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Zionists seek to silence critics of US policy toward Israel

By Peter Daniels
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Prominent Zionist groups and individuals in the US are conducting a campaign of intimidation against liberal and left-wing critics of the Israeli regime and Washington's policy toward Israel.

Tony Judt, a noted historian and the director of New York University's Remarque Institute, was to have spoken in New York earlier this month at a meeting called by a nonprofit organization that had rented space from the Polish Consulate. After telephone calls from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the American Jewish Committee, his lecture on "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy" was cancelled barely an hour before it was scheduled to begin.

Judt, a liberal academic who writes frequently for the *New York Review of Books*, was born and raised in Britain. He lost many members of his own family in the Holocaust, but has aroused the ire of the Zionist public relations machine because of his sharp criticisms of Israeli policies and his charge that the Israel lobby has stifled debate on the Middle East in the US.

The modus operandi of Zionist organizations such as the ADL and the American Jewish Committee is by now a familiar one. "Inquiries" are made by one or another of these groups. The message is clear.

As the Polish Consul General said in connection with the contacts made in regard to Judt's scheduled appearance, "The phone calls were very elegant but may be interpreted as exercising a delicate pressure. That's obvious—we are adults and our IQs are high enough to understand that."

Abraham Foxman of the ADL cynically insisted that he hadn't requested that the event be shut down, but added, "I think they made the right decision." He then spelled out the brazenly anti-democratic and thuggish attitude of himself and his organization toward anyone who criticizes Israel's policies and Washington's support for those policies. "He's taken the position that Israel shouldn't exist," Foxman said of Judt. "That puts him on our radar."

To clarify his position toward Israel, Judt remarked, "The only thing I have ever said is that Israel as it is currently constituted, as a Jewish state with different rights for different groups, is an anachronism in the modern age of democracies."

The cancellation of Judt's lecture is only one in a series of similar incidents. Judt was also forced to cancel another speech, at Manhattan College in the Bronx, on the topic "War and Genocide in European Memory Today," after he was asked by the event's sponsors to censor himself by avoiding direct references to Israel.

Less than a week after the episode at the Polish Consulate, an almost identical incident took place, this time at the French Embassy. British-based author Carmen Callil had been scheduled to attend a reception on October 10 in honor of her forthcoming book, *Bad Faith*, an account of the Vichy official who arranged the deportation of thousands of French Jews to their deaths in the Holocaust.

This event was also canceled at the last moment, apparently because of complaints over a sentence written by the author in the postscript to the book. She wrote of becoming anxious, while researching the "helpless terror of the Jews of France," to see "what the Jews of Israel were passing on to the Palestinian people." She continued, "Like the rest of humanity, the Jews of Israel 'forget' the Palestinians. Everyone forgets."

Zionist attempts at censorship have a long and distasteful history, especially in New York City. They are not always successful, but not for lack of trying.

Just a few months ago the New York Theatre Workshop cancelled its production of *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, the play about the American student killed by an Israeli military bulldozer in 2001 as she attempted to stop the destruction of the home of a Palestinian family. The production was halted after similar “inquiries” from Zionist circles. *My Name is Rachel Corrie* finally opened in Manhattan this month and was met with warm responses from critics and the public.

The ADL, the American Jewish Committee and other Zionist organizations disingenuously claim they are not part of a “lobby.” That is supposedly limited to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the organization whose specific aim is to influence the US government on behalf of Israel. In reality, all of these organizations devote themselves to the defense of Israel and its diplomatic and political interests. They are free to do so, but their attempts to silence their critics and smear their opponents as anti-Semites demonstrate their reactionary character.

The censorship attempts have extended onto university campuses. Campus Watch, a right-wing web site established by Daniel Pipes several years ago, has drawn up a blacklist that targets professors of Middle Eastern studies for alleged “bias” because they have dared to criticize Israel and defend the Palestinians. Supporters of Campus Watch have encouraged the sending of hate mail and threats to these professors, along with calls for their removal from their academic positions.

The Anti-Defamation League, founded in 1913 to fight against anti-Semitism, has long since betrayed any commitment to civil liberties and academic freedom when it comes to critics—including Jewish critics—of the policies and foreign policy interests of the state of Israel.

Even limited opinion polling reveals the growing opposition among American Jews to the decades-long Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, but this doesn’t stop the ADL and similar groups from speaking in the name of all Jews. The power of these unelected spokesmen is magnified many times by their wealthy sponsors and their long-established ties to dominant sections of the corporate, financial and political establishment in New York and Washington. They have succeeded over many years in propagating the myth that Judaism and Zionism are identical, and that anti-Zionism is therefore anti-Semitism.

It should be noted that the kind of criticism that Foxman of the ADL says cannot be voiced in New York City is frequently expressed within Israel itself. Israeli newspaper columnists, writers, academics and others spoke out during the recent Israeli aggression in Lebanon. Are they also to be branded anti-Semites and silenced?

As Judt himself declared, “This is serious and frightening, and only in America—not in Israel—is this a problem. These are Jewish organizations that believe they should keep people who disagree with them on the Middle East away from anyone else who might listen.”

The Zionist organizations involved in such witch-hunting and censorship utilize the issue of anti-Semitism as a red herring. They are really concerned with the foreign policy interests of the Israeli government, and specifically the maintenance of the longstanding alliance between Israel and Washington.

The alliance between American imperialism and Zionism was fully cemented some 40 years ago, in the wake of the Six Day War of 1967. Over the past several decades American defenders of the Israeli state have secured the ironclad support of both major capitalist parties, from the most liberal Democrats to the neo-conservatives in the Republican Party and the Bush Administration.

Big business politicians have vied to demonstrate their loyalty to Israeli policies, and the occasional maverick who deviates from pro-Zionist orthodoxy, like Republican Congressman Paul Findley some years ago, is usually purged at the next election with the help of millions of dollars in campaign funds from the Zionist lobby.

In the recent period, however, public criticism of the existing US policy toward Israel has begun to emerge within American foreign policy and academic circles. To some extent, the feverish campaign to silence all critics of Israel is an expression of the nervousness within American Zionist circles over this emerging policy debate.

While the US-Israel alliance has never been closer than during the administration of George W. Bush, there are signs of a possible shift. The disaster facing the US ruling elite in Iraq, along with the deepening external and internal crisis facing Israel, exemplified by its recent debacle in Lebanon, is emboldening those within the American foreign policy establishment who argue that US policy is tied too closely to that of Israel.

American Zionist organizations are acutely sensitive to these tremors, hence their attacks on John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard University. Mearsheimer and Walt authored a paper earlier this year which charged that the Israel lobby had distorted US foreign policy and sought to intimidate its critics.

An article by Mearsheimer and Walt in the *London Review of Books* was entitled, “The Israel Lobby: Does it Have too Much Influence on US Foreign Policy?” The lobby was defined as “the loose coalition of individuals and organizations who actively work to steer US foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction.”

Mearsheimer and Walt articulate the views of a section of the American ruling elite which has concluded that Washington’s virtually uncritical support for Israeli foreign policy has produced a diplomatic and political disaster for US interests in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world.

The publication of these views was followed by hysterical charges of anti-Semitism against the authors, who were accused of stoking up anti-Semitic notions of an international Jewish conspiracy.

Socialist opponents of Zionism and imperialism do not take sides politically between Mearsheimer and Walt and their Zionist critics. The policy shift they propose, while it enrages the Zionists, has nothing to do with the interests of the international working class or the democratic rights of the Palestinians, and they are opposed to a struggle against both the Israeli and Arab bourgeois elites to unite Jewish and Arab workers on the basis of a democratic and socialist program.

We have no hesitation, however, in denouncing the crude charges of anti-Semitism leveled against Mearsheimer, Walt, Judt and similar critics of Israel.

There are, of course, anti-Semites among the opponents of the Israeli state, and they repeat the old anti-Semitic slanders. There are also a large number of anti-Semites among Israel’s supporters. Richard Nixon, whose virulent anti-Semitism was exposed on White House tapes in the wake of the Watergate scandal, had no difficulty aligning himself with Israel. Today the Zionists welcome the support of Christian fundamentalists who would like nothing more than the establishment of a right-wing theocracy in the US.

As far as the Zionist establishment is concerned, the main enemy is not anti-Semitism, but anti-Zionism. When it suits its purposes, it is perfectly prepared to recognize this vital distinction and “overlook” the anti-Semitism among its own supporters. Hence the warm accolades from the Israel lobby to such figures as Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister, who received an award from the Anti-Defamation League in 2003 just days after expressing nostalgic sympathy for the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

To the extent that anti-Semitism has gained a new lease on life in the Middle East and elsewhere, this is largely the responsibility of Zionism itself. The anti-Semitic pronouncements of such figures as Iranian President Ahmadinejad are essentially the mirror image of Zionist propaganda, accepting the claim of the Israeli state to speak for all Jews and the interests of the Jewish people.

In fact, for the first half-century of its existence, Zionism was a distinct minority opinion within world Jewry. Its main opposition historically came from the left—from the socialist and internationalist opponents of all forms of nationalism and chauvinism. The attempt to smear left-wing critics as anti-Semites is one of the most despicable techniques of the Zionist propaganda machine.

The current attacks on even relatively mild critics of Israel are a sign of weakness. Longstanding Zionist myths are being increasingly exposed to the light of day. The fraudulent charge of anti-Semitism is beginning to backfire against those who level it.

The flagrant character of the Zionist intimidation campaign is such that even some committed Zionists have been forced to question it. The current issue of the *New York Review of Books* contains a letter entitled, “The Case of Tony Judt: An Open Letter to the ADL.”

The letter, signed by more than 100 writers, journalists and academics, criticizes the ADL’s actions in connection with the planned meeting at the Polish Consulate, declaring that “we are united in believing that a climate of intimidation is inconsistent with fundamental principles of debate in a democracy . . . the rules of the game in America oblige citizens to encourage rather than stifle public debate. We who have signed this letter are dismayed

that the ADL did not choose to play a more constructive role in promoting liberty.”

Among the signers are Peter Beinart, Franklin Foer and Leon Wieseltier, all of the *New Republic*, one of the most vociferous defenders of the Zionist state.

The intimidation campaign raises the obvious question of why the Zionists fear open debate. An open debate would provide the opportunity to expose the false promise of Zionism to provide a haven for the Jewish people, as well as to demonstrate the necessity of the struggle for the unity of Jewish and Arab workers in the fight for a democratic and socialist Middle East.

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