



**Norman G. Finkelstein, *Knowing too much. Why the American Jewish Romance with Israel Is Coming to an End*, OR Books, New York-London 2012, 472 pp. 23 \$.**

The more danger, the more honor - this saying could be a trade mark for the straightforward attitude and non-corruptible scholarly work of the US-American political scientist Norman G. Finkelstein. There is no other American Jew in the United States whom the right-wing pro-Israel Zionist lobbies and their cheerleaders' worldwide love to hate more than Finkelstein.

One of his fiercest opponents is Alan Dershowitz, law professor at Harvard University, whose book, "In Case of Israel", Finkelstein not only ridiculed but also exposed in many parts as plagiarism. Dershowitz returned this compliment by pursuing a smear campaign against Finkelstein at DePaul University where he was just up for tenure. He achieved his goal. Finkelstein considered an excellent teacher by his students and an outstanding scholar by the faculty was not accepted for tenure. That the biggest Catholic university in the U. S. yielded to the pressure of parts of the right-wing pro-Likud Zionist "Israel-Lobby" is something to be noted.

The Dershowitz pamphlet was translated into German, and was prefaced by the German-Jewish journalist Henryk M. Broder, known for his islamophobic leanings. In that foreword he wrote inter alia: "It is correct: Israel is today more a perpetrator than a victim. That's good and that is how it should be after Jews had played for almost 2,000 years the role of victims and had only bad experience with that role. Perpetrators usually have a longer life expectancy than victims and it is more fun to be a perpetrator than a victim." At the end, the book did not succeed at the German market because it could only convince the already converted, i. e. real believers.

Finkelstein's record to frontally attack the "Israel Lobby" has a long history starting with his dissertation, in which he criticized Zionism and its ideology. Stronger however, was his reaction towards the book "From time Immemorial" by Joan Peters, widely acclaimed in United States, though not in Israel. In a detailed analysis Finkelstein proved that her book was a hoax, one of many Zionist fairy-tales that strove to demonstrate the "historic" right of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, regardless of all historical facts.

Another author who was intellectually debunked by the team Norman Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn, was Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. His book "Hitler's Willing Executioners" was very well received in Germany. Goldhagen was treated like a "savior" by certain German progressive political circles. The "Goldhagen phenomenon" in Germany can only be explained by a confused German political conscience. The Goldhagen hype was shattered by the book "A Nation on Trial" in which Finkelstein and Birn presented many historical flaws in Goldhagen's book and demonstrated that his work was ideologically driven but lacked scientific basis.

Finally, Finkelstein's book "The Holocaust Industry" created an uproar among some representatives of the American Jewish community. The author argued that some money from European governments in the name of "needy Holocaust victims" was withheld and that some Jewish organizations pocketed some of the "Holocaust compensation" monies. Although the late well-known Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg praised the book and spoke in high terms of Finkelstein, it marked the beginning of the end of Finkelstein's academic career. He lost immediately his teaching post at Hunter College, and later DePaul University used the book as the basis of getting rid of him.

„If Israel has become a crazy state, it is in no small part because of American Jews”, writes the author at the end of his analysis about the attachment of American Jews towards Israel. Despite this fact,

American-Israeli relations are undergoing a major shift. Zionist propaganda is not as readily accepted by liberal American Jews as before. Young American Jews do not automatically support Israel, the government of which continues to pretend that it speaks in the name of worldwide Jewry.

The main focus of the book is what Steven M. Cohen has observed of the contemporary American Jewish scene: "For many American Jews, politics - in particular pro-Israel and liberal activity - have come to constitute their principal working definition of Jewishness." According to Finkelstein, Israel can no longer count on the blind support of American Jews. This shift in perception is especially palpable on American college campuses. Despite all the efforts of pro-Zionist and pro-Israel propagandists in the U. S., young American Jews, as many opinion-polls indicate, turn their back on Israel and its extremist policies that offend liberal, democratic people.

Among those concerned about the Israeli drift towards "fascism", reported by Michael Warschawski from the "Alternative Information Center" in Jerusalem, we find not only American Jewish critics of Zionist ideology and Israeli policies like Finkelstein, but also liberal American Zionists, such as Peter Beinart and David Remnick, who are deeply concerned by the hazardous, irrational and extremist policy of the Netanyahu government and its right-wing coalition partners. Their disenchantment is palpable. For them, Israel bears a large burden of guilt for what is going wrong in the Middle East.

After the "glorious" victory in the June war of 1967, a special relationship between the U. S. and Israel developed. The "light unto nations" became the prime concern and the focal point of American Jewry. After the Israeli leadership decided to colonize the Palestinian Occupied Territories, the "benign occupation" turned into a brutal occupation regime. Finkelstein shows that the American public was only rudimentarily informed. Since the beginning of the first intifada in 1987, it has become impossible, even for the staunchest Israel supporter, to turn a blind eye to Israel's massive human rights violations.

As Finkelstein shows in his book, ever fewer U. S. American Jews support the ethnically based State of Israel, albeit kinship among Jews is still the main bedrock in their relationship. What alienates liberal American Jews from Israel is the "hijacking" of the relationship between the U. S. and Israel by the right-wing pro-Likud "Israel Lobby" and its neoconservative and Christian fundamentalist allies. Their legitimization of Israeli politics clashes with human values democratic American Jews stand for. Precisely because most American Jews adhere to a robust liberalism, they loosen their ties with Israel. That is why Finkelstein feels optimistic about reaching American public opinion and the mainstream of Jewish public opinion.

Finkelstein argues that the awareness of the Israel-Palestine conflict changed because knowledge shifted from fiction to fact "that has rendered support for Israel on the basis of liberal values increasingly untenable". In the early 70s and 80s, only a few "esoteric" Israelis like Felicia Langer and Israel Shahak spoke out against Israeli occupation and the oppression of the Palestinian people. Later advocate Lea Tsemel joined in. These were and still are wonderful and courageous individuals. At the time they could be easily dismissed as marginal's but in the 90s several human rights organizations, such as B'tselem, amnesty international and Human Rights Watch appeared on the scene, writes the author. And these could not be dismissed.

Especially in the last decade, the facts on the ground have become so revolting that hardly any liberal Jewish American could justify what the Israel government does. Although the record of Israeli governments is disastrous, there are still [Jewish] groups [in the United States] that attempt to whitewash Israel's human rights violations and distain for international law. Significant portions of Finkelstein's try to set the record straight. Israeli Hasbara (propaganda) fights an uphill or even a losing battle. Should Israel really face an existential threat – and not one concocted by invoking Iran's non-existent nuclear capabilities – almost all American Jews, according to Finkelstein, "will almost certainly

rally, and should rally, to [Israel's] defense". A peace settlement could have reached decades ago, so the author, but "Israel – with critical U. S. backing, largely because of the Israel lobby – has blocked it".

In four chapters Finkelstein shows that American Jewry can no longer reconcile Israel's right-wing ideology and extremist policies with its liberal principles. American Jews do not anymore pretend they do not know. All the propaganda by the Dershowitz'es and his ilk, let alone the powerful Israel lobby, cannot anymore bridge the gap between Zionist fiction and the brutal reality in Palestine. Finkelstein shows that finally, liberal American Jews have grasped it. The lobbies' attempts to tar critics with "anti-Semitism" or label them "self-hating Jews" are not anymore effective.

According to Finkelstein, Israel must be held accountable to the same standards as any other country. That means that international law has to be enforced: Israeli settlements are illegal under international law; Israel has no legitimate title to the West Bank, Gaza, or Jerusalem, and the Palestinians have a right to return to their country. The author mentions that President Barack Obama was criticized by Benjamin Netanyahu for not holding on to the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak. Young liberal Jewish Americans don't want to hear this political nuisance any longer, so Finkelstein.

Also in this book, the author remains true to his brand. He deals with the books of Jeffrey Goldberg, Dennis Ross, Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, Michael Oren, and Benny Morris. Finkelstein lashes at the Israeli "new historian" Benny Morris for justifying a potential "ethnic cleansing" of the Palestinians and advocating a „nuclear attack“ on Iran by Israel, should the United States not do the job: "It is no longer possible to both be an honest historian and perpetuate the *Exodus* version of Israel's past, and it is no longer possible to defend Israel on the basis of liberal values. To gain entry into the elite tier of Israel's historiographic establishment, however, it has always required recycling the mythical version of Israel's past and staunchly defending the Israeli state (...) If Morris has gone berserk, it is because he aspires to be the official storyteller of a nation that itself has gone over the cliff . His degeneration vividly illustrates that except by resorting to a mishmash of lies and lunacies, deceits and delusions, it is no longer possible for Israel's defenders to justify its policy."

To show the hypocrisy of the so-called Zionist left or Zionist liberals, Finkelstein compares in an Appendix the ruling of the High Court of Israel (HCI) – considered a bastion of liberalism and Jewish democracy – and the ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concerning the Wall that purports to separate the West Bank from Israel proper. Whereas the latter saw in this monstrous construction a grave violation of international law, the HCI justified the wall in every ruling. "Despite its pious lip-service to the rule of law, the HCI again breached it in the service of *raison d'état*. In addition, the HCI decisions on the wall were riddled with internal contradictions. The Court deferred absolutely to the military authority of the state, but also disputed the state's military rationale for segments of the wall, in the process undercutting the basis of the Court's own finding of the military necessity of the wall."

To make a long story short: this book is typical Finkelstein. He always handles hot iron but based solely on meticulously researched facts and convincingly argued. All in all, very worth-reading, intellectually challenging, and a real treat.

Ludwig Watzal

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