

Analysis

Holocaust Memorial Day

Is it just my impression, or was there a real shift in the discussion about Holocaust Memorial Day as we reached the first of these annual events? The government consultation document (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/reu/holremd.pdf) made it quite clear that the aim of this commemoration was to highlight the dangers of racism, exclusivism and victimisation, and to emphasise the virtues of vigilance, tolerance and diversity. Yet the assumption seemed widespread (and I shared it) that we were going to witness nothing very new, and that the Zionist propaganda machine would succeed in highjacking this commemoration. As the day drew near, however, a number of interesting things started to happen.

Newsnight ran a hard-hitting analysis in which the question was rightly put: what about other massacres, and in particular what about the Armenians? It went even further and analysed the political reasons why the Armenian tragedy is not the flavour of the month. Norman Finkelstein got his soundbite on the Today programme predictably saying that the memorial day was part of the exploitation of Jewish suffering. More surprisingly he was followed by the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sachs, saying that Finkelstein's remarks were well-taken. Sachs's point followed the traditional Jewish-religious line that Jewish experience serves as a beacon for the whole of humanity, and that Holocaust Memorial Day, by highlighting the horrific experience of Jews under the Nazis, stands as a dreadful warning about where racism can lead us. On 21st January I attended a dayschool run by the Jewish Socialist Group at the Liberal Synagogue in St Johns Wood. Its title was 'The Holocaust - remembering all the victims, remembering other holocausts'. It may be that the sympathetic reception I got there as a known PSC supporter would have been no different in the past, but it was nevertheless gratifying and news to me.

On the other side, no doubt sensing an uncomfortable slippage in the Zionist agenda and therefore expressing doubts about the wisdom of such a memorial day, Jonathan Romain in The Times wrote that there was 'the risk that events in the Middle East could cloud the issue.' He disingenuously avoided committing himself either to the view that Israel was now Goliath and the Palestinians David, or to the opposite one that Israel continued to be a tiny beleaguered state surrounded by gigantic enemies. But would 'events in the Middle East' really be clouding the issue? Are they not precisely the very point? Here are some of the aims of the memorial day given on the website. '[To] ensure that [these] horrendous crimes, racism and victimisation ... are neither forgotten nor repeated, whether in Europe or elsewhere in the world;' '[to] restate the continuing need for vigilance etc;' '[to] reflect on recent atrocities that raise similar issues;' '[to] provide an opportunity to examine our nation's past ...;' '[to] highlight the values of a tolerant and diverse society etc;' '[to] assert a continuing commitment to oppose racism, anti-Semitism, victimisation and genocide;' and '[to] support ... the ideals of peace, justice and community for all.' By and large these are also the aims of Deir Yassin Remembered!

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