

No justice, no peace!

Yossi Wolfson

1995

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“The thought that we could end the bloodshed without doing justice to the (Palestinians) is not only malicious, but a dangerous illusion. The “peace process” is trying to do precisely that... That is why I’m against it.”

In late 1994 a young Israeli anarchist named Yossi Wolfson wrote an opinion column in a local punk fanzine, describing why he opposes the so-called peace process, the “Oslo Agreements”. He had better understanding of reality than any of the senior “political experts” at the time, combined.

Many Palestinians, of course, expressed these views in real time as well, but among the “Israeli Left”, and even the radical left, these ideas were extremely rare at the time.

30 years later, I can definitely say in retrospect that Wolfson was spot on in his criticism, so I thought I’d share. Following is the full text, translated from Hebrew. It was published in the underground anarcho-punk fanzine “War of Words”, issue 2, 1995.

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I’m against the peace process. It’s been more than a year since the Washington Agreement, and I think we need to reevaluate our position. And I’m against it. It’s not that I don’t see positive developments. Surely I don’t miss Shamir as prime minister, when new settlements kept being erected and the IDF was patrolling in Jabalia refugee camp. There’s no more night curfew in Gaza, that’s already a good thing, and not the only one. And still, I’m against it. Thousands of Palestinians are still being held in Israeli prisons. The closure is preventing the people from Gaza and the West Bank from getting work and providing for their families. Anyone trying to enter for work can get arrested and fined. Recently there were a few cases where the IDF killed some of these “infiltrators”. Mass arrests in the West Bank continue. The Shin Bet continues with its torture tactics, and now it is also being joined by a Palestinian Shin Bet. Home demolitions have restarted, and land expropriation never stopped – not to mention that no piece of land has been returned to its rightful owners. And also the violence hasn’t stopped, every week there are more people injured and killed.

They say it’s a process and that we need to give it a chance, and that things can only get better. A year ago they said: we’re on our way to victory. Now I think it’s time to sober up. Things are going the opposite way. Even before the elections Rabin was clear about his platform: let’s build a fence around Gaza and let them rot. So he said and so he did. The Palestinian Authority has relieved Israel of its responsibilities towards the people of Gaza. Finally we don’t have to worry about (or pay for) their health and education (not that we did a lot for them before). The Palestinian Authority takes care of keeping the peace. We didn’t give up a single Israeli interest – either real or imagined. We control the population registry, entry to and exit from Gaza, we keep the settlements, set building regulations and I could go on. And regarding those little concessions we committed to, we are mostly trying to deflect them: for example, the promise to remove military forces from population centers before the election.

Rabin wants to maintain all military advantages but do away with the burden of keeping the peace. And what does Peres want? Peres has a grand vision of a New Middle East. His vision gives a central role to huge multinational corporations. Let’s turn the Middle East into a free market,

with capital moving freely. Of course, the workers will remain caged in their places. Nobody wants Arabs in the middle of Tel Aviv, right? The big companies will get cheap labor and make their profits. And what about the Middle East?

Arafat's aspirations also don't give me great hopes. He founded a new military rule in the (1967-occupied Palestinian) territories, with him as the top ruler, surrounded by a multitude of all-powerful generals. Human rights are not being upheld. There are limits on free press. And his arm is being twisted behind his back by Israel. A year ago, I had the illusion that political processes can undo evil. Now it seems they mostly replace one evil by another. Instead of the occupation they are now creating a banana republic that is dependent on Israel. This new state of affairs has advantages and disadvantages. In the bottom line, though, the Palestinians will continue being screwed, sometimes even more screwed than before. And the Israeli "left" and global public opinion will no longer help them. As far as they're concerned the problem's been solved. There's a "peace process", the Nobel prizes have already been awarded, so what if children are hungry, prisoners are left to rot, and people need a double permit if they want to visit Cairo – not only from the Israeli authorities (and Shin Bet) as before, but now also from the "independent" Palestinian Authority.

The Israeli-Palestinian problem is not, in its essence, a problem of war and peace. This is not a cycle of revenge killings, started in ancient history, which perpetuates itself into the present. Not at all. The Israeli-Palestinian problem is a problem of justice, or more precisely of injustice. An injustice that is still ongoing in the prisons, the refugee camps in Palestine and beyond, and in the everyday lives of millions. The thought that we could end the bloodshed without doing justice to the workers, to the refugees of all the wars, to the farmers who are left without land or water, to the political prisoners – this thought is not only malicious. It is a dangerous illusion. Making peace is about allowing two sides to forgive each other for past injustices and to start a new path. But as long as the injustice is not a thing of the past, there's no chance (and also no justification) for the demand that Palestinians should lay down their weapons.

The peace process is trying to do precisely that: to achieve a peace that is inseparable from continuing the injustice. That is why I'm against it. I'm aware of the limitations of a process that is directed from the top by political leaders, which is why it's hard for me to offer alternatives in the form of a general resolution. I still dream, in moments of weakness, of a two-state solution, but after Oslo I no longer believe that there's any kind of diplomatic solution that could help the common folk. I'm not saying we should call it quits. On the contrary, we must snap out of our euphoria and go back to protest. I don't expect Rabin, Peres, Arafat or Clinton to provide me with a solution. But I can demand the end of specific injustices: demand the release of prisoners, protest the closure, demand elections now, persuade the Israeli public that Palestinian East Jerusalem is, in fact, Palestinian. I can, in short, continue to serve as a leftist opposition to the regime. Because the biggest disaster resulting from this fake peace process is that the leftist opposition in Israel has pretty much decided to take a break and stop fighting.

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<https://twitter.com/ireallyhateyou/status/1853520660242350567> ("War of Words", Issue #2)
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