

Scholars Circle Resource Guide

The Assembly Line of Antizionism: Soviet Roots of Today's Progressive Antizionism



Dr. Naya Lekht

*Jerusalem Post/JNF 2024 "ViZionary"
Co-founder of Stop Antizionism*

About Dr. Naya Lekht

Dr. Naya Lekht is a scholar, educator, and writer known for bringing urgency and clarity to the study of anti-Jewish hatred. She earned her PhD in Russian Literature from UCLA, where her dissertation examined Holocaust literature with a focus on Babi Yar as a site of collective memory for Russian-speakers. Her research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union informs her work on Soviet antizionism, linking historical patterns of repression to contemporary forms of anti-Jewish hatred. Today, Dr. Lekht partners with Jewish and non-Jewish private schools to develop rigorous, historically grounded curricula on Israel, the Middle East, and Jewish identity, empowering students to think critically and engage confidently with one of the defining issues of our time. In 2024, she was named one of the Jerusalem Post and JNF's Top 25 Zionist "ViZionaries." She is the co-founder of Stop Antizionism, an educational initiative addressing the realities students face in K-12 and higher education through a declaration that names antizionism as today's antisemitism. Her writing has appeared in the Jerusalem Post, Tablet, Jewish Journal, Algemeiner, and Times of Israel, and she regularly lectures in schools, community institutions, and public forums on the history of anti-Jewish movements and how to teach this material with clarity and moral courage.



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Common Q&A's

Why and how did the Soviets engineer the antizionist campaign?

After World War II, the Soviet Union initially hoped Israel would help spread communism, but turned against it when Israel aligned with the United States. To avoid discrediting themselves after the Holocaust, they reframed traditional antisemitism into a politically acceptable form—antizionism. By recasting Jews as violators of modern values like human rights, they branded Israel with accusations such as racism, colonialism, and genocide.

Why was antizionism rejected in the USSR but embraced in the West?

In the Soviet Union, antizionism was imposed from above as state propaganda and never fully embraced by ordinary citizens. In the West, it evolved into a grassroots belief system promoted by activists and academics who view it as a moral cause. Universities and postcolonial theory helped legitimize and spread these ideas, turning ideology into widely accepted conviction.

How did the Protocols of the Elders of Zion influence Soviet antizionism?

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fabricated conspiracy text from Tsarist Russia, provided a blueprint for Soviet antizionist narratives. The Soviets replaced “Jews” with “Zionists,” preserving the idea of a secret global conspiracy controlling politics, media, and finance. This reframing allowed them to present antisemitic themes as political criticism of Israel.

Key Takeaways

- ☑ Antizionism did not appear organically in the West. It was deliberately constructed by the Soviet Union as a rebranded form of anti-Jewish hostility, designed to appear political rather than ideological. As such, by presenting hostility toward Jews as “criticism of Israel,” antizionism avoided the stigma of antisemitism and gained moral and intellectual legitimacy.
- ☑ The Soviets consistently denounced antisemitism while promoting antizionism, creating a false distinction. This pattern, rejecting “old” hatred to legitimize a “new” one, remains a defining feature of anti-Jewish discourse.
- ☑ Soviet antizionism was a tool to demonize the West and as such, must be understood within the broader Cold War era. In this regard, the Soviet Union supplied the Third World and Arab states with propaganda narratives to destabilize American global influence.
- ☑ In the Soviet Union, antizionism was imposed from above as a tool of state power. Today, it has transformed into a populist moral cause, embraced as a language of justice and liberation. By casting Israel as a symbol of Western sins, colonialism, racism, apartheid, it enables Western audiences to project their own moral anxieties onto Israel, reinforcing its centrality as a global scapegoat.

The views expressed by the speaker don't necessarily reflect Chai Mitzvah's official position.

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