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Cancellation of Dr. Norman G. Finkelstein's speaking arrangement to Germany

Statement of the Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East – EJJP Germany

Dr. Norman Finkelstein has cancelled his planned flight to Germany.

He wanted to speak in Munich, Milbertshofen and Berlin on February 24, 25 and 26.

The scheduled title of his talk was: "One Year after the Israeli Assault on Gaza. The German Government's Responsibility in the Ongoing Starvation of the Palestinian Population."

This title does not beat around the bush. It violates the terminology accepted by official German politics. It violates the terminology accepted by the mainstream German media. And it tells the truth.

It is this truth that the German lobby for Israeli hit-and-smash nationalism is very much afraid of. Therefore a campaign was cranked up: Finkelstein, a man proud of the Jewish traditions bequeathed him by his parents, was defamed as an "anti-Semite" and "revisionist historian", and thus made out to be in league with the Nazis. The Jewish Community of Berlin, look-alike Jewish groups in the party "The Left" (committees by the name of "Shalom") and a Jewish committee in the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) called for a demonstration against Finkelstein.

The Protestant Church did not want to poison its relations with these groups for no good reason. The same held for the Heinrich Böll Foundation associated with the Green Party, and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation associated with "The Left", also. All of those withdrew their support for organizing Finkelstein's talk. It was not enough that Finkelstein himself is a Jew, or that we – the "Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East" – were co-organizers.

A new forum for Finkelstein's talk was found in the "Junge Welt Ladengalerie" in Berlin. But this is a relatively small room, and Finkelstein's assessment of the situation was that the battle around his person would overshadow his main concern, the one summed up in the title of his talk. He cancelled his speaking arrangement.

Was this a victory for the lobby for hit-and-smash Israeli nationalism? Without a doubt. But it was a Pyrrhic victory. For this lobby, which has brought the Church, the Green Party and "The Left" into line, has in the process made it all too clear what the political consequences of it unjustly equating the criticism of Israel's injustices with anti-Semitism are: limiting the freedom of speech. And this leads to resistance. Presumably there is much grumbling in the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation. It is only a matter of time – and of further such "victories" – before grumbles will be heard in the SPD and the Christian-Democratic Union (CDU) as well. For there can be no stopping the discussion of Israel's obviously unjust actions against the Palestinians. As for us, we intend to pursue these discussions.

This was a Pyrrhic victory on ideological grounds as well. For Jews, when they respect their best traditions, have actively strived to make the world a more just, more merciful place. It was the spiritual leader of German Jewry in the last century, Rabbi Dr. Leo Baeck, who characterized Judaism as the religion of active ethics. In that sense, Jews can and should contribute to promoting mutual understanding, dialogue, reconciliation, and peace in the Middle East. Those who, in the name of Judaism, have prevented Finkelstein from speaking in public, have distanced themselves from this venerable tradition. They have no new tradition to put in its place: just a yawning nationalistic vacuum.

This will make it increasingly easier for non-Jewish Germans not only to see the difference between justice and injustice in the Palestinian question, but also to speak it out:

"One Year after the Israeli Assault on Gaza. The German Government's Responsibility in the Ongoing Starvation of the Palestinian Population."

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