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Palestine

Thus an Apartheid Regime Develops

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It seems that recent events are leading to the implementation of an Apartheid regime in the State of Israel, and the completion of a comprehensive Apartheid reality within the borders of Israel and in the Occupied Territories.

With regards to the Security Forces' pattern of treatment, the Green Line has been blurred. The police forces have clearly institutionalised two different ways of oppressing demonstrations, as well as two different forms of imprisonment and detention. Hand in hand with this is the entire Israeli media which has been mobilised for the benefit of the security forces to incite the Jewish community against the Arab - defining it as the enemy. The representatives of the Left are tongue-tied. The majority of the Israeli public (as revealed by the polls) express understanding with mobs that attack Arabs, this creating the conditions for the establishment of an apartheid regime.

All at once, the secondary contradictions within Israeli society, together with its party divisions, became irrelevant. All have withdrawn to the background because of the 'Arab problem'. It turns out that when the state is not a state of all its citizens - namely, when citizenship is not at the centre of the state- equality becomes a mere illusion and maybe, even a fraud. When a policeman or a border guard policeman is confronted with an Arab demonstrator, he does not use 'discriminating means' with him; he simply behaves towards him as an enemy.

The fact is that every time Arab citizens were murdered in Israel, the Left or what is so-called 'the Left', was in power and the 'Right' was in opposition: the massacre at Kufr Qassem [1956], Land Day [1976], together with the recent events all took place under Labour governments. This so-called Left has always backed the security forces, strengthening them and abandoning the Arab citizens. For years Arab citizens have been complaining about the conduct of Police Commander of the Northern Districts, Alic Ron, but nobody in the Left will listen. The Minister of Interior Security, Professor Ben Ami embraces him and gives him his complete backing.

The recent demonstrations inside Israel, in which 14 people were killed and hundreds of youngsters were wounded are not the first in which shooting took place in recent years. There have been demonstrations in Al ruha, Um- Al -Sahali, and other places. Though hardly any demonstration in the Arab sector manages to pass without shooting, all remains quiet in Israel. The recent events are not a turnabout, but a case in which quantity has changed into quality. All this time the Israeli Left did not exist. There was complete silence at the time of the shooting in Lydd, where I personally was wounded. Furthermore, no sound was uttered when Alic Ron used violence to implement the policy of house demolition.

It is the paternalism of the Israeli Left that leads it again and again into extreme conduct. Not only does it hold the wrong positions, but - and here as opposed to the Right - it also expects the Arabs to accept these positions. That is why the Left becomes disappointed and angry, and that is why they look for "agitators" and for those to put the blame on. We, who support equal citizenship and liberal position such as opposing an identity policy and struggling for a civil-democratic line of equality, have suddenly become extreme agitators in the state of Israel.

Last year I tried to interest three prominent Israeli newspapers on the subject of increasing violence on the part of the Police, but nobody was interested enough to follow up the subject. Israeli liberalism is shocked only when a Right wing mob sets out to kill Arabs. It so happened that the Left only awoke after the massacre in Nazareth, which started with a Jewish mob from Nazareth-Illit [Upper Nazareth] running wild but ended with brutal violence against Arabs on the part of the Police. The only thing that the Left did was to organise a delegation to visit the bereaved families. But it is forbidden and unacceptable that the Left becomes one clan that comforts the other clan.

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The brutal behaviour demonstrated towards Arab citizens reflects the same values which enable such unrestrained brutality in the Occupied Territories. The same goes for the absolute silence and even the explicit support of the Israeli Left, of all the steps taken by the Security Forces - a silence that continues even in the face of more than a hundred killed and thousands wounded in the recent demonstrations in the Occupied Territories. Also there, the events started in the wake of the Police action when they fired without any justification at people who were praying at the Al Aqsa mosque.

These unprecedented brutal steps, to which the use of helicopters and tanks was later added, won general agreement among the Israeli public- fully accepting the Israeli version concerning the Peace Process ("We have no partner for peace") and the behaviour of the army in the Occupied Territories.

Both inside and outside the Knesset we said that Barak's program, which was celebrated at the time of his victory in the last elections, cannot be a basis for peace. We reiterated that before Barak left for Camp David and naturally after it. So why does the Left seem so surprised? What is indeed surprising is the surprise of the Left that continues to be addicted to the wrong information, and to images of images.

But nobody wanted to listen because everybody was so pleased that Netanyahu had been beaten in the elections. Thus the Israeli Left strengthened the anti-Arab line. The Israeli Left gambled on a peace based on the existing relation of forces and did not set up principles of justice and equality. That is the reason it did not confront the Israeli public opinion on the terms for a just peace, and instead of criticising Barak's initiative, supported and aided the accusation of the Palestinians who opposed an agreement based on an apartheid state, divided into cantons. That is also why the Left stood not only by Barak's program, but also backed the schedule that he set up in order to find out if 'there is a partner for peace.' or not. The Left, with the Security argument written on its flag, brought militarists to power and did not give one thought to the significance of the 'political' steps taken in the last months. Today we are witnesses to the results of this attitude. And all this after no voice was raised throughout the previous year against the policy of massive settlements, against house demolition, against the deportation of people from their homes and against continuing restrictions on movement and labour. These processes were beyond Barak's governments' areas of interest in its first year.

That also was the case with the Syrian and Lebanon questions: it was possible to withdraw from Syria and Lebanon with a peace agreement. But the Israeli Left celebrated the unilateral retreat instead of exerting pressure on Barak to achieve a comprehensive agreement while he constantly ignores any moral criticism of his program.

I view the war that Israel declared on the Palestinian Authority as the continuation of the same politics executed by different means. That has been the political trend of Barak from its beginning. It boils down to the ultimatum that Barak gave the Palestinians: either everything or nothing - either Arafat immediately puts his signature to Barak's conditions, concerning the 'Four Nos' as he had presented them since his election campaign - or nothing, namely war. The non-'moderate physical pressure' now being exerted on the Palestinians, including threats on the life of Arafat, is a continuation of the diplomatic pressure that began after the Camp David summit. Very few joined us during those months when we tried, time and again, to make it clear that no Palestinian would accept such an ultimatum, and that this was a dangerous policy that would lead to war.

Barak and his supporters paid no attention to the ominous danger and were convinced that they would be able to force an agreement on the Palestinians. Barak was pleased with his diplomatic achievements and with his success in presenting Arafat as a recalcitrant person who refuses to accept his 'generous' offers. Barak remains linked to the same principles which he declared before the elections; 'The Four Nos': no to Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, no to a withdrawal to the 4th of June borders, no to the dismantling of settlements (with 80% of the settlers under Israeli sovereignty) and a definite no to any debate concerning the Right to Return, or any just solution to the refugee question. That is the reason that the popular uprising was so predictable

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Sharon's rush to the Al Aqsa mosque is only a small detail in these happenings and is part of larger Israeli moves. It is difficult to decide whether Sharon's visit was the direct cause, or whether it was Barak agreeing to the visit. It is most plausible that it was the massive presence of the police surrounding the mosque and the massacre of the people praying in Al Aqsa the day after. We must remember that Sharon did not try to provoke the Palestinians. He just came to test if Barak really meant to preserve Israeli sovereignty in that area. Barak and Ben Ami sent thousands of policemen to escort Sharon and on the following day they surrounded the mosque, preparing for the shooting that was to lead to the death of seven men and dozens wounded. Thus, they passed the test set by Sharon for a unified national government, but failed completely in the peace test. The unity between Ben Ami's police and Sharon in the break-in to Al Aqsa is the only basis for the present emergency government. It has no other basis.

Israel had hoped that the Palestinian police would be a kind of militia on its behalf, whose role would be to keep order for Israel in the Occupied Territories. Israel held negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, but expected to receive their help against the Palestinian people.

Israel expected Arafat to behave like Anton Lahad [the Head of the collaborating South Lebanon Army during the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon], and that he would be instrumental in guarding the interests of Israel in the Occupied Territories. It seems that Palestinian policemen were expected to join the shooting against their own people and not to react when demonstrators were attacked with lethal firearms. When it became clear that in moments of crisis the PLO would unite with its people and would not turn its guns on them, and that the victims of Israel would not send the victims of the occupation to jail - the moment this dream was shattered, Israel again returned to use full force. But unlike the first Intifada, and because a separation of forces between the Israeli army and the Palestinian people actually had taken place, it is not manifested at present in broken bones but in shooting and bombing from afar - a minute Gulf War. And Israel pretends to be surprised that the Palestinian policemen did not shoot their fellow men, but tried to defend the demonstrators who were being attacked by the Israeli army.

Now the only meeting places with the Israeli army is in Jerusalem and at check-points at the time of demonstrations. Since the army has not decided to re-conquer the cities and villages, it bombs them. When there is direct friction as at Al Aqsa, it becomes obvious that Occupation remains Occupation and Israel remains Israel. It doesn't matter if the minister is named Ben Ami or Sharon. The place where the greatest friction took place was at Al Aqsa immediately after Sharon's visit. The Israeli police behaved there the same as they have behaved since '67 - shooting and killing. Nothing has changed.

We have always said that there are three possibilities for an agreement; the first, a two-state solution, namely, the establishment of a Palestinian state within the borders of '67, including Jerusalem, without the settlements. The second possibility is that of a comprehensive solution of living together in one democratic state. The third is an Apartheid reality. Anyone who refuses to accept one of the first two solutions, consequently leads to the third - Apartheid. The Israeli Left did not accept the principle of two states, but supported an agreement based on canonisation of the Occupied Territories. They are still shocked by the very possibility of one shared democratic state, based on national and citizenship equality. Therefore, they themselves are leading to Apartheid, namely - they support the third solution.

The obvious conclusion that the Left has to draw from these recent events is not to indulge in a kind of hypocritical and beautified despair, but to begin a real soul-searching self-criticism. In this context, we call upon the Israeli Left to regain control and express determinedly their objection to the government's policy, to struggle against Apartheid, against the systematic oppression of the Palestinian population and against Barak's 'peace plan'. The principles of this policy will only worsen the situation and bring about its escalation. It is not enough simply to call 'the two sides to the discussion table'. The Left must clearly declare the set of morals and values needed for any agreement.

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Not only will the Left have a lot to do. Both in the Arab world and in Arab society, many missions await us. The declaration of war on a whole nation has left us with scorched land which enables an irrational political discourse to take over, sometimes that of a religious war. This discourse has not yet chosen the colours with which the national uprising will be painted, but such a danger is looming, mainly in public opinion and in parts of the Arab media. The national and democratic forces in Arab society must not ignore these phenomena. Difficult as it may well be, we must tackle them even during the most painful process of de-colonisation.

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