

An Anti-statist Outlook

A New (Jewish) Fascism and its Opposition

Unruhlee

Israel, The U.S. in Miniature

Much of the population of Israel, no different from people in the United States, denies its past as an invader/settler nation, is oblivious to the suffering which creates its plentitude, revels in self-generated myths of its goodness and bravery, and cannot fathom why such rage is directed at it.

Both nations live in what Noam Chomsky describes as a state of “willful ignorance.” The information readily exists for either people to easily understand their origins and how their country and culture engage the world, but blinders are preferable to many rather than having to face the consequences of what a look at reality would demand of them.

The European invasion and genocidal destruction of the North and South American indigenous cultures, cleansed the continent as part of the importation of a poisonous culture and governmental system that had brought social and ecological wreckage to its homeland. The Israelis, although basing their state on similar land dispossession, are faced with resistance of their victims who remain.

Our coverage includes two essays by Jewish Americans, one which traces the history of Israel from its beginning as a Zionist vision, [The Mythology of Israel] the other [this article] looks at the current intifada. Also included in this section is an essay from the Situationist International written at the time of the 1967 war. Though written 35 years ago, it retains its sharp critique.

—FE staff

“I was starting to be familiar with the traits of the Nazis who’d almost captured me: the racism that reduced human beings to their genealogical connections over five or six generations, the crusading nationalism that considered the rest of humanity an obstacle, the Gleichschaltung that cut off the individual’s freedom to choose, the technological efficiency that made small humans mere fodder for great machines, the bully militarism that pitted walls of tanks against a cavalry and exacted a hundred times the losses it sustained, the official paranoia that pictured the enemy, poorly armed townspeople and villagers, as a nearly omnipotent conspiracy of cosmic scope. But I didn’t see that these traits had anything to do with America or Israel.”

—Fredy Perlman, *Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom* [1]

In January, a commanding officer in the Israeli Defense Force revealed that his units were studying the German Army’s experiences during the World War II battle for the Warsaw Ghetto. [2] His explanation was that however shocking this may sound, seizing a densely populated refugee camp or the kasbah in Nablus, for example, presented logistical problems for an army trying to reduce casualties.

No worries, it’s just a question of efficiency.

By the time I read about this a few months later, these studies were being fully utilized during the April Israeli invasion and reoccupation of the West Bank. Overwhelming forces entered city after city, enforcing a total curfew by shooting at anybody found in the streets.

More than half the houses in big cities like Ramallah and Nablus have been searched, often accompanied by looting and wanton destruction of property. In “sensitive” areas, especially refugee camps, these visits often included the mass arrest of the entire male population. After a few days at improvised detention camps, most of the prisoners would be set free to get home by foot under the deadly conditions of the curfew. The rest were taken to the notorious Ansar-3 Detention Center, tortured to make them confess and implicate others, and “sorted out” for prolonged prison terms. “Administrative Detention” like this can go on for years without trial, according to Israeli law.

It is not possible to convey in a few paragraphs the extent of the damage being done: [3] the civilian infrastructure is being deliberately destroyed. School records have been ruined, a center for blind children shelled, ambulances and countless peoples’ cars flattened by tanks. In Jenin alone, at least 26 civilians were killed, many of them aged or handicapped people trapped in homes being demolished by army bulldozers. Almost a million people have been held under curfews without access to basic necessities for weeks, only to have it briefly lifted and resumed for weeks more.

Yesterday, on the 68th day of curfew in Nablus, the Israeli army occupied the Red Crescent center in the city, the Palestinian Medical Relief building was surrounded, and Israeli troops prevented ambulances from moving freely. Already 70 Palestinians have died because they were prevented from receiving medical treatment. Assassinations occur daily with a high civilian toll.

A modern Warsaw Ghetto

Essentially, Israel is administering a modern Warsaw Ghetto on the West Bank and in Gaza. They’ve learned their lessons from history very well.

This age-old project of deporting, expropriating and exterminating human beings is never pretty, but there is something especially stomach-churning to me in that this new fascism is being done by Jews. Part of that is personal, because I’m Jewish. But I don’t think that’s all of it: the persecution of the Jews has infamous status, and has often been seen as the historical epitome of brutal discrimination.

The response to this, however, was the formation of a new nation state which began its own pattern of land dispossession and oppression and the creation of a national myth in which the invader/settlers portray themselves as being persecuted by their victims much in the manner of those who had tortured them. It is a tragedy with echoes throughout history.

“I don’t compare the Israeli government to the Nazis anymore,” says forest activist Mika] Jakubal, following his April 2002 trip to the West Bank where he dodged Israeli bullets and helped with medical relief.

“What I’m saying now...is all empires do and the Nazis are only unique in that they applied their famous German ingenuity and thoroughness in such a way as to give us a near-perfect image of the, um, glory that is the state.”

“Traitor!” was a frequent response from many people, according to Fredy Perlman in the essay quoted above, when he mentioned “pogrom” and “Beirut” in the same sentence following the 1982 Ariel Sharon-led attack on Lebanon and the slaughter of 20,000 civilians. Similarly, anyone effectively getting the truth out about today’s pogroms in the West Bank and Gaza risks coming under heavy fire from Israel’s defenders.

British journalist Robert Fisk writes, “In 26 years in the Middle East, I have never read so many vile and intimidating messages addressed to me. Many now demand my death.” [4]

But as they give the lie to the notion that Israel’s critics are just anti-Semites, muckraking Jews are getting it with a special vengeance. Activists and writers such as Dennis Bernstein, Barbara Lubin and Adam Shapiro are deluged with such messages as: “You mother-fucking self-hating Jewish piece of shit. Hitler killed the wrong Jews. He should have killed your parents ... God willing, Arab terrorists will cut you to pieces ...” [5]

After Shapiro, an International Solidarity Movement activist, described to CNN the Gestapo-like tactics being carried out by the Israeli army when he was under siege in Yassar Arafat’s Ramallah headquarters, his parents in New York City had to flee their home following threats by right-wing Zionists. With this particular nationalist project, the Jewish “Race” becomes a club to which membership is mandatory and all must march in step.

Appallingly, some people take the construct of a Jewish “Race” seriously as an existing entity, and even proclaim its superiority. Thus, in a murder trial of a Jewish boy who randomly shot a 13-year-old Palestinian girl, Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh, a settler militant, defended him with these words: “The people of Israel must rise and declare in public that a Jew and a goy are not, God forbid, the same. Any trial that assumes that Jews and goyim are equivalent is a travesty of justice...something is special about Jewish DNA...There is something infinitely more holy and unique about Jewish life than non-Jewish life.” [6]

Although this racist view of Palestinians is prevalent among the most fanatically religious of the settlers, polls show that the majority of Israelis and even the settlers themselves express a willingness to withdraw from the Occupied Territories and recognize a Palestinian state. However, Sharon and a core of rightists still dream of an ethnically cleansed “Greater Israel,” though paradoxically, the prime minister’s poll numbers remain high.

Unfortunately, many American Jews (most of whom identify themselves as liberal), have been manipulated into defending the repressive policies of the Likud government through the intense pressure brought upon U.S. politicians and the corporate media by groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The Opposition

But there is growing opposition in both Israel and the United States and around the world. There are many inspiring aspects of the Palestine solidarity and anti-war movements: international activists defying the Occupation, blocking tanks or delivering water to the terrorized in Jenin; the occupation of the Israeli consulate

in San Francisco by the Jewish Voice for Peace group; the increasing number of army refuseniks, draft refusers and insubordinates in the IDF. It is conceivable that multiplying these sorts of pressures may force Israel to negotiate a withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders and recognition of some form of a Palestinian state.

Anti-statists must have no illusions

However important a demand for withdrawal from the Territories is in order to end the immediate oppression of the Palestinians, anti-statists must have no illusions about this nationalist thrust. It is hard to be enthusiastic about partial projects. Even on the “realistic” terms of the modern world’s absurd and illegitimate ruling institutions, Israel could securely get out of the occupied territories and still remain the obscene, ethnic, theocratic democracy that it is. [7]

Doesn’t a campaign towards the limited end of Israeli withdrawal ultimately lend credence to ideologies of established powers which should be abolished altogether? It’s hard for anyone to campaign solely for the suspension of U.S. military aid for these ongoing horrors who would prefer to fight for the end of all governments.

The crux of the Israel/Palestine insanity rests heavily on the lack of basic information about the situation. The corporate mass media’s dis- and mis-information acts to ensure that the American public continues to support the U.S. government’s financing and arming of Israel. Speaking critically about Israel can be a big step in itself. Thankfully, more people are starting to do it, taking stands in many different ways.

As a basic primer, an excellent resource is the 60-page, “The Missing Peace: Truth and Justice in Israel/Palestine,” by Ronni and Laila, a childhood Zionist and a Palestinian American respectively, now housemates in Seattle. The pamphlet has something new for anyone, packed as it is with succinct analysis from many sources, as well as interviews they did in Palestine with activists and former prisoners who had been tortured. It’s both intellectually sharp and personal.

Send \$2 to: The Missing Peace, POB 28833, Seattle WA 98118.

Endnotes

1. "Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom," 1982, Fredy Perlman, in *Anything Can Happen*, 1992, Phoenix Press. This essay first appeared in the *Fifth Estate* and later appeared as a Black & Red pamphlet. It will soon be reprinted by B&R.

[See also FE #310, Fall, 1982]

2. Quoted in *Ha'aretz* article by Amir Oren, a senior military commentator for the paper, January 25, 2002.

3. For a good account in detail see the new issue of *The Other Israel* magazine, titled "Inside the Maelstrom," <http://other-israel.tripod.com/>. Or POB 2542, Holon 58125, Israel.

4. "Why Does John Malkovich Want to Kill Me?," Robert Fisk, *Independent* (London), May 14, 2002. It's interesting to note that only Israel's defenders from outside Israel have been less than polite in their disagreement.

5. "Strangling the Messengers: Palestine and the Price of Truth-Telling," Dennis Bernstein, *CovertAction Quarterly* 73, Summer 2002.

6. Quoted in Israel Shahak's response to a critic of his text "Jewish Fundamentalism" at www.cactus48.com/jewishlaw.html.

7. Many Israelis would prefer not. See *The Other Israel*, op cit.

Related

See response in Letters, FE #359, Winter, 2002–2003.

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Fifth Estate #358, Fall, 2002

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