

One Must Choose, Now! — Lessons of the Madrid Social Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East

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For the last couple of decades, there has been a wide no-man's land upon which the anti-occupation/anti-war camp encountered and even cooperated with some European governments, their agencies and the NGOs they were promoting. The power of the Palestinian national movement, and more generally of the global social movement, obliged them to develop a kind of third way, between the US/Israeli aggression and the resistance movement. Quite often, such alliances did benefit the Palestinian cause. During these days, power relations were clearly in favor of the progressive camp, which was on the offensive.

The year 2000, however, marks a qualitative turning point. Under the leadership of the US/Israeli neoconservatives, a global counter-offensive was planned and launched by our opponents, especially in the Middle East. In parallel with a brutal policy of the recolonization of the "third-world," there has been a rollback of the social achievements of the past decades (women's rights, social rights, civil liberties). The conservative camp is the one now on the offensive and it is no longer ready to negotiate compromises with its opponents. Instead, it works to bring them to capitulation or to destroy them.

The brutal intervention in the proceedings of the Madrid Social Forum by the Spanish government—and the Israeli lobby that was behind it—is a clear indication of their political determination: "the party is over" was their unambiguous message to all the solidarity organizations that used to cooperate with them. Though they will not hesitate to use force in order to impose their own agenda upon civil society organizations (in Madrid, the police were used to close the site of the Forum), their main weapon is obviously money, as if public funding was their own private property and not a right of the citizens and their organizations.

Concerning the Madrid Forum, Israeli neoconservative journalist Ben-Dror Yemini writes in NRG, the website of the rightwing daily *Ma'ariv*: "[the Anti-Zionist Left] raised pre-conditions: only organizations that support the right of return and a bi-national state could participate. They already endorsed the program of Ahmadinejad. It is not clear why the media continues to call such kind of organizations 'peace organizations.' They are in fact 'eradicating organizations.' The eradication of Israel [...]" (NRG, 21 December 2007)

As usual, Yemini mixes half-truths and half-lies: months ago, when it began the project of an International Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East, the Madrid Social Forum adopted a Statement of Principles that included the relevant UN resolutions concerning the Middle East conflict, including the right of return for the Palestinian refugees. It did not include, however, the call for a "bi-national state." Moreover, the list of invited Israeli organizations included quite many Zionist organizations, ready to accept the Statement of Principles.

But even if the Statement of Principles would have included "bi-national state" or "support to Ahmadienijad," or the call for an "Islamic Republic in West Asia," it is not the business of Yemini and

his friends. The Madrid Forum was an independent initiative of civil society organizations which are sovereign to decide what they are, what they want and whom to invite. No one is obliged to come and no one has the right to invite himself to a private party. If they wish, Ben-Dror Yemini and his friends can organize their own Forum in support of the Clash of Civilizations and the war in Iraq. We may fight them politically (or decide to ignore them) but we swear that we will not try to prevent them from expressing their opinions. Unlike Yemini, we do believe in democracy and freedom of expression.

When the Spanish Foreign Minister, Miguel Moratinos, sent the police to shut down the Forum, when Yemini is asking to take back the public funding—they are telling us a lot about their conception of democracy: a regime in which civil society is controlled by the State, which has the last word on the agenda and the participants, through the police forces and money. We call it Fascism, and the Spanish peoples should know well what we are speaking about.

Ben-Dror Yemini writes with obvious satisfaction, “The Spanish Foreign Ministry announced to the hotels where the rejectionists [sic] were staying that the funding was cancelled. An unusual but necessary step. [...] Moratinos announced also that the Spanish Foreign Ministry would allocate five million euros to joint projects. The rejectionist organizations will not receive one euro. Funds already allocated have been cancelled.”

I have two pieces of news for Ben Dror Yemini: first, public funding is not the private money of Miguel Moratinos, and our Spanish and European partners will fight for a fair allocation of that public funding. Second, unlike hundreds of other NGOs and NGO functionaries, the AIC (and quite a number of other Palestinian and Israeli organizations) is an organization of dedicated political activists who have been active for peace and justice long before the era of “donors” and without “European funds,” and has been ready to confront Israeli state repression, including the closure of its office and the arrest of its staff, but not to kneel or to accept external diktats. The Israeli Security Authorities repression did not deter us in our mission, and money will certainly not do it! If needed, we will continue our struggle as volunteers, but we will never accept any kind of blackmail. I am sure that neither Yemini nor a person like Ofer Bronchtein, who has been publicly charged with the serious mishandling (an understatement) of funds can understand that, but, believe it or not, NGO business has not been able to kill political activism and the spirit of sacrifice for values and ideals.

In his piece in NRG, Ben-Dror Yemini states that Ofer Bronchtein was “active in shaping the list of Israeli moderates.” And Yemini quotes Bronchtein as stating, “A clear distinction was made between Israeli and Palestinian fascists who reject understanding and dialogue, and the camp of moderates [...] The real face of the radical organizations was revealed to the Spanish Foreign Ministry and the Spanish Left organizations. They burned themselves.”

One doesn’t have to make a large effort “reveal the real face” of Yemini’s hero, Ofer Bronchtein. Go to Google, and judge yourself who is that person that even prominent “moderate” Zionist organizations felt obliged to disconnect from. They type of guy who no reasonable person would buy a used car from. Not a fascist, only a deeply corrupt individual.

As for the Israeli Committee against Houses Demolitions (ICAHHD), it definitively needs to make some order in its ranks. While its coordinator asked to be part of the protest against the government’s interference, another of its members, Meir Margalit, was actively collaborating with assistants of Moratinos, in order to establish the “respectable” alternative Israeli delegation.

As my grandfather used to say, “You cannot have both—pleasures on earth and salvation in heaven.” In this case, not risking the loss of funds from the Spanish government, on the one hand, and keeping ethical and political integrity on the other.

The AIC made its choice; ICAHD will have to make its own.

The neoconservative offensive doesn't leave room for the old no-man's-land: the camps today are well defined, and every person, organization and movement must decide to which camp it belongs.

P.S.

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