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When You Say No or: Poisonous Mushrooms

BEFORE THE victory of feminism, there was a popular Israeli song in which the boy asks the girl: "When you say No, what do you mean?"

This question has already been answered. Now I am more and more tempted to ask: "When you say Zionism, what do you mean?"

That is also my answer when asked whether I am a Zionist.

When you say Zionist, what do you mean?

LATELY, ASSOCIATIONS for the defense of Zionism have been springing up like mushrooms after rain. Poisonous mushrooms.

All kinds of American Jewish multi-millionaires – many of them Casino kings, brothel moguls, money launderers and tax evaders – are financing "patriotic" Israeli groups in Israel, to fight the holy war for "Zionism".

The assault takes place along all the fronts. Jewish organizations aim at cleansing the universities of post-Zionists. They threaten to induce other donors to withhold their donations, they terrorize presidents and rectors and frighten professors and students.

Americans may be reminded of the sinister era of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who blighted the life of thousands of intellectuals and artists, pushing many of them into exile or suicide. Europeans might be reminded of the days when "Aryan" professors informed on their treasonous colleagues, and students in brown shirts threw their Jewish colleagues out of the windows.

This is only one sector of the broad offensive. One group has proudly announced that it is teaching hundreds of professional Zionists how to cleanse Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia, of post-Zionist items and plant Zionist ones in their stead.

THE TERM "post-Zionism" is starring in the propaganda of all the dozens – and perhaps hundreds – of the associations financed by the Las Vegas multi-millionaires and their likes in the United States in order to restore the Zionist glory of old.

Why this term, of all others? They mean the leftists, but those who attack the "leftists" are liable to be called "rightists". However, the members of the extreme right want to be seen as belonging to the patriotic center. Nor is it nice or enlightened to speak out against "liberal" or "progressive" professors. "Post-Zionists" is the Israeli equivalent of the "Reds" of Senator McCarthy or the "Jews" of his predecessors in Germany.

BUT WHAT is "post-Zionism"? Why not simply "anti-Zionism"?

As far as I know, I was the first to use this term. That was in 1976. I was testifying in a libel case that my friends and I had lodged against a publication that had accused the "Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace", that we had just founded, of being "anti-

Zionist". In trying to explain my view to the judge, I said that Zionism was a historic movement, with both light and shadow, which had fulfilled its role with the establishment of the State of Israel. From then on, Israeli patriotism has taken its place. "Post-Zionism" means that with the founding of the state, a new historic era began. A "post-Zionist" can admire the achievements of Zionism or criticize them. He is not by definition an anti-Zionist.

The judge accepted my arguments and found in our favor. She awarded us handsome compensation. Now I am the only living Israeli who has a judicial confirmation that he is not an anti-Zionist – much as only a person released from a psychiatric hospital has an official confirmation that he is sane.

Since then, the term "post-Zionist" has acquired wide currency in academic circles. It has also acquired many shades of meaning, according to the people who use it. But in the mouths of our new mini-McCarthys, it has become a simple denunciation. A post-Zionist is a traitor, an Arab-lover, a lackey of the enemy, an agent of the sinister world-wide conspiracy to destroy the Jewish State.

SHLOMO AVINERI, a respected professor of philosophy, recently published an article in which he fervently argued that Israel is a Jewish state and must remain so. The article has already stirred up a vivid debate.

I have received some protests from people who mistakenly thought that it was I who wrote the piece. That happens from time to time. Years ago the respected British weekly, *The Economist*, printed my name instead of his, and next week published "an apology to both".

But the difference is considerable. Avineri is an eminent professor, a student of Hegel, an expert on Zionist history, a former Director General of the Israeli Foreign Office, and a devout Zionist. I, as is well-known, am not a professor, I never even finished elementary school, I never was a government spokesman and my attitude towards Zionism is very complex.

In his article, Avineri argued passionately that Israel is a Jewish state "as Poland is a Polish state and Greece is a Greek state". He was responding to a Palestinian citizen of Israel, Salman Masalha, who had asserted that there cannot be a "Jewish state", much as – he says – there cannot be a "Muslim state" or a "Catholic state".

How can one compare, Avineri cried out. After all, the Jews are a people! Israel belongs to the Jewish people, whose religion is Judaism.

Logical, isn't it?

BY NO means. The analogy does not fit.

If Poland belongs to the Poles and Greece to the Greeks, Israel belongs to the Israelis. But the Israeli

government does not recognize the existence of an Israeli nation. (The courts have not yet decided upon the petition by some of us to be recognized as belonging to the Israeli nation.)

If Avineri had demanded the recognition that Israel belongs to the Israelis as Poland belongs to the Poles, I would have applauded. But he argues that Israel belongs to the Jews. This immediately raises some basic questions.

For example: Which Jews? Those who are Israeli citizens? Clearly, this is not what he means. He means the “Jewish people” dispersed all over the world, a people whose members belong to the American, French, Argentine nations – and, yes, also to the Polish and Greek nations.

How does a person become an American? By acquiring American citizenship. How does a person become French? By becoming a citizen of the French republic. How does a person become a Jew?

Ah, there’s the rub. According to the law of the State of Israel, a Jew is somebody whose mother is Jewish, or who has converted to the Jewish religion and not adopted any other religion. Ergo: the definition is purely religious, like that of a Muslim or a Catholic. Not at all like that of a Pole or a Greek. (In Jewish religion, it’s only the mother, not the father, who counts in this respect. Perhaps because one cannot be quite sure who the father is.)

There are in Israel hundreds of thousands of people who have immigrated from the former Soviet Union with their Jewish relatives, but are not Jewish according to the religious definition. They consider themselves Israelis in every respect, speak Hebrew, pay taxes, serve in the army. But they are not recognized as belonging to the Jewish people, to which, according to Avineri, the state belongs. Like the million and a half Israeli citizens who are Palestinian Arabs. The state does not belong to them, even though they enjoy – at least formally – full civil rights.

Simply put: the state belongs, according to Avineri, to millions of people who do not live here and who belong to other nations, but does not belong to millions of people who live here and vote for the Knesset.

WHO HAS decided that this is a Jewish state? Avineri

and many others assert that the character of the state was decided upon by the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations of November 29th, 1947, which partitioned the country between a “Jewish state” and an “Arab state”.

Not true.

The UN did not decide upon a state which belongs to all the Jews in the world, any more than upon a state that belongs to all the Arabs in the world. The UN commission which investigated the conflict between the Jews and the Arabs in the country then called Palestine decided (very sensibly) that the only possible solution was to allot to each of the two national communities a state of its own. Nothing more.

In short: the words “Jewish” and “Arab” in the UN resolution have nothing to do with the character of the two states, but only define the two communities in the country that were to establish their states. They have no other meaning.

BUT A professor who comes to this conclusion would be hounded as a “post-Zionist” who must be expelled from his university. According to our little McCarthys, even the debate is absolutely verboten. Verboten to think. Verboten to write. Strictly verboten to speak. In every university there would be Zionist overseers to receive reports about the lectures of professors, check their publications, report what they hear from students who inform on other students, and safeguard ideological purity. Much like the “politruks” – political commissars – in the Soviet Union. Much like the cadres of the “cultural revolution” in China, when thousands of professors and other intellectuals were sent to labor camps or remote villages.

But the results of their labors may be very different from what they expect. Instead of making the term “post-Zionism” a synonym for treason, they may make the term “Zionism” a synonym for fascism, gladdening the hearts of all those around the world who preach a boycott of the “Jewish state”. When the Israeli universities are cleansed of non-conformist thinkers, it will indeed be easy to boycott them.

When you say Zionism, do you mean the humanist vision of Theodor Herzl or Avigdor Lieberman’s Jewish fascism?