

# Would you buy sneakers from an anti-Semite?

**I'VE SUBSCRIBED** to Adbusters Magazine since its advent in 1989, back when it was on the cutting edge of culture jamming. When the March/April 2004 issue showed up in my mail, with a full page back cover ad for "the unswoosh" sneaker, I knew that the magazine's culture jamming days were over. Adbusters is now firmly planted in the land of marketing, contracting out to overseas companies to manufacture sneakers branded with Adbusters' "hip" new anti-brand, the Black Spot. Their new "Chukie T" style canvas, which will debut in a few weeks for around \$40 a pair, are designed, they say, "for only one thing: Kicking Phil's Ass."

The Phil in question would be sweatshop guru Phil Knight, of Nike fame. Adbusters had been a thorn up Knight's butt for years – but now it appeared they were ready to throw in the hat and emulate Nike's marketing strategy. Touting the motto "Rethink the Cool," Adbusters plans to launch the sneaker with billboards and TV ads, which they oxymoronically dub as "subvertisements."

The only thing Adbusters is subverting, however, is the popular Black Spot anti-branding campaign. Their plan follows a textbook 1990s coolcrafting blueprint, counting on viral advertising in the form of existing black spot graffiti and stickers, and having their product used by trendsetting youth. To this end, they admonish well-intentioned followers

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to "spread the word at high schools, adjust Nike billboards in your area, [and] jam Niketowns with black spot stickers." The last two suggestions help brand Adbuster sneakers with a trendy radical outlaw chic – in effect outcooling even Nike's icy cool. And hence, the anti-brand is branded. Feeling cynical yet?

I was concerned when Adbusters introduced their sneaker campaign, but as a longtime fan of the magazine and the anti-consumerist movement it inspired, I went with the flow, waiting to see where it would end up. Naturally I assumed we'd be talking about a worker-run collective and organic cotton or hemp materials – in essence, a real alternative to the Nike model. None of this has emerged. But to my own embarrassment, I stayed silent because I trusted Adbusters.

### **Cooler than Hitler**

This month, after "rethinking the cool" one more time, as Adbusters' back cover admonished me to do, I opened the magazine to read the article, "Why Won't Anyone Say They Are Jewish?" written by Adbuster's founder and publisher, Kalle Lasn. In this piece, he argues that a sort of Jewish cabal has hijacked US foreign policy. "Here at Adbusters," he writes, "we decided to tackle this issue head on and came up with a carefully researched list of who appear to be the 50 most influential neocons in the US." Based on this list, Lasn writes, "What they all share, is the view that the US is a benevolent hyper power that must protect itself by reshaping the rest of the world into its morally superior image. And half of them are Jewish." This is especially odd, he suggests, since Jews, "make up less than 2 percent of the American population," a point he makes earlier in the article.

His point isn't new. Nazis and other anti-Semites on the right often compile similar lists, arguing the opposite point, that Jews dominate a subversive hedonistic left, hell-bent on undermining conservative values and political power. The only thing that differentiates Lasn from his right-wing counterparts is the bone he throws in advance to his critics, acknowledging that American Jews do not have a "monolithic perspective," and that many oppose the war in Iraq and Ariel Sharon's policies.

Like Lasn, I don't buy into the argument that anyone who opposes Israel is an anti-Semite. Many outspoken Jewish-Americans are among of the strongest critics of Israel's criminal occupation of Palestinian land and its horrific treatment of Palestinian citizens. Jewish people of conscience find Israel's actions to be horrific, with holocaust survivors comparing walled-in Palestinian communities to the Warsaw ghetto. For them, it's a sin not to protest such injustices. As Democracy Now!'s Amy Goodman put it at a recent talk in Buffalo, "As the grand daughter of an orthodox rabbi, I was horrified to see photos of young Israeli children wearing gas masks, but I was more horrified to see photos of young

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Palestinian children without them ..." Jews like Goodman and Noam Chomsky who actively oppose Israeli policy are clearly not anti-Semites. Likewise, non-Jews who hold the same principled positions, are not anti-Semites. And to call them anti-Semites is both a cry of wolf, and an act of slander, undermining the true fight against a very real anti-Semitism.

### **Kalle Lasn is a punk**

Lasn, however, is the real article. He's an anti-Semite. The list he presents of neo-conservatives is artificially small, with an inflated Jewish presence. Missing from his list are high-profile neo-cons such as New Gingrich, Bill Frist, Madeleine Albright, Richard Armitage, John Ashcroft, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Karl Rove and Jeanne Kirkpatrick. Lasn even seems to have missed a few supposed Jews, such as Henry Kissinger, on his list. Even with a more complete list, Lasn's point still holds true (though not with the fifty-plus percent Jewish plurality he describes) – there are a lot of Jews among the neo-cons. So what? There are also a lot of Jews among the socialists. And among the labor movement. And there are a lot of former Jews now self-describing as Pagans. Hell, former Jews also dominate Jews for Jesus. A cultural anthropologist might say this is natural for an oral culture. Or it could be a statistical anomaly. As Lasn readily admits, however, there is no monolithic Jewish perspective. So what is his point?

The neo-cons in question should be called on the carpet for what they have done to this country – for lobbying in support of an illegal war in Iraq, for supporting a morally bankrupt policy of military aggression, for leading the fight to dismantle the Bill of Rights, and yes, for supporting, both financially and politically, the disgusting criminal actions of the Sharon government. The people Lasn mentions, both Jews and non-Jews, are part of a political movement that is opposed by both liberals and traditional conservatives. They have hijacked our government and are leading our country down a road to ruin. This is why we must oppose them – not because some of them claim to be Jewish.