

Is the anti-globalisation movement anti-Semitic?

BY ANATUL ISLAM

MARK Strauss, a senior editor at the influential international affairs journal *Foreign Policy* seems to denigrate the so-called 'anti-globalisation' movement as essentially a cover for a global anti-semitic movement ('Anti-globalism's Jewish problem' in *Nov/Dec* issue, 2003). With a deft touch, Strauss pulls together disparate evidence to argue that the far right movement has linked up with the far left -- a disreputable alliance that is united by the 'backlash against globalisation'. The latter, in turn, is engendered by 'public anxiety' over 'lost jobs, shaky economies, and political and social upheaval'.

Strauss suggests that critics of globalisation view the process through the prism of prejudice: a US-led project for the hegemonic expansion of US-style capitalism to the rest of the world. Add to this the presumption that members of the Jewish diaspora are over-represented in the corporate and financial world in the West and one can make the leap to a 'Jewish conspiracy' lurking behind globalisation.

Strauss makes a number of important points and is right to expose the malcontents who masquerade as members of a progressive movement. Unfortunately, in his zeal to disparage the critics of globalisation as no more than a cover for anti-semitism, the author fails to accept genuine concerns about the current structure of global capitalism and the risk that the label of anti-semitism can easily be abused to suppress legitimate dissent and debate. He presents a caricature of a complex case of transnational activism -- on which, by the way, there is a large and sophisticated professional literature. I offer a less prejudicial way of analysing the anti-globalisation movement and show how the spirit of disquiet that pervades the debate on globalisation is, in fact, being shared by luminaries in the economics profession who are neither Luddites nor anti-semitic. I argue too that eminent practitioners, such as Judith Butler at the University of California at Berkeley, have raised concerns about the abuse of the term anti-semitism to smear all criticism of policies of the Israeli government.

Goethe, as Tariq Ali notes, once said that the world moves forward because of those who oppose it. It is possible to view the anti-globalisation movement in that spirit, despite the fact that ranks of the movement are infiltrated by the usual suspects as Strauss concludes. The Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen develops the thesis in the spirit of Goethe, although he invokes the wisdom of Francis Bacon. The point, according to Sen, is that the anti-globalisation movement, despite its rowdy and at times violent nature, is essentially a movement of dissent that raises 'global doubts' that could pave the way for 'global solutions'. Indeed, several luminaries in the economics profession are afflicted by 'global doubts'.

The Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz and his recent views on 'globalisation and its discontents' are well-known. He has followed up his work with a rather critical analysis of the 'roaring '90s' that bred a triumphalist vision of globalisation. I suggest that it is this triumphalist vision that is under intellectual onslaught. Propositions that may be regarded as 'articles of faith' by economists are increasingly being questioned. As Dani Rodrik at Harvard has shown, trade policy, for example, cannot be shown in the most recent empirical studies to have a large or even a significant influence on national economic prosperity after other

The Strauss thesis of the anti-globalisation movement as being no more than an anti-semitic front is blissfully unaware of the implicit alliance that has been forged between the 'street protests' that started in Seattle and continued in Cancun and the break-down in professional consensus among leading economists.

factors and variables, such as geographic location and institutions, are considered. Even pro-globalisation economists, such as Bill Easterly, Jagdish Bhagwati, Andrew Rose and Paul Krugman are disturbed by the findings that they themselves unearth.

Bill Easterly, a former World Bank economist and now at New York University, finds that the much-vaunted era of globalisation of the 1980s and 1990s were 'lost decades' for the average developing economy when seen from the perspective of the 1960s and 1970s -- a finding corroborated by Mark Weisbrot and others at the Centre for Economic Policy Research. Branko Milanovic, a World Bank economist, has shown that the state of the evidence on trends in global inequality is rather mixed, while Angus Deaton at Princeton and Reddy and Pogge at Columbia have raised serious doubts about the unambiguous declines in global poverty that have been approvingly reported by the World Bank in its recent publications.

Paul Krugman makes the important point that, despite the conservative counter-revolution in economics in the '70s and '80s, Keynesianism is alive and well and suggests that we should 'all be Keynesians now' given the return of 'depression economics'. Andrew Rose shows that, in statistical terms, the WTO has had little or no impact either on trade liberalisation or the growth in world trade, after other variables are allowed for. Indeed, Rose speculates that the WTO was deliberately created as a weak international institution by its powerful founding members. Jagdish Bhagwati at Columbia University has dedicated his professional life to studying international trade and its essentially benevolent nature. Even he is forced to talk of a 'Treasury-Wall Street-IMF complex' that has sabotaged a meaningful discourse on the benefits and costs of globalisation and a genuine agenda of multilateralism.

One can thus find enough examples to show that there are leading economists who are highly circumspect about a triumphalist story of globalisation and have provided intellectual succour to the strident sentiments expressed by the anti-globalisation movement. In this specific sense, the Strauss thesis of the anti-globalisation movement as being no more than an anti-semitic front is blissfully unaware of the implicit alliance that has been forged between the 'street protests' that started in Seattle and continued in Cancun and the break-down in professional consensus among leading economists.

Let me now turn to the vexed issue of the use and abuse of the term 'anti-semitism'. Of course, antisemitism, like all forms of discrimination and prejudice, must be consistently and unambiguously opposed. There is, however, the risk that, in their zeal to deal with this scourge, the self-appointed watchdogs of anti-semitism -- such as Strauss -- may lack a sense of balance in propagating their views. To start with, no state authority -- or their lobbies -- must be given latitude in their exercise of influence, power and authority to use the cover of anti-semitism to cover their dubious deeds. It is difficult to argue that the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians is an example of morally and ethically consistent behaviour. It is difficult to dismiss

the view that the Christian Right in the United States has forged an alliance with the pro-Israeli lobby (the so-called 'Likudniks' who form part of the 'neoconservatives' or 'neocons') and exert a powerful influence on American foreign policy, hobbling the capacity of the US government to adopt an evenhanded approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The 'Likudniks', after all, were identified by such commentators as Kinsey rather than by an anti-semitic and swarthy Arab. Even some mainstream foreign policy historians, such as Arthur

by the Israeli government?

Why isn't Strauss distressed that Van Creveld, a historian at Hebrew University, proposed that the Israeli army should kill as many Palestinians as possible to impose 'peace' in that troubled part of the world (Creveld as reported in March 1, 2003 in the Hebrew Weekly *Yerushalayim*)? Where is the outrage expressed by Strauss when Allan Derzhowitz, Professor of Law at Harvard University wrote on March 11, 2003 in the *Jerusalem Post* that the Israeli army should not hesitate to liquidate entire Palestinian villages in order to

monopolise the position of victim. 'Victim' is a quickly transposable term: it can shift from minute to minute, from the Jews killed by suicide bombers...to the Palestinian child killed by Israeli gunfire. The public sphere needs to be one in which both kinds of violence are challenged insistently and in the name of justice." (*London Review of Books*, vol.25, No.16, Nov 2003). I urge Strauss to heed such advice rather than dismiss the anti-globalisation movement as anti-semitic or selectively use the term to suppress legitimate debate about the abuse of state power and authority, whether it occurs in Israel or elsewhere.

Anatulul Islam teaches at the School of International Business and Asian Studies, Griffith University, Australia. He is the founding co-editor of the *Journal of Asia Pacific Economy* (Routledge, London and New York).



Schlesinger, Jr refers to a 'neoon fantasy' in current US foreign policy (*New York Review of Books*, Vol.50, No.16, October 23, 2003) as a routine statement of fact. Will Strauss be prepared to dismiss Kinsey and Schlesinger as 'part of anti-semitism bandwagoned on the anti-war movement and rising anti-Americanism'? Strauss is enraged with the villains in the anti-semitic camp, but where is his zeal to be a moral crusader when some eminent members of the academic community in Israel and the Jewish diaspora are prepared to condemn Palestinians for their violence but unwilling and unable to condemn injustices committed

quell the resistance by Palestinians, giving such communities '24 hours to leave' before the bulldozer could begin? Are we not seeing a semblance of these ideas being carried out by the Israeli government in the West Bank and Gaza? Is it anti-semitic to condemn the intellectual and moral justification for state-sponsored violence being offered by Creveld and Derzhowitz?

What Strauss needs to recognise, as Judith Butler has so eloquently argued, "that Jews cannot legitimately be understood always and only as presumptive victims...No political ethics can start from the assumption that Jews

A peep into Rumi's treasure

TALKING BOOKS

There is above all the ecstasy of grief that we find in his poetry which is the most intimate record of the search for the divine -- an emblem simultaneously of discipline and the abandon of surrender...Rumi says that we know separation well only if we have tasted the joy of the union. Longing becomes more poignant if in the distance you can't tell whether your friend is going away or coming back and the ecstasy of grief is both human and divine.

YASMEEN MURSHED

I claim to have fairly wide ranging even eclectic tastes in reading therefore I must include poetry in my weekly must-include books. Prose cannot soothe the soul and feed the emotions as poetry does, especially when it is great poetry which excites the intellect with passion.

One finds the power of such poetry in the works of the mystic poet Rumi. His works have become available to a wider readership with the publication of Coleman Barks' excellent translations. Barks is himself a poet and has taught both English and poetry at the University of Georgia. His books, *THE ESSENTIAL RUMI, THE SOUL OF RUMI* and *RUMI THE BOOK OF LOVE* (pub: Harper Collins 1997, 2002 and 2003 respectively) have become best sellers in recent years.

Born in Balkh in what is now Afghanistan, during an era of political conflict and war, Jalaluddin Rumi turned to theology and mysticism from a very young age. His father Bahauddin Walad, was a theologian and a jurist as well as a mystic and at his death Rumi took over the position of Sheikh in the dervish learning community. Rumi's life seems to have been the fairly normal one of a religious scholar -- teaching, meditating, helping the poor -- until he met the wandering mystic Shams of Tabriz and they became inseparable companions. This friendship led to an opening of hearts and minds, an exploration of the mystery of divine truth which celebrated both the glory and the pain of being in a human incarnation.

Barks says that Rumi became a deep and radiant adept in the science of mystical tradition. "Mystical" is a vague and imprecise word in English and the area of mystical experience may not often be empirically verifiable. It is also not exclusively physical, emotional or mental though it may partake of those three areas. Like the depths of love mystical experience can be neither proven nor denied, but it does happen and it is the region of human existence that Rumi's poems inhabit.

I enjoyed Rumi's poetry from a very early age but my *Farsi* was never good enough to truly appreciate the nuances of the language. In any case with any mystical writing, I find, that annotation, commentary and explanation is essential for full enjoyment and appreciation. The main source for

these before the Barks translations was Professor Arberry's extremely erudite work. However Barks writes with such a passionate commitment to mysticism that the very first verse I read captivated me completely.

"No one knows what makes the soul wake up so happy! Maybe a dawn breeze has blown the veil from the face of God."

At this time in the history of the world when Rumi's homeland itself is embroiled in political conflict and war just as it was when he was born in the thirteenth century, consider these verses from his *Diwan* and how relevant they are to our times.

".....every war and every conflict between human beings has happened because of some disagreement about

names. It's such an unnecessary foolishness, because just beyond the arguing there's a long

table of companionship, set and waiting for us to sit down."

On a similar theme is the ghazal *Four Words For What We Want*

"A man gives one coin to be spent among four people. The Persian says, 'I want *angur*.' The Arab says, '*Inab*, you rascal.' The Turk,

'*Uzum!*' The Greek, 'Shut up all of you. We'll have *istafil*.' They begin pushing each other, then hitting with fists, no stopping it. If a many-languaged

master had been there, he could have made peace and told them, *I can give you each of you the grapes you want with this one coin. Trust me. Keep quiet, and you four enemies will agree.*

I also know a silent inner meaning that makes of you "Four words one wine."

As a true adept Rumi's thoughts transcend the boundaries of creed and class to proclaim a monotheistic, multicultural and secularist thought as the following verses show

"What is praised is one, so the praise is one too, many jugs being poured into a huge basin. All religions, all this singing,

one song. The differences are just illusion and vanity. Sunlight looks slightly different on this wall than it does on that wall and a lot different

on this other one, but it is still one light. We have borrowed these clothes, these time-and-space personalities,

from a light, and when we praise, we pour them back in".

Rumi feels it is a deep necessity, if our lives are to be real, that we experience the energy of essence. There is in his poetry a love of living on the verge, the delight on the brim of merging with the divine and the flirtatious touch of bewilderment in the face of divine majesty.

There is a passage in the *Musnavi*, the long continuous poem that he wrote for the last twelve years of his life, in which the life of the soul is felt as an apple orchard and language is a thick morning fog covering it. Gradually as the sun comes up and burns off the mist we see through to the taste and the beauty. It is this tangible, sensual quality to his imagery that captivates even those who are not persuaded of the validity of mystical experience.

There is above all the ecstasy of grief that we find in his poetry which is the most intimate record of the search for the divine -- an emblem simultaneously of discipline and the abandon of surrender. Sufis call the wanting of the soul 'nafs'. From the urgent way lovers want each other to the *sannyasi's* search for truth all movement comes from the mover. Rumi says that we know separation well only if we have tasted the joy of the union. Longing becomes more poignant if in the distance you can't tell whether your friend is going away or coming back and the ecstasy of grief is both human and divine.

"I saw grief drinking a cup of sorrow and called out, 'It tastes sweet, does it not?'"

"You've caught me," grief answered, "and you've ruined my business. How can I sell sorrow, when you know it's a blessing?"

Yasmeen Murshed is a full-time bookworm and a part-time educationist. She is also the founder of Scholastica School.

Who promote drugs and arms trade?

SIRAJUL ISLAM

THE way the mainstream media is presenting it, it almost seems as if there is simply no link between the recent proliferation of international politics of the most deadly variety, and international business interest. Indeed, the official spokesmen of the United States government, as well as several private businessmen, have gone further and presented the matter in terms of an opposition between politics and business interest worldwide. Political extremists, who are no doubt dangerous, fanatical and lethal, are seen as opposing all aspects of what is presented as "good" modern civilisation - democracy, international trade and investment, and so on. So the story is told as if world trade patterns stand in direct opposition to extremist international politics as we know it. Not only is trade itself adversely affected by such extremist activities, but these activities in turn would be less, we are told, if only the wheels of commerce and economic integration would be allowed to run smoothly, since this would ensure greater prosperity for all.

Unfortunately, a large part of the world now knows beyond all doubt that this statement -- that more international integration will necessarily bring about better material conditions - is simply not true. The era of globalisation has seen many more people on earth living in absolute poverty, significant increases in income and asset inequality both within and between countries, impoverishment of entire regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Eastern Europe, agrarian crises throughout the developing world, as well as many other such results. And it is also quite clear that such results are not accidental, that they stem from the greater power of large international capital vis-à-vis all other social groups, which has been the dominant and defining feature of the recent phase of globalisation. Indeed, it could be argued that some

of the increase in resentment, even in sheer desperation, that has been such fertile ground for the breeding of extremist politics, has come from the massive increases in inequality and the denial of basic economic rights to large sections of people across the world. But quite apart from this indirect process of causation, there is another sense in which international terrorism and international trade are not in opposition, but

Intelligence Agency's covert operations.

Prior to the Soviet-Afghan war, opium production in Afghanistan and Pakistan was directed to small regional markets. There was no local production of heroin. The Central Intelligence Agency not only encouraged the local leaders to coerce farmers into growing opium but also set up around eleven heroin production units in the area. Within two

narcotics policy in Afghanistan has been subordinated to the war against Soviet influence there. In 1995, the former CIA director of the Afghan operation, Charles Cogan, admitted that the CIA had indeed sacrificed the drug war to fight the Cold War. The completely cynical attitude of the CIA is exemplified by Cogan's blatant and shameless statements. "Our main mission was to do as much damage as possible to the Soviets. We didn't really have the resources or the time to devote to an investigation of the drug trade. I don't think that we need to apologise for this. Every situation has its fallout.... There was fallout in terms of drugs, yes. But the main objective was accomplished. The Soviets left Afghanistan."

The end of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan did not mean a disruption of this production and trade, which has grown exponentially even after this. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a new surge in opium production has unfolded. (According to UN estimates, the production of opium in Afghanistan in 1998-99 -- coinciding with the build up of armed insurgencies in the former Soviet republics -- reached a record high of 4600 metric ton).

actually fundamentally linked and reliant upon each other. This is in terms of some types of world trade which are huge in size but rarely get talked about either by the World Trade Organisation or by the most ardent advocates of globalisation - the world trade in arms and in drugs.

This trade has become the source of the vast incomes which generate the funds used by terrorist networks across the world, even as they also form an important source of demand for small arms production in particular. The close nexus between such nefarious and shady trading activities and the activities of international terrorists, as well as the close involvement of quasi-governmental organisations like the American Central Intelligence Agency, has been brought out very clearly in a study by the Canadian academic Michel Chossudovsky. Thus, as Chossudovsky shows, the history of the drug trade in Central Asia is intimately related to the Central

Intelligence Agency's covert operations. Prior to the Soviet-Afghan war, opium production in Afghanistan and Pakistan was directed to small regional markets. There was no local production of heroin. The Central Intelligence Agency not only encouraged the local leaders to coerce farmers into growing opium but also set up around eleven heroin production units in the area. Within two narcotics policy in Afghanistan has been subordinated to the war against Soviet influence there. In 1995, the former CIA director of the Afghan operation, Charles Cogan, admitted that the CIA had indeed sacrificed the drug war to fight the Cold War. The completely cynical attitude of the CIA is exemplified by Cogan's blatant and shameless statements. "Our main mission was to do as much damage as possible to the Soviets. We didn't really have the resources or the time to devote to an investigation of the drug trade. I don't think that we need to apologise for this. Every situation has its fallout.... There was fallout in terms of drugs, yes. But the main objective was accomplished. The Soviets left Afghanistan."

Of idiots and telephones

BICHOLITO

OK! Let me be straightforward. I believe too many people have telephones these days that ought to be confiscated. And I'll be happy to explain, especially since I have had several similar encounters as the one below that border on sheer ridiculousness. One went this way:

Ring Ring...I pick up the telephone and say a friendly hello as is customary. The chap on the other side responds hello. I am now waiting for him to continue but there is a peculiar silence as if of anticipation, of being recognised. So I say "hello!" this time with a question. To my astonishment the reply is another heavy hello, but nothing more.

Now I am starting to shake my head, but having been taught restraint from an early age, I seize the initiative, "Kakey chaichen?" (Whom do you want?). Back comes the cryptic reply, "Ami Gulshan thekey bolchi." (I am calling from Gulshan). OK...now I'm convinced I'm dealing with an idiot who believes he is the only earthling living in Gulshan! I am tempted to put the phone down, but decide to press on and see where this conversation goes.

As some more of my patience wears off, I try my humor, "Gulshan thekey kay bolchen?" (And who are you calling from Gulshan?), still trying to keep calm. But these callers don't want you to keep calm as he hurls back rather seriously, "Apni kay bolchen?" (Who are you?). Still trying to see whether I can recognise the voice so that I can give the person a good talking to about telephone etiquette, I raise my voice a notch and say, "Ami jei hoi, apnar kakey chai? Koto nombor chaichen?" (Whom do you want? What number have you dialed?).

I hear an irritated "tch" on the other side

followed by a slight pause; then a thunderous and harsh "Ai, tumi kay?" (Hey, who are you?). The bloke is now calling me "tumi" (an unpleasant "you"). That did it! It was time to engage differently, time for a full-scale counter-attack! So I become an idiot myself to confront an idiot and mumble back something, barely making myself audible.

Kay? (Who?)
Mumble mumble
Shuni na, jorey bolo! (Can't hear, speak loudly)
Alexander
Kay?
Alexander the Great
Ki Ashchorjo (exasperation)
Sorry, Hitler; bhul bolchilam. (I was mistaken)
Faizlami koro? (Are you trying to be stupid?)
Ji kori. (yes)
Kay Tumi? (Who are you?)
Haji Chan Miya...biryani lagbo sir? (Do you need biryani?)
Fazil kothakar (Stupid)
Na saar, ami Alim pash, Korotia Madrasah theika. (I have an Alim degree)
Click...end conversation!

So there you are: a conversation of idiotic proportions that need not have gone so far if only some simple telephonic norms were maintained. It could have easily ended much earlier or certainly gone on longer as I was bristling. But there are stupid callers armed with a telephone and a real attitude who can incite highly negative reactions. I tell you, these reactions come with a price: First my blood pressure went up a few notches, and that was

uncalled for; then, not only did I spend time with this fool, but also needed extra time to gain back my sanity. Finally there was a social price of dealing with this imbecile by making myself an idiot in front of decent company! Don't people understand the ramifications of their behaviours? What is wrong with these people? There almost seems to be some type of a power dynamic here, as if the one who identifies her/himself last is some kind of a winner.

One encounters something similar when calling the "so-called" important people whose secretaries always intervene on their behalf. Many times I have asked my secretary to contact a certain person. Even after she has given the details of who I am and where I am calling from, I find myself confronting a secretary on the other side who will take me to task again as (s)he wields the power of providing access. Readers can surely guess how my agitation is as I am cross-examined thoroughly once again by this digital gatekeeper, before I am given access. Perhaps this is a necessary device to screen out idiot callers.

I wonder what happens when one "so-called" important person calls another. I have a strange feeling that the secretaries have a secret code that sorts out the power balance. Or perhaps they battle it out on a cognitive plane to determine which boss will talk to a secretary first. What a game... a win-lose power game of immense stupidity, played out everyday that is so Bengali!

For all "callers", I have a simple message: When you call someone, you either identify yourself or let the person on the other side know who or what number you are calling -- that's the norm. Otherwise, you will get branded quickly with one simple word -- idiot!

Sirajul Islam is a social sciences researcher and consultant.