

For the last time, Progressivism is not Judaism

By Matthew M Hausman

There is an inherent inconsistency between and Jewish values and radical progressivism, with its agenda of identity politics that falsely maligns Jews as oppressors, demonizes Israel, and elevates revisionist Palestinian Arab mythology over documented Jewish history. Opinion.

The 2024 presidential election is swiftly receding in the rearview and the inauguration is fast approaching, but provocative rhetoric continues to flow from those who persist in referring to President Trump and his supporters as nazis or fascists. Though more Jews voted Republican this election than in the past, the [non-religious] majority still voted for Kamala Harris and the Democrats – and they had every right to do so. What they had no right to do, however, was use their Jewishness to camouflage antisemitism within their party and advance a narrative insulting to the memory of Holocaust martyrs who were the victims of real Nazis.



Progressive activist group Jews For Racial and Economic Justice are demanding an

Gili Getz

Liberal clergy who use the *bima* as a bully pulpit are entitled as Americans to speak their consciences – assuming their congregations tolerate political speech from synagogue professionals. But they cross the line when they distort historical facts for political reasons, as some did by misusing terms like nazi and fascist to impute Jew-hatred to Trump and Republicans, although it was Democrats – including Biden administration acolytes – who embraced antisemitic and anti-Israel progressives for their electoral support and failed to condemn without equivocation violence against Jews and baseless accusations of Israeli ‘genocide’ in Gaza.

Indeed, it was primarily Democrats or progressives, not Republicans or conservatives, who falsely claimed that Israel was engaging in genocide and denied that Hamas committed atrocities on October 7th.

Despite their party’s growing animosity towards Israel and tone deafness regarding antisemitic campus and urban street violence, progressives suspend intellectual integrity by (a) conflating their political preferences with Jewish values and

(b) projecting the left's intolerance and hatred onto their political opponents – usually conservatives who are more frequently philosemitic and pro-Israel.

Misconstruing Jewish values and history for the sake of politics is, as they say in Yiddish, "*a shanda fur die goyim*" (a disgrace before the gentiles) because it evidences ignorance, partisan blindness, moral weakness, or self-abnegation. And when Jews of any political stripe fail to assert their ancestral values or historical rights (or misrepresent them), their failure is often weaponized against Israel by antisemites from left, right, and center.

Nevertheless, this did not stop many from using their Jewishness to minimize antisemitism amongst Democrats, or projecting onto their political opponents conduct that has become synonymous with progressive excess, e.g., suppressing speech, engaging in censorship, promoting cultural divisiveness, and subverting the democratic process.

And over the last year, it was mainly progressives who contextualized antisemitic terrorism, blamed Israel for a humanitarian crisis caused by Hamas, and attacked PM Netanyahu from the halls of Congress in an attempt to bring down his government in the middle of a seven-front war.

-Though they disparage Republicans, conservatives, and Trump as "threats to democracy," it was the Biden administration that flouted the First Amendment by using social media proxies to censor opposing viewpoints as "disinformation."

-It was progressives who sought to regulate speech (e.g., by attempting to dictate pronoun usage) to enforce an extreme gender ideology with which most Americans disagree.

-And it was Democrats who bypassed the democratic process altogether by anointing Kamala Harris their presidential nominee without the benefit of any primaries – despite her unpopularity among the party's rank-and-file.

Moreover, it was progressives and Democrats – not conservatives, Republicans, or Trump – who humanized Hamas and Hezbollah, advocated appeasement of Iran, lauded antisemitic rioters on college campuses, and validated Islamist ideologies that preach the destruction of Israel and extermination of Jews. Accordingly, it was progressives who threatened democracy and free speech, legitimized Nazi-like dogmas, and advocated governmental authoritarianism.

And through it all, many whose parents and grandparents were classical liberals (i.e., defenders of civil liberties and the Constitution) were swept up in a radical tide that pushed liberal democratic virtues aside and falsely conflated leftist ideals with Jewish tradition. However, there is an inherent inconsistency between radical progressivism and Jewish values, reflecting the sacralization of an agenda grounded in identity politics that falsely maligns Jews as oppressors, demonizes Israel, and elevates revisionist Palestinian mythology over documented Jewish history.

Because much of the Jewish establishment identifies as liberal, there was an initial reluctance by some to acknowledge the scope of antisemitism on the left – until vicious progressive mobs began targeting Jews on American college campuses last year.

Too often in recent years, communal leaders have reflexively blamed violent antisemitism solely on the right or on the right and left equally – ignoring that some of the vilest anti-Jewish rhetoric in Congress comes from members of the Democratic caucus and that American universities are overwhelmingly progressive. Some have even vindicated Islamist propaganda by demanding the imposition of unrequited ceasefires with terrorists, admonishing Israel for civilian deaths caused by Hamas, or legitimizing anti-Israel grievances through moral equivalence or false contextualization.

They have also displayed alarming ignorance regarding Torah

values and Jewish history.

Many Jewish leaders treat Democratic Party allegiance like a commandment – despite Biden administration policies that emboldened Islamists and empowered Iran. These policies included the lifting of sanctions and transfer of Iranian assets that were then used to finance terrorism through Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, and to fund the orgy of murder, rape, and torture last October. Although most communal leaders spoke supportively following Iran's ballistic missile attack on Israel, they offered little criticism of Biden for (a) attempting to discourage Israel from responding (and interfering with the war effort in Gaza) by threatening to withhold arms or slow-walking the delivery of munitions, and (b) chiding Israel for human rights conditions caused by Hamas.

Establishment leaders were free to support any candidate or oppose Trump for any reason or none at all. But they had no basis to claim his defeat was a uniquely Jewish imperative because, like him or hate him, he had a solid record of supporting Israel and condemning antisemitism during his first term. In contrast, many Democrats have tolerated or embraced Israel-hating bigots in their party and in Congress.

The reality is that Jewishness does not demand any specific political allegiance – liberal, conservative, or libertarian. However, those who support far-left candidates should be honest and admit that their preferences are based not on Jewish values, but on their acceptance of an agenda that incorporates policies hostile to Israel and traditional Jewish concerns.

They may not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, but continuing to champion politicians antagonistic to Israel evinces ignorance or moral blindness.

Those who believe Jewish identity is synonymous with

progressive political ideology often come from backgrounds with little grounding in traditional Judaism. Since the advent of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) and fall of the ghetto walls, in fact, many knowingly adopted common culture over Jewish tradition to blend into their host societies. As a consequence, many lost their connection to Torah and Jewish tradition, which created a spiritual void they attempted to fill with politics, secular humanism, or natural law.

But secular ideologies are no substitute for G-d and Torah, without which Jews are spiritually untethered and orphaned from their ancestors.

Indeed, those who believe Jewish identity is defined by secular politics (whether liberal or conservative) are no different from those who embrace "messianic Judaism" or other forms of *avodah zarah* (strange worship), in that they are attempting to define Jewishness through beliefs and ideologies that are extraneous, alien, or antithetical to Jewish tradition and scripture. This is not to say that secularism is inherently heretical; only that those raised without Torah knowledge lack a historically normative frame of Jewish reference. Such people are deemed similar to the "*tinok shenishbah*" (captured infant) and are distinct from those who knowingly reject or misrepresent Torah.

The Babylonian Talmud discusses the case of the "*tinok shenishbah bein ha'akum*," i.e., a captive child raised among gentiles, who consequently never learned Torah and thus cannot be blamed for ignorance or for violating the commandments. (Tractate Shabbos, 68b; Shavuos, 5a.) Most contemporary authorities apply the same reasoning to those raised in completely secular environments, and many recognize an obligation to engage in outreach to facilitate repentance and return. The concept would also seem to apply to those indoctrinated from childhood to associate Judaism with temporal politics or mundane ideologies.

There is nothing wrong with Jews as individuals voting their consciences – whether Republican or Democrat – or not at all; but supporting particular candidates, parties, or causes does not render them synonymous with Torah values. Moreover, it is disingenuous to use one's Jewishness to shill for platforms that contravene Jewish interests, particularly when such endorsements give the appearance of community imprimatur.

Jewish identity does not mandate any specific partisan affiliation; but to ensure generational continuity, it does require belief in Torah and resistance to *avodah zarah* – whether grounded in gentile religion or secular ideologies. Whereas Jewish values should always inform one's vote, they should never be dictated by profane ideals.

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