

Wedding video shows Israeli far-right gathering celebrating arson attack on Palestinians

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Israeli television aired leaked video clips of an ultra-orthodox Jewish wedding where a guest stabbed a photo of Ali Dawabsheh, the toddler killed along with his parents in a firebomb attack on their home in the West Bank last July. Youths dancing with guns, knives and firebombs cheered him on and shouted anti-Arab slogans.

Another video of what has been dubbed the “wedding of hate” shows extremist Jewish leaders Itamar Ben Gvir, the lawyer for the suspected fire bombers, and Bent Zion Gopstein, leader of the fascistic anti-Arab group Lehava and disciple of Meir Kahane, the US-born rabbi who sought to remove all Arabs from Israel and the Palestinian territories. Lehava has been accused of regularly inciting racist attacks against Palestinians, both online and on the streets of Jerusalem.

According to *Channel 10*, the couple getting married was “very well known in the radical right,” while their friends were described as being friends of the suspects in the arson attack.

Such a wedding “celebration” is no means unique. The owner of the wedding hall told the Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*, “There are dozens of these kinds of weddings every month.” He said that “the police knew about the wedding and deployed undercover cops who documented everything.”

The airing of the video clips comes just days after Defence Minister Moshe Ya’alon announced that there was insufficient evidence to detain or prosecute the alleged arsonists who killed three members of the Dawabsheh family and critically injured a fourth in the Palestinian village of Duma in the West Bank last July.

The political establishment condemned the scenes glorifying the arson attack, with Prime Minister

Benyamin Netanyahu describing them as “shocking images” and saying they expose “the real face of a group that poses danger to Israeli society and security.”

But the record shows that his government has done nothing to stop the activities of such groups. Far from it. Ever since the 1967 War, successive governments have cultivated far-right death squads, encouraging them to do what the Israeli state cannot be seen to do quite so openly—drive the Palestinians from their homes and clear the way for further Israeli expansion. The settlements and their organisations have had access to public funds that far exceed those available to the rest of Israel.

Israel’s gutting of educational and essential public services, the whipping up of racism, and above all, the constant war-mongering against both the Palestinians and neighbouring states have spawned these fascistic gangs.

Over the last 30 years, social and political tensions within Israel have grown as the gap between rich and poor has widened to the extent that it is now the second most unequal society in the OECD countries. According to a report released earlier this month by the National Insurance Institute, one in three children live in poverty, while poverty among families in which at least one person was working climbed from 12.5 percent in 2013 to 13.1 percent last year.

All this has gone ahead with the Labour Party and the trade unions refusing to lift a finger to stop it. When in office, Labour implemented social policies that were indistinguishable from those of the right-wing governments. Just last week, the Histadrut, Israel’s main trade union federation, called off a public sector workers strike set for December 23, following the

Likud-led government's paltry offer of a 7.5 percent rise in pay over five years.

With the majority of people alienated from official politics, the state has increased its reliance on ultra-nationalist, religious and fascist layers to the extent that no party today can form a government without their support. The present government, with its majority of one, is no exception.

While there are undoubtedly real concerns within the Israeli state apparatus about the consequences of empowering such pathological elements, Netanyahu, who has been prime minister since 2009, has shown no desire to rein them in. Settler gangs have repeatedly been allowed to murder and attack the Palestinians, and destroy their property, with no attempt by the authorities to bring them before the courts except in the handful of the most horrific attacks that provoke international revulsion and censure.

At the same time, the Israeli government has supported an anti-democratic bill specifically targeting human rights and left-wing organisations. Should the bill become law, it would require NGOs that receive 50 percent or more of their funding from foreign governments to detail those sources of funding in any public reports or documents, meetings with state officials, and to wear special tags when attending parliament. Such measures are aimed at showing that such human rights work serves a foreign, as opposed to an Israeli, interest or agenda.

Settlers' groups that receive overseas funding will not come under the bill's remit. According to a report in the *New York Times*, at least 40 American groups have collected more than \$200 million in tax-deductible gifts for Israeli settlement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem over the last decade. This money has been spent on schools, synagogues, recreation centres, and so on, which is legal under US tax law although contrary to official State Department policy of opposing Israeli settlement building in the interest of maintaining the fiction of a "peace process." Crucially, some of it has also gone to housing as well as guard dogs, bulletproof vests, rifle scopes and vehicles to protect settlers' outposts that are illegal even under Israeli law in the West Bank.

The government's support for the bill comes just one week after another group, Im Tirzu, which an Israeli court once ruled could be publicly and legitimately

characterised as fascist, launched a vicious hate campaign targeting Breaking the Silence, a group of soldiers exposing the criminal and inhumane activities of the Israeli Defence Forces, and other human rights organisations.

Netanyahu went on to bolster the Shin Bet, which has come under fire from these right-wing groups after questions were raised about the interrogation tactics used on the suspected arsonists in the Dewabsheh case. They have apparently been held under Israel's administrative detention policy that enables people to be held without trial for renewable six-month periods.

In reality, according to a parliamentary report, of the 31 Israeli citizens held in November, 4 of the administrative detainees are Jews (presumably the 4 suspected of carrying out the arson attack on the Dewabsheh family), 6 are Palestinian citizens of Israel, and 21 are Palestinian permanent residents of Jerusalem. This is a substantial increase on previous years, and is believed to be even higher in December. A further 371 detainees are Palestinians from the West Bank.

Israel has used the 1979 "Emergency Regulations" law as the legal basis for the administrative detention of its own citizens, whereby such anti-democratic measures are valid as long as the country remains in a "state of emergency." Israel has been in a declared "state of emergency" ever since its establishment on May 15, 1948.



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