

## Norman's Wisdom

*The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* by Norman G. Finkelstein, London, Verso, 2000.

In this remarkably clear and concise polemic, Finkelstein distinguishes between the Nazi holocaust, the historical event, and its ideological construct, The Holocaust. He believes The Holocaust was invented after 1967 in order to recreate Israeli victimhood. The Six-Day War had demonstrated Israel's overwhelming military might, after which it could no longer be regarded as a victim. The United States saw strategic advantages in wooing this powerful new phenomenon while a Jewish-American élite became increasingly powerful in forming US policy. Since this new alliance intended to perpetuate and extend the injustices of 1948 it was necessary somehow to disarm international critiques. The Holocaust provided the perfect answer. It also opened the doors to a compensation bonanza.

The premises of The Holocaust are (a) that it is unique and (b) that it is the culmination of a mysterious and incurable Gentile disease, namely hatred of Jews. Underlying the second of these is, of course, the view that The Holocaust was an entirely Jewish disaster. Finkelstein points out that all historical events are unique, but they are also comparable. The second premise has been used to disarm any criticism of Israel. He ends his book with a plea to 'restore the Nazi holocaust as a rational subject of enquiry', and that means comparing. He challenges Americans to consider their own history of extermination, and asks why there are 10,000 scholarly works on the holocaust, but only one on the slaughter of 10 million Congolese under colonial rule. On the holocaust itself he can be faulted for largely overlooking the mass killings of Russians, but he rightly draws attention to the marginalisation of Gypsy genocide.

Nearly half the book is devoted to the use of The Holocaust for extorting unjustified compensation, especially from Switzerland (but not the US), and then routing the money so obtained to Jewish organisations rather than individuals. Finkelstein commends the suggestion of an Israeli academic that funds so obtained should partly be used to compensate Palestinian refugees, the victims of the victims. This is as likely to be heeded as a similar suggestion by Moshe Sharett in the fifties.

Here at last is a book which says what many of us in Palestine Solidarity already knew or suspected. Would a publisher have countenanced it had it not been written by a Jew, son of survivors of the holocaust?

Francis Clark-Lowes