

Inflating Anti-Semitism?

In "Sharon's Best Weapon" (May 27), Naomi Klein overrates real anti-Semitism, as opposed to anger at Israeli policy. She also equates it with the violence being applied to Palestinians, and scolds protesters against Israeli policy for failing simultaneously to condemn attacks on Jewish synagogues and an alleged "rise of anti-Semitism."

Klein's article fails to demonstrate that there has been any rise in anti-Semitism. Her statement that anti-Semitism helped spike Le Pen's support "from 10 percent to 17 percent in a week" has no basis in fact. Le Pen's campaign was silent on Israel and Jews, focusing on anti-Arab themes. In Klein's reasoning this should have cost him votes. Even the pro-Israeli *Economist* notes that in France, "personal hostility to Jews, as opposed to the Israelis' government, is neither widespread nor increasing," that "few analysts put Mr. Le Pen's success down even partly to anti-Semitism," and "indeed, a leading French Jew laments that quite a few of his co-religionists voted last month for Mr. Le Pen."

Klein also misrepresents the position of the left, stating that every time she logs into indymedia.org, she's "confronted with a string of Jewish conspiracy theories about September 11 and excerpts from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*." She assures us that "the globalization movement isn't anti-Semitic," but her smear certainly suggests that it is. Those searching Indymedia have found mentions of the *Protocols*, but none in which they were cited as meritorious or valid; so I believe Klein owes an apology.

In her conclusion, Klein says that "whenever hatred of Jews diminishes, the likes of Jean-Marie Le Pen shrink right down with it." This is untrue, as Klein once again inflates the importance of anti-Semitism relative to other factors. In reality, it is the anti-Arab and anti-immigrant focus, along with the impact of neoliberal policies, that has given Le Pen his strong position in France.

Edward S. Herman
Penn Valley, Pennsylvania

Naomi Klein replies: I expected the hate mail from right-wing Israelis, but the attacks from the left have taken me somewhat by surprise. So far, I haven't responded. But when someone like Edward Herman, whose work has meant a great deal to me, chooses to so grossly distort the intent and spirit of my writing, I need to set the record straight.

Let me be absolutely clear: I did not "scold" the brave activists who have put their bodies on the line in the Occupied Territories. I unequivocally support these actions, stand in solidarity with them, and clearly said so in my article.

Neither did I "smear" Indymedia. As Indymedia readers know, it is a fact that anti-Semites, racists and other assorted wackos have tried to hijack the open publishing philosophy of several Indymedia newswires. For more than a year, Indymedia activists have been struggling to find an ethical way to deal with this opportunism, one in keeping with the values of participatory media. It is an open debate and, as someone who collaborates with Independent Media Centers around the world, I have the right to express my concerns without being told to go to apologize and go to my room.

Herman further implies that anti-Semitism isn't much of a problem anyway. While it's true that Le Pen's main target is Arab and North African immigrants (yet another point I made in my original article), the political success of a man who once dismissed the Holocaust as a "detail of history" is a reminder that it is perfectly possible to hate Arabs and Jews at the same time (and, if history has anything to teach us, communists, gypsies, gays, lesbians and plenty of other "others").

That's why the left has always had to find ways to condemn many hatreds and abuses simultaneously, just as we now must condemn Israeli violence while remaining vigilant about anti-Semitism. At no point did I in any way "equate" the current effects of anti-Semitism in Europe with the horrific violence the Israeli military is

raining down on Palestinians. The problem is that some on the left seem to feel this is a competition and that speaking out against anti-Semitism somehow softens opposition to Israeli violence and occupation. Quite the opposite: It strengthens it, while staying silent nearly plays into Sharon's scare tactics.

Sharon and leaders of the mainstream Jewish lobby groups prey on memories of persecution to convince millions of Jews that they will always be alone in a sea of hatred, that turning Palestinian towns and cities into cages is their only hope of security. Israeli newspapers are filled with articles about the rise of anti-Semitism in North America and Europe, with a special focus on the left.

One of the effects of this campaign has been the isolation of peace activists within Israel. Far too many left-wing Israelis have concluded that they cannot make common cause with those who not only seem to stay silent in the face of anti-Semitism, but even question whether the wave of incidents in Europe is anything to worry about at all. Herman seems unconcerned about further isolating these potential allies. That is a mistake.

Sharon is determined to destroy Palestinian society under the guise of fighting terrorism. The only strategy that has a chance of stopping him is a sustained, three-pronged alliance among Palestinian liberation forces, peace advocates within Israel and international human rights movements.

One thing is certain: We're not going to get anywhere until we start listening to the complexity in each other's positions, instead of portraying one another as crude caricatures.

Terry LaBan



THE CIA GETS THE GO-AHEAD TO ASSASSINATE SADDAM HUSSEIN

Before the Dawn

Will political reform finally come to Burma?

By Joshua Schenker

WASHINGTON—Ever since Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in early May, some foreign policy-makers and many ordinary Burmese have expressed cautious optimism that Burma, a Texas-sized Southeast Asian country ruled for 40 years by a brutal military regime, may finally undergo a political transition.

Burma's ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), announced it was turning over a "new page" for the country's 50 million citizens. For her part, Suu Kyi heralded a "new dawn" and vowed to work with the junta to further political reform, promising to continue a confidence-building dialogue begun in late 2000 between her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), and the regime.

Though politics inside Burma, probably the most isolated country in the world besides North Korea, are always murky, experts suggest several factors prompted the *détente*. At the highest levels, SPDC leaders may have believed Suu Kyi had lost her popular allure during her time away from the limelight. They were mistaken: After her release, she was met by thousands of supporters in Rangoon.

Meanwhile, special U.N. envoy Razali Ismail helped persuade the junta that only by breaking the country's political deadlock could they obtain any international legitimacy. "Razali has convinced some members of the regime that the only way they can return to the international fold is to embrace dialogue," says David Steinberg, a Burma specialist at Georgetown University.

Razali's hand was strengthened by U.S. threats to tighten sanctions on Burmese goods. This threat was enhanced by the recent pullout of dozens of major companies—including Wal-Mart, Hanes and, most recently, Ross Stores—from Burma, in response to pressure from groups like the Free Burma Coalition to stop purchasing textiles manufactured there.



Aung San Suu Kyi speaks to reporters after being freed from house arrest in May.

Burma (called Myanmar by its leaders) has been an international pariah since 1988, when the Rangoon regime brutally suppressed street protests and killed more than 3,000 people. The United States and several of its allies cut off direct financial assistance and blocked most aid to Burma after the 1988 bloodshed, and Washington barred all future investment in the country in 1997.

Almost immediately after Suu Kyi left her house, however, key foreign states began reconsidering their policies. Some diplomats said privately that the European Union would consider boosting assistance to Burma. Four days after Suu Kyi's release, Japan announced that it would provide the Burmese government with \$5 million to renovate a hydroelectric power plant.

Most important, in May, the United States—which generally takes a harder line against Rangoon—invited Colonel Kyaw Thein, a senior SPDC officer, to Washington. Kyaw Thein was the highest-ranking Burmese official to visit Washington in years, though experts emphasize that most American officials are not convinced Washington should expand contacts with the regime.

Indeed, Burma's recent political and socioeconomic history should make the

United States highly skeptical. The SPDC has a poor track record of keeping its promises: The junta allowed elections in 1990, but when the NLD won, the military annulled the results.

According to sources close to the talks, the NLD-SPDC dialogue has not broached any critical issues, including the some 1,500 political prisoners who remain in Burmese jails. Many Burmese exiles fear the regime will use talks with the NLD to draft a new constitution that will guarantee the military's supremacy in national politics. "The regime could use the talks to create a new constitution, have Suu Kyi give it legitimacy, and then cut out the NLD at the last minute," says Aung Zaw, editor of *Irrawaddy*, a Thailand-based magazine on Burmese politics.

Even as it touts a "new page" of openness and prosperity, the regime is contributing to the country's worsening socioeconomic crisis. The junta's graft, fiscal mismanagement and restrictive laws have created what may be the worst economic period in the country's history. The value of the kyat, Burma's currency, has plummeted, and long lines now form every morning in Rangoon, as average Burmese citizens wait for hours outside shops selling subsidized food staples.