

Uri Avnery
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Red and Green

Channel 10, one of Israel's three TV channels, aired a report this week that surely frightened a lot of viewers. Its title was "Who is Organizing the World-wide Hatred of Israel Movement?", and its subject: the dozens of groups in various countries which are conducting a vigorous propaganda campaign for the Palestinians and against Israel.

The activists interviewed, both male and female, young and old - quite a number of them Jews - demonstrate at supermarkets against the products of the settlements and/or of Israel in general, organize mass meetings, make speeches, mobilize trade unions, file lawsuits against Israeli politicians and generals.

According to the report, the various groups use similar methods, but there is no central leadership. It even quotes (without attribution, of course) the title of one of my recent articles, "The Protocols of the Elders of Anti-Zion" and it, too, asserts that there is no such thing. Indeed, there is no need for a world-wide organization, it says, because all over the place there is a spontaneous surge of pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli feeling. Recently, following the "Cast Lead" operation and the flotilla affair, this process has gathered momentum.

In many places, the report discloses, there are now red-green coalitions: cooperation between leftist human-rights bodies and local groups of Muslim immigrants. The conclusion of the story: this is a great danger to Israel and we must mobilize against it before it is too late.

THE FIRST question that arose in my mind was: what impact is this report going to have on the average Israeli?

I wish I could be sure that it will cause him or her to think again about the viability of the occupation. As one of the activists interviewed said: the Israelis must be brought to understand that the occupation has a price tag.

I wish I believed that this would be the reaction of most Israelis. However, I am afraid that the effect could be very different.

As the jolly song of the 70s goes: "The whole world is against us / That's not so terrible, we shall overcome. / For we, too, don't give a damn / For them. // ... We have learned this song / From our forefathers / And we shall also sing it / To our sons. / And the grandchildren of our grandchildren will sing it / Here, in the Land of Israel, / And everybody who is against us / Can go to hell."

The writer of this song, Yoram Taharlev ("pure of heart") has succeeded in expressing a basic Jewish belief, crystallized during the centuries of persecution in Christian Europe which reached its climax in the Holocaust. Every Jewish child learns in school that when six million Jews were murdered, the entire world

looked on and didn't lift a finger to save them.

This is not quite true. Many tens of thousands of non-Jews risked their lives and the lives of their families in order to save Jews - in Poland, Denmark, France, Holland and other countries, even in Germany itself. We all know about people who were saved this way - like former Supreme Court President Aharon Barak, who as a child was smuggled out of the ghetto by a Polish farmer, and Minister Yossi Peled, who was hidden for years by a Catholic Belgian family. Only a few of these largely unsung heroes were cited as "Righteous among the Nations" by Yad Vashem. (Between us, how many Israelis in a similar situation would risk their lives and the lives of their children in order to save a foreigner?)

But the belief that "the whole world is against us" is rooted deep in our national psyche. It enables us to ignore the world reaction to our behavior. It is very convenient. If the entire world hates us anyhow, the nature of our deeds, good or bad, doesn't really matter. They would hate Israel even if we were angels. The Goyim are just anti-Semitic.

It is easy to show that this is also untrue. The world loved us when we founded the State of Israel and defended it with our blood. A day after the Six-day War, the whole world applauded us. They loved us when we were David, they hate us when we are Goliath.

This does not convince the world-against-us people. Why is there no world-wide movement against the atrocities of the Russians in Chechnya or the Chinese in Tibet? Why only against us? Why do the Palestinians deserve more sympathy than the Kurds in Turkey?

One could answer that since Israel demands special treatment in all other matters, we are measured by special standards when it comes to the occupation and the settlements. But logic doesn't matter. It's the national myths that count.

Yesterday, Israel's third largest newspaper, *Ma'ariv*, published a story about our ambassador to the United Nations under the revealing headline: "Behind enemy lines".

I REMEMBER one of the clashes I had with Golda Meir in the Knesset, after the beginning of the settlement enterprise and the angry reactions throughout the world. As now, people put all the blame on our faulty "explaining". The Knesset held a general debate.

Speaker after speaker declaimed the usual clichés: the Arab propaganda is brilliant, our "explaining" is beneath contempt. When my turn came, I said: It's not the fault of the "explaining". The best "explaining" in the world cannot "explain" the occupation and the settlements. If we want to gain the sympathy of the world, it's not our words that must change, but our

actions.

Throughout the debate, Golda Meir – as was her wont – stood at the door of the plenum hall, chain-smoking. Summing up, she answered every speaker in turn, ignoring my speech. I thought that she had decided to boycott me, when – after a dramatic pause – she turned in my direction. “Deputy Avnery thinks that they hate us because of what we do. He does not know the Goyim. The Goyim love the Jews when they are beaten and miserable. They hate the Jews when they are victorious and successful.” If clapping were allowed in the Knesset, the whole House would have burst into thunderous applause.

There is a danger that the current worldwide protest will meet the same reaction: that the Israeli public will unite against the evil Goyim, instead of uniting against the settlers.

SOME OF the protest groups could not care less. Their actions are not addressed to the Israeli public, but to international opinion.

I don't mean the anti-Semites, who are trying to hitch a ride on this movement. They are a negligible force. Neither do I mean those who believe that the creation of the State of Israel was a historical mistake to start with, and that it should be dismantled.

I mean all the idealists who wish to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and the stealing of their land by the settlers, and to help them to found the free State of Palestine.

These aims can be achieved only through peace between Palestine and Israel. And such a peace can come about only if the majority of Palestinians and the majority of Israelis support it. Outside pressure will not suffice.

Anyone who understands this must be interested in a world-wide protest that does not push the Israeli population into the arms of the settlers, but, on the contrary, isolates the settlers and turns the general public against them.

How can this be achieved?

THE FIRST thing is to clearly differentiate between the boycott of the settlements and a general boycott of Israel. The TV report suggested that many of the protesters do not see the border between the two. It showed a middle-aged British woman in a supermarket, waving some fruit over her head and shouting: “these come from a settlement!” Then it showed a demonstration against the Ahava cosmetic products that are extracted from the Palestinian part of the Dead Sea. But immediately after, there came a call for a boycott of all Israeli products. Perhaps many of the protesters – or the editors of the film – are not clear about the difference.

The Israeli right also blurs this distinction. For example: a recent bill in the Knesset wants to punish those who support a boycott on the products of Israel,

including – as it states explicitly – the products of the settlements.

If the world protest is clearly focused on the settlements, it will indeed cause many Israelis to realize that there is a clear line between the legitimate State of Israel and the illegitimate occupation.

That is also true for other parts of the story. For example: the initiative to boycott the Caterpillar company, whose monstrous bulldozers are a major weapon of the occupation. When the heroic peace activist Rachel Corrie was crushed to death under one of them, the company should have stopped all further supplies unless assured that they would not be used for repression.

As long as suspected war criminals are not brought to justice in Israel itself, one cannot object to the initiatives to prosecute them abroad.

After this week's decision by the main Israeli theaters to perform in the settlements, it will be logical to boycott them abroad. If they are so keen to make money in Ariel, they can't complain about losing money in Paris and London.

THE SECOND thing is the connection between these groups and the Israeli public.

Today a large majority of Israelis say that they want peace and are ready to pay the price, but that, unfortunately, the Arabs don't want peace. The mainstream peace camp, which could once bring hundreds of thousands onto the street, is in a state of depression. It feels isolated. Among other things, its once close connection with the Palestinians, which was established at the time of Yasser Arafat after Oslo, has become very loose. So have relations with the protest forces abroad.

If people of goodwill want to speed up the end of the occupation, they must support the peace activists in Israel. They should build a close connection with them, break the conspiracy of silence against them in the world media and publicize their courageous actions, organize more and more international events in which Palestinian and Israeli peace activists will be present side by side. It would also be nice if for every ten billionaires who finance the extreme Right in Israel, there were at least one millionaire supporting action in pursuit of peace.

All this becomes impossible if there is a call for a boycott on all Israelis, irrespective of their views and actions, and Israel is presented as a monolithic monster. This picture is not only false, it is extremely harmful.

Many of the activists who appear in this report arouse respect and admiration. So much good will! So much courage! If they point their activities in the right direction, they can do a lot of good – good for the Palestinians, and good for us Israelis, too.