



Cartoons | News Stand | News and Reports | Opinions | Archive | Journalists and Writers | Audio | Contact

Search

07 March 2007

top



Print

## Deir Yassin – From Remembrance to Resistance

By: Paul Eisen

In a recent piece on The Guardian - Comment is Free Tony Greenstein says that Deir Yassin Remembered is an anti-Semitic organization and, along with Roland Rance, Sue Blackwell and Les Levidow he's going to try to get the Palestine Solidarity Campaign to have nothing to do with us. Well, good luck to them, and if the PSC is foolish enough to bow to this kind of thing, then good luck to them too – they're going to need it.

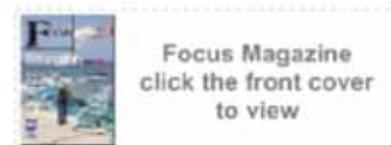
Deir Yassin Remembered is an international organisation whose aim is to build a memorial to the victims of the Deir Yassin massacre of April 9th 1948. But the list of victims extends far beyond the 100 to 130 elderly men, women and children who died that day. It extends also to the over 750,000 Palestinians expelled in the concurrent Zionist ethnic cleansing of Palestine, to the over 500 Palestinian towns and villages destroyed or expropriated by the Jewish ethnic cleansers and now also to their descendants - the now over six million dispossessed Palestinians living either as second-class citizens in Israel, in the towns, villages and refugee camps of post-1967 occupied Palestine, in refugee shanty-towns in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and finally in the many Palestinian communities-in-exile in practically every corner of the world. In short, Deir Yassin Remembered exists to build a memorial to all of Palestinian life and memory.

But Deir Yassin Remembered is not just about remembrance; Deir Yassin Remembered is also about resistance. Yes, there was a time when we spoke passionately about the proximity of Deir Yassin to the Jewish Holocaust memorial at Yad Vashem and about the inextricably close and agonised relationship between Jewish suffering and the suffering inflicted by Jews on Palestinians. But not any more. There have been too many deaths, too many disappointments and now the nearness of Deir Yassin to Yad Vashem serves merely to underline the stark differences between abused and abuser - and the continuation of the abuse.

But there's no smoke without fire. If Tony and his colleagues say that we are anti-Semites and the Palestinian solidarity movement should have nothing to do with us, there must be something in it – nobody, surely, nobody could dream up such a thing. Indeed there is something in it. Tony's complaint rests on three matters - the inclusion in our Board of Advisers of Israel Shamir, a couple of articles written by myself, and a recent visit by Dan McGowan, the founder of DYR, to Ernst Zundel sentenced to five years imprisonment in Germany for Holocaust denial..

To take these in turn: Israel Shamir is indeed on our board – he is one of twenty members of whom half are Jews, half non-Jews; half are men, half women. Shamir is an intellectual, a religious thinker and writer and an outstanding and tireless supporter of Palestinian rights. He also has severe criticisms to make of the way Jews and Jewish organisations are currently behaving and have behaved in the past. Shamir has also proposed the existence of what he would term a Jewish "spirit" or "paradigm" (which incidentally is by no means confined only to those who identify themselves as Jewish) which, if unchecked and unbalanced can lead to supremacism.

But Israel Shamir has never been guilty of violence nor has he ever advocated violence. He has never discriminated against anyone, nor has he ever advocated discriminating



English

عربي

against anyone. Nor has he ever advocated denying anyone the right to free speech, or to a fair hearing. I like Shamir enormously, I find him stimulating and informative and always gentle in his manner and humane in his approach and I agree with a lot, though not all, of what he says and writes. Shamir is in full agreement with the spirit and meaning of Deir Yassin, has contributed enormously to Deir Yassin Remembered and is an honoured member of the Deir Yassin Remembered Board of Advisers.

Tony also objects to DYR because I, one of its seven directors, wrote, in a personal capacity, two articles with which he disagrees. The first, "Jewish Power" examines Jewish identity and the complex relationship between Judaism, 'Jewishness' and Zionism and distinguishes between Judaism the religion and 'Jewishness', the more complex cultural and emotional identity. It also examines Jewish power, not only in its political manifestation but also, and more interestingly, its cultural, ideological/religious and emotional significance. Finally it examines the degree to which Zionism, and therefore the abuse of Palestinians is a Jewish phenomenon and, if it is, asks why it is so hard to say so.

The Holocaust Wars was written in three sections. The first titled "Scum" describes the struggle of Ernst Zundel, now sentenced to five years' imprisonment in Germany for Holocaust denial. This section attempts to contextualize and re-humanize Ernst Zundel and Holocaust revisionism. It also attempts to see the National Socialist regime through the eyes of the German people. In fact, what this part of the essay really tries to do is to see the world through the eyes of the 'other' - and for an obsessively curious self-identifying Jew such as myself, who could be more 'other' than Ernst Zundel? The second section, "The War for the Truth," examined Holocaust Revisionism - its scholarship and its struggle. Although I stopped short of coming out in definite agreement with revisionists, I did (and do) find their case compelling. The last section was called "The War for the Spirit" and was concerned with the ideological, spiritual and religious meaning of the Holocaust narrative and the use to which it has been put to enforce Jewish power. For me, this was the most important section of the essay.

Finally, Dan McGowan, the founder and U.S. director of DYR, also in a personal capacity, visited Ernst Zundel in prison. Why he did this, what happened there and what he made of it is all described most eloquently in his piece A Visit in Prison with Ernst Zundel- a piece of writing which for Tony renders Dan and the organisation he founded now beyond the pale.

But that's not all; it gets worse – worse even than Tony knows because DYR does indeed include in its solidarity discourse a challenge to the notion of a non-religious Jewish specialness and its possible effects, when empowered, on the Israel/Palestine conflict. Is this racism? Not at all - Jews are not a race so, strictly speaking, any anti-Jewishness cannot, by definition, be racist. Is this anti-Semitic? Maybe it is - it all depends what you mean by the term. Is it acceptable? Who knows? Let the debate begin.

But look, it really doesn't matter what anything means or what is or is not acceptable. Tony and his colleagues will tell us what things mean and what we may or may find acceptable because Tony is an arch practitioner of that which he most denies - Jewish power. Does Jewish power exist? Of course it does. Who has not seen someone stand up in a solidarity meeting and begin with the words, "As a Jew..."? And who has not seen the meeting then fall reverently, even fearfully silent? And who, in the course of their solidarity activities, at one time or another has not felt the brunt of Jewish collective power? So of course Jewish power exists. The question is how does it exist, to what extent and to what effect? Let the debate begin.

So on March 10th at the PSC AGM Tony Greenstein, Roland Rance, Les Levidow and Sue Blackwell will propose, and may even pass, a motion which will urge the PSC to shun Deir Yassin Remembered. And their stated reasons are that one out of twenty DYR advisers and two out of seven DYR directors hold views with which Tony and his friends disagree. Why do they do this? Why do these largely Jewish activists see their personal struggle against a perceived anti-Semitism as so important that it overrides any other considerations, including the good work of Deir Yassin Remembered?

The answer is simple. Like so many Jewish activists, and particularly those who style themselves as 'anti-Zionist, Tony and his colleagues' real priority, despite their protestations to the contrary, is defending Jews, mainly from what they see as anti-Semitism. Of course they care about other things too - Palestinian liberation, civil rights, human rights etc. etc. but when push comes to shove it is Jewish interests that they will ultimately defend. But why should this be a problem? Why should Jews and others not defend Jewish interests? The problem is twofold: First because not only do they prioritise Jewish interests but they also insist that everyone else must do the same. And they're not afraid to enforce it either with the ever-present threat of being labeled an anti-Semite. The second reason why their defense of Jewish interests is a problem is that they won't admit that they are doing it and one reason why they won't admit they are doing it is because they don't really know that they are doing it. At least that is how it was. I now have a sneaking suspicion many of them are beginning to realise what they are doing and are now beginning to do it consciously. In effect, self-delusion is becoming conscious lying.

And why could the PSC, without a whimper, pass such a motion? The answer is again simple: Like all of us, they are terrified, terrified of Zionist power and the penalty of defying it – being branded an anti-Semite or, even worse, a Holocaust denier. And this is what this is really all about. Because the real reason for this motion is this: Tony Greenstein, Roland Rance and Les Levidow, three Jewish activists, plus Sue Blackwell their obligatory non-Jewish associate, want to make it clear who really runs the PSC, indeed who runs all Palestinian solidarity.

Deir Yassin Remembered does not 'know' what is right for the Palestinian people. Only Palestinians can know that. Deir Yassin Remembered cannot free Palestine. Again, only Palestinians can and will do that. But Deir Yassin Remembered stands in unconditional solidarity with Palestinians and in unflinching opposition to those who oppress them and oppress so many others in the world.

Deir Yassin Remembered has advisers, directors, members and supporters with very many different ideas and beliefs – some will agree with all of the above, some with parts of it and some with none of it. But what they all share is an unconditional commitment to Palestinian remembrance and resistance. Anyone who wishes to join us is welcome and, provided they do not try to impose their views on, or try to silence others, we care little for what else they believe. So, if Tony Greenstein and his friends will mend their ways, they too are welcome.

\* *Paul Eisen is the UK Director of Deir Yassin Remembered. His email is: [paul@eisen.demon.co.uk](mailto:paul@eisen.demon.co.uk)*

Others Articles by This Author

[▲ Top](#)

[Cartoons](#) | [News Stand](#) | [News and Reports](#) | [Opinions](#) | [Archive](#) | [Journalists and Writers](#) | [Audio](#) | [Contact](#)

(c) Arabic Media Internet Network 1996 - 2005

[TamamTech Inc.](#) All right Reserved.