

Outside View: The left and anti-Zionism

By Linda Press Wulf

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From my high school years, I was an instinctive left winger, championing the weak and berating the powerful. Living in Israel in the 1980s, I protested against the ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank and cheered the legalization of the PLO. But in the 1990s I began to question my own reactions.

At first I was dismayed by the Palestinians' passivity and self pity in the face of twin handicaps: their political leaders' debilitating corruption and self interest, and the terrorists among them who callously sabotaged any compromise that might lead closer toward accommodation with Israel.

What turned my sympathies finally, though, was the deliberate education of their children to hate.

Basic addition was taught to Palestinian students by totaling the killing of three Israelis plus five Israelis. Summer camps featured songs glorifying young suicide bombers. Festive celebrations with guns shot into the air marked a "good" number of Israeli citizens killed by bombs on school buses or outside a synagogue as Sabbath prayers were ending or at a Passover celebration where entire families were gathered. After the handful of times when fanatical and unstable Israelis killed groups of unarmed Arabs -- among them, Baruch Goldstein shooting Arabs at prayer in a mosque in 1994 and a deserter from the Israeli army shooting inside a bus carrying Israeli Arabs in August of 2005 -- the Jewish nation's shame (and the heavy punishment meted out if the perpetrator survived, as did Ami Popper in 1990) was loud and clear. Even as 18-year-olds began their compulsory service in the Israeli Defense Forces, the significance of the word "Defense" was drummed into them, while Hebrew songs about peace have been at the top of the hit parade for decades.

But none of this seems relevant to those political left-wingers in Europe and North America who keep the sufferings of the Palestinians close to their hearts. To my bewilderment over the years, the crimes of Israel -- three decades of delay in resolving the final status of land captured in an unwanted war, lengthy and humiliating checkpoints, rough searches and destruction of Arab houses under suspicion, periodic fatal shootings of some of the angry youngsters who gather to hurl rocks, and unsatisfactory legal battles over the government's confiscation of land farmed by previous generations of Palestinians -- clearly seem more urgent and more evil to the international left than the mass rape and mass murder of Africans by Muslims in Darfur; the open and widespread ownership of slaves by Muslims in Niger right now at this very hour; the denial of independent freedom for the female half of the population by every Muslim nation; the persecution of Arab homosexuals to the point that Palestinians flee to Israel where discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is illegal; and the disappearance, torture, and murder of dissident journalists and political activists in every Muslim nation, including "moderate" countries like Pakistan and Turkey.

Eventually, it is impossible to deny the reason for such disproportional empathy

with the Palestinians. Through history, each group that has blamed the Jews has been utterly convinced that its own unique reason for doing so is fair and obvious. Surely, they say, the Jews would recognize they are at fault if only they'd stop crying "Anti-semitism!"

"Et tu, Brute?" I want to murmur to the unworthy descendents of a political movement which strove honestly and painfully to make the world safe for ALL people, including (and at times, especially) the Jews. Like a Roman mob moved by demagoguery rather than logic, the left has taken to criticism of the United States and her allies as an unthinking *raison d'etre*, a fashionable and comfortably self-congratulatory pursuit. And if in the process the Jews lose their ancient homeland and only hope of long-term safety after 2,000 years in the diaspora, so be it. They must have brought it upon themselves; everyone says so.

Do those who spring to attention at the siren call of "Zionism is Racism" ever question their own readiness to believe what they are told? Is the comradeship and complacency of the Left so attractive that they have forgotten the movement's infamous delay in breaking ranks to criticize the sacred cow of communism under Stalin?

In Berkeley, California, the racing heart of left-wing America, I do not allow my young sons to wear T-shirts bearing Hebrew writing unless I know where they are going and am with them as a shield against potential abuse. (No prejudice is acceptable in Berkeley except anti-Zionism, which is worn as a badge of honor.)

For the proudly left-wing citizens who claim their animus against Israel is grounded in brave truth (and is therefore not anti-semitic), I venture to recommend they read Alan Dershowitz's book called "The Case for Israel." Surely that is a simple enough task for all those who "know" that Zionism is racist and the cause of terrorism and unrest in the Arab world and the catalyst for bin Laden's hatred of all Westerners and the hidden reason for Bush's war on Iraq and, for all I know, the bubonic plague (another century, same principle).

It is time for people of sound heart to open their eyes and look around. We can survive without your support. We have done it before. But the problem is clear. And despite the Jews' convenient existence whenever and wherever trouble rears its ugly head in the world, the problem, yet again, is not the Jews.

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(Linda Press Wulf is the author of "The Night of the Burning" (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Sept 06; Former protester with Women in Black (against Israel's long-term occupation of the West Bank), Jerusalem, 1988-90.)

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