA](#) (The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs), one of the many pivotal nodes in Washington that link between Zionism, the armament industry and market fundamentalism. American neo-conservatism is an inspiration to Europe's stock market liberators. Unfortunately anti-war commentary rarely stresses that the neo-conservative movement, in addition to being fanatically pro-Israel, has always been fanatically anti-worker. When the neo-cons took over the management of Baghdad, their plan for what [Naomi Klein](#) called "a free market utopia" was a more uninhibited version of what Sarkozy wants to do to France. One law from Saddam's era that the occupiers did not scrap was the restriction on trade unions.

The nexus between assault on labor and social services and vocal support for Israel crawls up from under every stone one turns. I will turn just two stones below. In condemning the UCU resolution, *The Jerusalem Post* gave the [full podium to the British Baroness Cox](#). Her Pomposity was quoted as saying, "it is ironic and disturbing in the extreme that censorship is being promoted by some representatives of academic staff who should be the guardians of academic freedom." She also insinuated that the British police should act against boycott supporters. You'd think that bringing police squads to force academics to cooperate with Israel is not exactly a shining example of how to **protect** academic freedom. But then the Baroness is nothing if not consistent. For her, academic freedom means an academy free from critical voices. She received her peerage from Margaret Thatcher after the latter noted her McCarthyite book denouncing the prevalence of Marxist professors in British education. She led the attack on teacher education for being too leftist (i.e., too anti-sexism, anti-racism etc.) and worked in and out of the House of Lords to privatize schools and de-skill teachers. (See Dave Hill, [The Charge of the Right Brigade](#), and "The Christian Schools Campaign: A Successful Educational Pressure Group?" by Geoffrey Walford, *British Educational Research Journal*, September 1995, pp. 451-464). Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Cox's *bÂte noir* is "radical Islam," which is "the greatest threat posed to the Western world." She is a pious Christian and known as a fighter for human rights, especially for victims of Muslim governments. She is the co-founder of [One Jerusalem](#), an organization whose mission is "maintaining a united Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel." Perhaps following the moral example of the crusaders, the baroness has no concern for the human rights of [Jerusalem's Palestinian residents](#). Cox, to boot, has some issues with homosexuality, which might explain the choice of words in her denunciation of the "unnatural alliance" between "the Islamists and the left." *Noblesse oblige*.

In France, media star and \$200-million-worth Bernard Henri-Levi "a.k.a. brand name BHL" is a major voice in opposition to the boycott. When a boycott measure passed in Paris VI university in 2003, BHL was invited to condemn it. He dutifully called it shameful, linked it immediately to Vichy and called Israeli universities "[the heart of peace](#)." BHL is France's smoke machine. Officially a socialist, he rose to the French firmament on a wave of rightwing adulation for his role in defeating the French left in the '70s. Intellectually and morally, he is a fraud. Here is just one example from [Doug Ireland's highly recommended account](#) of this incarnation of Baudrillard's *simulacrum*: the great humanitarian moralist "BHL inherited the family's huge lumber business, Becob while BHL was running the company, numerous international bodies and a report from the Canadian government denounced it for keeping its African workers in penurious semi-slavery." Hypocrisy might be easier to forgive if BHL's public "positions" were not themselves smokescreens. BHL's performance is built on a simple technique that allows him to speak "truth to power" from the dead center of French power: he

endorses leftist positions in vague emotive terms in order to better undermine them. Examples: he disagrees with neo-conservatives, but thinks [Charles Krauthammer and Christopher Hitchens are the contemporary equivalent of Sartre](#). He opposed the war on Iraq, but [chides us in the global anti-war movement](#) for believing that "it is better to live as a serf under Saddam than to be free thanks to Bush." Free, one presumes, from the constraints of bodily existence. BHL is against "the Clash of Civilizations," but works to exacerbate it. Like practically all vocal defenders of Israel, BHL "who claims to have introduced the term "islamofascism" " is a leading purveyor of Islamophobia and racist drivel, although perfumed with highfalutin rhetorical flourish. Here's [a sample](#): "The Taliban weren't just defeated, they were defeated without a fight. " the image of these defeated fighters, lionized by the Arab street from Baghdad to Damascus, the image of these salahudins who were supposed to bring America to its knees, and who, at the first shot, fled like chickens, could only astound those who identified with them." On neoliberalism, BHL is an impressive Weapon of Mass Distraction. Consider that when he finally announces his hyper-hyped electoral endorsement for 2007, he breaks with the knight of neoliberalism Sarkozy over " the [medical explanation for pedophilia](#).

Next: anti-Semitism and the inner logic of this double assault.

Part II: The Enemy

What then lies at the root of this quite natural alliance between Christian fundamentalists, market fundamentalists, billionaires, Zionists, islamophobes, and garden variety warmongers? Karl Schmitt, the Nazi philosopher of law who theorized the way to defend the Christian state from the twin evil of communism and liberalism, identified the essential basis of political authority in the power to name the enemy. For Schmitt, while leftists see the enemy across town, in the ruling class and the state, the problem with liberals is that they see no enemies. Communism must be opposed; but the liberal alternative is not up to the task, since, without enemies, politics degenerate. To defeat the liberal atrophy of politics as well as labor's militant tendencies, Schmitt saw the necessity of having an existential enemy, one that the whole state can be fully mobilized against. The enemy creates the conditions for the exercise of decisive state power, free from the restraints imposed by law and the deadlocks of parliamentary politics. Although the debt is rarely acknowledged, that has been the guiding principle of right-wing reaction. One could read Huntington's "Clash of Civilization" thesis as the globalization of Schmitt's insight. While originally presented as descriptive, the "Clash of Civilization" has been so influential because it is in practice a political program, one tailored to combat what Huntington himself called elsewhere "[an excess of democracy](#)." Does one needs to mention that Huntington also looks askance at unions? The raw Schmitt, however, is too clearly reactionary. The new Schmittianism of the Islamophobic front is a rightwing reaction veiled in the trappings of the traditional left.

Having an enemy across the border " alien, total, menacing " helps the right assert political power domestically, the power it now needs to liberate stock markets from the fetters of the welfare state. This is the revolution's goal, and support for Israel is right at the center of it. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis is manna from heaven for Israel because it places its fight against the Palestinians in a larger struggle that includes the whole West. This was always a conscious and important Zionist goal. Two examples of many: [Max Nordau addressing the crÃme of British Imperialism](#) at Albert Hall in 1920. "We know perfectly well what you require of us. We are to keep guard over the Suez Canal for you. We are to act as sentinel over your route to India and Asia " And a short century later here is former Israeli PM [Benjamin Netanyahu capitalizing on 9/11](#): "What is at stake today is nothing less than the survival of *our civilization* ." And "The international terrorist network is thus based on regimes

Iran, Iraq, Syria, Taliban Afghanistan, Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority and several other Arab regimes such as the Sudan – the Palestinian groups cooperate closely with Hezbollah, which in turn links them to Syria, Iran and Bin Laden." Of course, Hezbollah and Bin Laden's affiliates are sworn enemies, and Arafat was connected to neither. The other thing worth noting about Netanyahu is his neoliberal zeal in cutting welfare, and the fact that during his tenure as Finance Minister the [poverty rate in Israel rose 15%](#).

Radicalizing Europe's Muslims therefore serves Israel's purpose. But it is also, in line with Schmitt's and Huntington's ideas, a blessing for the neoliberal assault. Western support for Israel inflames Muslim public opinion and produces instances of fanaticism that in turn help inflame popular animus against Muslim immigrants. Practically all organized support for Israel is involved in demonizing Islam. The demonization of Islam strengthens the appeal of the most radical Islamists and increases the likelihood of terrorist attacks. Terrorism breeds fear and fear breeds obedience to authority and conformism. Divide and conquer. (Take, for example, [Margaret Hodges recent foray into anti-immigrant xenophobia](#) to cover up for New Labor's policy of shafting its constituents) It works in the US. It works in Israel. Why shouldn't it work in Europe? Needless to say, a state about to go smash labor and destroy public services needs all the obedience it can generate. It also needs vast police powers, and what better way to justify curtailing civil rights than a frenzy surrounding terrorism?

Furthermore, war and fear of terrorism require the transfer of funds from social services to defense and security. This is a bonanza for Israel since Israel specializes in selling security and defense wares. But spending on defense and security is also much better than spending on welfare from a neoliberal perspective. First, it is a way for the state to fund corporate profits directly, and therefore dear to the heart of financial capital. Second, the shift in priorities leads to dislocations that are in themselves useful for precipitating changes in the rules of work in favor of higher profits and lower wages. Third, social spending increases labor's bargaining power. Defense spending doesn't. It is pure waste, which is an advantage from the point of view of profits under current conditions. War, fear of terrorism, and immigrant bashing also bolster the legitimacy of the EU. Cross-border arrest warrants, mobile joint border policing, anti-terrorist task forces, are easier to justify than higher prices and lower wages.

Finally, in terms of talking left and walking right, Israel is indeed a "light onto the nations," and a successful controlled Schmittian experiment ensconced within a formal parliamentary democracy. Today, Israel is the second most unequal society in the developed world. The silver medal status, however, depends crucially on not counting Palestinians under occupation. Taken as a whole, Israel is in fact the industrial world's indisputable leader in inequality. But even that doesn't quite capture its unique achievement. Consider that this inequality is the result of a century of economic development during which, most of the time, Israel was under "socialistic" leadership! Europe had to wait for the '80s and '90s to find socialist leaders whose real motto is "investors of the world unite!" Israel already had such leaders in the '20s. (See Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*) This "socialist" and "democratic" legacy of Zionism must offer an appealing roadmap for the Tony Blair left. Unlike most European countries, Israel developed as a capitalist country without going through the menace of a radical-left alternative. The nationalism of the historic labor party (Mapai) precluded it. The existential enemy authorized a secure zone for the unhindered development of capital. Consider this revealing nugget from Mapai leader David Hacohen:

I remember being one of the first of our comrades to go to London after the first World War. – There I became a socialist – I had to fight my [student] friends on the issue of Jewish socialism, to defend the fact that I would not accept Arabs in my trade union, the Histadrut; to defend preaching to the

housewives that they not buy at [Palestinian] Arab stores, to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs there. â€¦ To pour kerosene on Arab tomatoes; to attack Jewish housewives in the markets and smash the Arab eggs they had bought; to praise to the skies the Keren Kayemet [Jewish National Fund] that sent Hankin to Beirut to buy land from absentee effendi [landlords] and to throw the fellahin [peasants] off the land â€¦ to take *Rothschild, the incarnation of capitalism, as a socialist and to name him the "benefactor"* â€¦ to do all that was not easy. (my emphasis. *Haaretz*, Nov 15, 1969, quoted in Arie Bober, ed., *The Other Israel*)

The Israeli Labor Party has the distinct achievement of firmly associating the term "left" with racism and class privilege, against both Palestinians and Jews. Today, it is [the party of generals, the security services and neoliberals](#). Compared to Europe, the complete dismantling of the Israeli welfare state sailed through with ease. The long-term strategy that netted these results was the Schmittian strategy of a state fully mobilized against the Enemy, the Arab, both internally and externally. Here is Mizrahi writer and activist Sami Shalom Chetrit [describing how it works](#), how war is used to entrench class, race and power:

You look at the Arab and actually you're looking the mirror, and you've been taught that the reflection in the mirror is actually bad, negative, low, enemy, so you start spitting in the mirror. It's hard to spit in the mirror everyday, because you go crazy. It's hard to live with self-hatred, you get sick, so what do you do? You channel everything to the Arab. It's very simple social psychology. That is how we all became Arab haters, because if we don't hate them, we're going to hate ourselves. â€¦ [That's] why they keep the Occupation goingâ€¦ They won't back down because if they do, they will lose their Ashkenazi, Zionist hegemonyâ€¦ Right now, in my view, everything is collapsing but no one complains because "we are at war â€¦!"

The way Israel deliberately confounds the left-right distinction is also reflected in the internal politics of the West. While it is not difficult to discover the hands of wealth and reaction behind pro-Israel bodies, much of the Western left is congenitally paralyzed on the subject of Israel. The common attitude is silence or mealy mouthed half-criticism. The most significant agent of this debility is the cult of the Holocaust. Pre-war communists correctly saw Zionism as a colonial and racist enterprise. In the struggle against fascism, however, the left won the war but lost the peace. The apotheosis of the Holocaust and the enshrining of an idealistic, nostalgic anti-fascism was their sop. Israel sought and was accorded the guardianship of European guilt. Holocaust kitsch and the attendant sanctification of Israel is now the West's alibi against all charges of continuing racism. In addition, Jewish community organs, captured by wealth, built their power on the cult of the Holocaust and now use it to de-legitimize criticism of Israel and drum up Islamophobia. Support for Israel is therefore a crucial element in preventing the articulation of a coherent social-democratic opposition to racism.

The Repetitions of Anti-Semitism

A word on anti-Semitism is a must, given the incredible cheek of those describing the UCU decision as anti-Semitic. A century ago, the radical threat that was threatening Europe's elites was communism. At the same time, the immigrant masses that sought refuge from misery in the West were the *Ostjuden* â€¦ Jews from Eastern Europe. Stereotyped and ridiculed as backward, dirty and subversive, and a fertile social ground for socialist and communist agitation, the *Ostjuden* also transformed anti-Semitism. Before they arrived, Western anti-Semitism was the work of anti-liberal agitators fanning the resentment of the downwardly-mobile lower middle-classes by pinning the blame to wealthy, integrated Jews. Respectable modern gents would not be seen near it and socialists fought against it. The

Ostjuden provided anti-Semitism with a concrete class of poor, Jewish immigrants who actually looked different and who competed with native labor for the lowliest jobs during the severe economic crises that followed the First World War. After the 1917 revolution in Russia, the propaganda campaign against communism almost merged with anti-Semitism. Russian anti-communist expatriates brought with them *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Bolshevism was described as a Jewish plot and Jewish immigrants a subversive danger. This new anti-Semitism was directly useful as a tool for undermining worker militancy. Hence, unlike the old anti-Semitism, it gained ground with the political and business elites, even in liberal England. Churchill described Bolshevism as the work of "international Jews." The conservative Tories used a mixture of anti-Bolshevism, anti-immigration and veiled anti-Semitism to respond to the first Labor Party national election victory in 1924. The Zinoviev letter, a forgery that implied that Labor was taking orders from the (Jewish) Bolsheviks put the Conservatives back in government. A clampdown on Jewish immigrants ensued under the Home Office of Sir William Joynson-Hicks. In the US, the industrialist Henry Ford was a leading impresario of this anti-communist anti-Semitism and the publisher of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion's* first U.S. edition. Does one need to mention that he was also anti-union and anti-immigration? The Nazis carried this identification between Jews and Bolshevism to the extreme; it was the platform that brought them to power and the political basis for the concentration camps. But it is necessary to remember that their fear-mongering about Jewish subversion was all too respectable and a staple of the conservative defense against workers' militancy all across Europe.

A new round of anti-immigrant xenophobia washed over Europe in the 1980s. It was fanned by party politics and the end of the post-war boom. Margaret Thatcher infamously described Britain as "swamped by alien culture." Turkish labor was the issue in Germany. In France, Jacques Chirac became mayor of Paris with the promise of clamping down on North-African immigrants. A campaign of police harassment dutifully followed. But the new xenophobia had its limits. Like pre WW-I anti-Semitism, it was too transparently racist and mean-spirited. It gave the political right a divisive issue and significant electoral gains, but it did not create a unified discourse that could take the center and marginalize the left. A major weakness was the lack of an international component. There was no connection between the terrorism of the IRA and the immigrants from Bangladesh. There was no link between cold-war anti-communism and the Algerian communities in Paris. There were many enemies, but there was no one big existential enemy.

But now there is. The Clash of Civilizations, the Israeli outpost fighting to avoid being "swamped" by Palestinians, 9/11, the war on terror, Muslim difference, immigration and the veil, all come together in one discourse that links an external ideological and physical threat to the "foreign" presence in Europe. This is no longer a discourse that divides between the center-left and center-right. It is a radical right-wing discourse that thoroughly takes over the center. The power to name the enemy proves itself again. Today's apologists of Israel's Apartheid, be they Jewish or not, seek to exploit fears and spread hatred against Muslim immigrants, even accusing them of plotting world domination, all in the service of lower wages and higher stock markets. They are the true heirs of *The Protocols'* Western admirers. "Islamism" is the boogeyman that replaces "Bolshevism". Muslim immigrants take the place of the *Ostjuden*. Green replaces Red. And Israel is where Germany was in the '30s, the frontal outpost where the fight against the enemies of capital rages fiercest.

Of course, there is the inevitable farcical aspect to this rhyming of history. Many things are different, not in the least the historical memory of Nazism which weighs heavily on the political theater. For this reason, Israel cannot (I hope) match the Nazi horror. A more important difference is that radical Islam is hardly as real a danger to property relations as the communist revolution in Russia was. Western

workers, who are anyway unlikely to convert to Islam, are not in a revolutionary mood. And the area of the globe that can be described as Muslim is far from being a significant military force that balances Western powers as the Soviet Union did. It includes a chain of barely functioning states on which the US and NATO can stage their telephoto wars-for-profits with abandon. The repetition of the triangular structure of xenophobia (Anti-Semitism/Islamophobia,) radical threats (Bolsheviks/Islamists,) and immigrants (Jewish/Muslim,) is not a defense against workers' militancy. It reflects a triumphal neoliberal juggernaut on the march, unable to satiate itself before it devours every last vestige of human welfare.

As the French and German reaction to the Iraq war made evident, there is significant elite opposition in Europe to the use of Islamophobia and to the neo-conservative war drive. But the resilience of this liberal opposition is questionable. It is disturbing how quickly the animus of the French and German governments against the Iraq war floundered. Islamophobia is ultimately fueled by the limits Western democracy places on profits. Fighting Islamophobia while resisting neoliberalism requires therefore a campaign that goes beyond moralizing. An understanding of the role that Islamophobia and support for Israel's Apartheid play in the neoliberal assault is a must. Conversely, given the kind of state Israel is, support for Israel is the most egregious internal contradiction of liberal imperialism. A wide and sustained conversation about the Boycott, Sanctions and Divestment (BDS) campaign " why it is needed, what conditions it is trying to change, why it is legitimate, and who its opponents are " is a very important educational tool in this struggle.

Sally Hunt, UCU general secretary and a committed Labourite, is against the boycott because she doesn't believe the majority of members support it. She [told the Guardian](#), "When I speak to members, they tell me they want their union to focus on pay and conditions." The separation between the struggle over pay and conditions of teachers and other workers and the larger questions about the character of the state is artificial. As we've seen, there is no such separation in the tactics of power. The financial and political elites always manage their foreign wars and their domestic concerns in tandem, with a keen eye to how each campaign can profit from the other. What schools and universities teach, who pays teachers and how much, who could fire them and for what, who has access to education and with what quality " all these inherently political questions are at stake in the fight over Islamophobia and Israeli Apartheid. It is the duty of the BDS campaign supporters to make the case that restraining Israel's brutality is not only the right and ethical thing to do, but also essential to successfully defending "pay and conditions."

Gabriel Ash is an activist and writer who writes because the pen is sometimes mightier than the sword and sometimes not. He welcomes comments at: g.a.evildoer@gmail.com. [Read other articles by Gabriel](#).

This article was posted on Saturday, June 23rd, 2007 at 5:01 am and is filed under [General](#), [Economics](#), [Israel/Palestine](#), [Imperialism](#), [Capitalism](#) and [Empire](#). [Send to a friend](#).