

“The way accusations of antisemitism are dealt with is in itself antisemitic”

Interview with Udi Raz about dismissal from Berlin’s Jewish Museum

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A few weeks ago, the Jewish Museum in Berlin sacked Udi Raz, one of its guides, for speaking the truth about the state of Israel and calling it an apartheid state during guided tours. The WSWs has already reported on the case and now had the opportunity to speak directly with Udi Raz, who is a board member of the Berlin-based organisation Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East.

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WSWS: Can you tell us more about the incident? Why were you sacked?

Udi Raz: I used the term apartheid to describe the human rights situation in the West Bank. I have been working at the Jewish Museum since the beginning of this year. There were repeated exchanges between the museum’s education department and myself, where it was always argued that it was better to avoid the term, as it was academically controversial. I then repeatedly provided arguments that actually supported the continued use of the term. But in the end, the education department said that you should only use the term if you really have a sense of whether the group understands the term or the discourse and can categorise the term correctly—i.e., historically, geopolitically, geographically, and so on and so forth.

That’s how I applied it. However, the head of the museum’s education department once went on a guided tour with me where I used the term accordingly. I only used it because I had a feeling that the group would be able to categorise it correctly. They were able to do so and there was also a lot of praise for the fact that I described the human rights situation in the West Bank in such detail and with such differentiation.

I never refer to my own position, but to the academic work of human rights organisations that are researching the area, including Amnesty International. I also say this explicitly during my guided tours. The head of the education department has emphasised several times that I have received a lot of praise and that I am one of the most highly praised guides in the museum, but since I have used the term again, I am not allowed to receive any more commissions.

WSWS: So, the Jewish Museum basically sacked you without notice? Are you no longer working at all?

Udi Raz: I was a freelancer, which means there was no contract. There was a framework contract, but I wasn’t actually an employee of the museum. This means that I have no further claims against the museum. And the museum didn’t have to justify why I wasn’t getting any more commissions. However, it is interesting that this time the museum explicitly explained why I was dismissed. I think that’s an interesting case.

WSWS: Yes, definitely. Maybe you can say something again about the context in which you called Israel an apartheid state? What did you talk about in your tours?

Udi Raz: I am trained to speak specifically about Jewish people in Germany after 1945. This also corresponds to a certain section of the museum building. In this part of the museum there is a specific room called the Israel room, where the triangle is thematised: Jewish people, Israel and Germany. There, I describe the different attitudes of the two states, the bilateral relations, starting from the 1950s until 2008, so to speak, when the then Chancellor Angela Merkel declared the protection of Israel to be a matter of state for Germany.

I also told my own story in this context. I am Jewish Israeli myself and I live in Germany. I explained why I am here at all. I told them that I come from a place, a city called Haifa. And then I ask the question: Where is Haifa? Then the visitors usually say either Israel or Palestine or both. And then I emphasise that it’s absolutely fine for me that the place where I come from has more than just a name, because many Palestinian people also live in Haifa.

But I explain that there is a specific area in this region called the West Bank. And I speak specifically about this region because I simply have knowledge of it. I have often been to the West Bank myself to demonstrate against the construction of the wall together with Palestinian people who live there.

And accordingly, I have often heard their experiences of life there and realised that this reality of life is completely different to the one I knew as a Jewish person living in the same country. But even more glaring is the fact that I, as a Jewish person, was able to cross the wall—through the checkpoints—while the Palestinian people cannot. And then I always explain that the Jewish people who live in the West Bank have Israeli citizenship. Accordingly,

they can, for example, help decide who sits in the Israeli parliament. Palestinian people, on the other hand, do not have Israeli citizenship and are not allowed to participate in decision-making. This means that the Jewish people in the West Bank live under the legal system of the Israeli state, while the Palestinian people living in the same area live under the military law of the Israeli army.

And in this context, I explain that Amnesty International, for example, published a report in 2021 characterising this reality as an apartheid system. In this context, I also explain that resistance to such an apartheid system is not always peaceful. There are indeed people who are prepared to kill and even sacrifice their own lives in order to resist.

At some point, I'd had enough, and I just wanted to leave Israel. Pupils from my school were also murdered in terrorist attacks. And then I decided in favour of Berlin. But in Berlin, I realised that my heart still lies there—also because of my family and friends.

And it's important to me to make my voice heard here too. But you can imagine how shocked I was when Germans here in Germany accused me of being antisemitic. And the reason for this is that many Germans are trying to deal with the past. I appreciate that in principle and I have no criticism of it. But you always have to question how it is done.

There are also attempts to deal with the past that are actually quite sensible: such as restorations, compensation, migration rights for Jewish people from the former Soviet Union. But this position, which says that Germany stands by Israel no matter what Israel does, means that Palestinian people living in Palestine/Israel are not allowed to enjoy any human rights at all. And the fact that Palestinian people are de facto not allowed to demonstrate in Germany emphasises this. While Palestinian people in Palestine/Israel do not enjoy any human rights, these people in Germany have no civil democratic rights at all.

WSWS: Do you see a connection between your dismissal and the war in the Middle East and at the same time the general restriction of democratic rights?

Udi Raz: That's a good question. I think that in a situation like the one we are seeing right now the masks just fall. One can't simply be ambivalent. We know exactly who stands on the side of international law, who stands on the side of humanism, who recognises human rights—including those of non-Jewish people. And the way in which accusations of antisemitism are dealt with is in itself antisemitic. For example, the claim that Jewish people are not able to imagine a future in which they can live in peace with Palestinians.

WSWS: Yes. The whole equating of the Jewish population with the Israeli government is an antisemitic argument. Because it means you're saying that the Jewish population is responsible for Israel's crimes.

Udi Raz: Absolutely. Nationalist Germans often claim that Islamists are not able to differentiate between Jewish people and Israel. That's true, but Israel and Germany feel the same way. Israel doesn't see any difference between Jewish people and Israel and Germany doesn't differentiate either.

WSWS: As socialists and internationalists we say that the war can only be stopped by a united movement of Israeli and Arab

workers and also workers here in Germany and in the US. We are fighting for an expansion of the protests and for workers worldwide to stand up for a political general strike against arms deliveries. What do you think about such an international perspective?

Udi Raz: Basically, I think it's always right to utilise every potential to start a conversation. I think I would like to see a future where all people are allowed to live in the same region and take part in such a dialogue. That there is no differentiation between different ethnic groups. This applies to Jewish people, Palestinian people, Druze and all people who simply live there and are affected by the system. And basically, arms deliveries are far more harmful than any other type of crisis management. And in this situation, Germany is now taking on the task of supplying weapons instead of decriminalising "non-violent" movements such as BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions].

WSWS: You've already said that the masks are falling here. In parliament, all the deputies from the Left Party to the Alternative for Germany (AfD) have voted in favour of a motion supporting Israel. It really is a united front of all parties.

Udi Raz: The Left Party already showed that with the anti-BDS resolution in 2019. Even then, the masks fell. This is now an urgent matter, because people are actually dying as a result of such policies. People also died before, but not in such large numbers. It's hard to believe how a party that calls itself left-wing can allow something like this to happen.

WSWS: And the fact that the AfD is at the forefront of this campaign exposes the fact that this is not about the fight against antisemitism. Its leading members declare that the Holocaust was "just so much 'bird shit' in history."

Udi Raz: As a Jewish person living here in Germany, I am totally appalled by this politicisation of the term antisemitism, because it distracts from the actual manifestations of this phenomenon, which are extremely dangerous. And we have to name phenomena such as antisemitism and any other kind of racism, monitor them and stop them accordingly.

WSWS: An extremely aggressive anti-Muslim campaign is currently taking place. Foreigners, Muslims and refugees are having hatred stirred up against them. What do you think about this?

Udi Raz: It's very sad. But the accusations of antisemitism against Muslim people as such are also proof that it's not really about antisemitism at all. This is an attempt to defame Muslim people.

WSWS: Thank you very much for this interview.



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