

Members of Congress and Their Highly Selective Indignation

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Stephen Flatow notes that a letter signed several weeks ago by 60 members of Congress shocks the conscience, or should. [Here](#) is his story :

Did you hear the shocking news? Sixty Congress members just signed a letter demanding that the Federal government stop the dismantling of any illegally built homes that have been built by Arabs. But they did not object to Israel's continuing policy of dismantling illegally built Jewish homes.

The letter demanded that the American government not allow American-made equipment it supplied to Israel to be used in

what they called “the ongoing home demolitions” of Arab homes. There was no mention in the letter of the Israeli government’s dismantling of Jewish homes and settlements it deemed “illegal.” Nor was there any mention of the demolition of houses belonging to the families of terrorists as an effective way to discourage would-be terrorists.

Who would have thought that in this day and age, members of Congress would stoop so low as to make policy recommendations based on the idea that one specific ethnic group should be targeted?

We were supposed to have given up the old practice of making policies based on the color of people’s skin, rather than the content of their character. Images of George Wallace standing in that schoolhouse door were supposed to be just a bad memory. Yet here we are, in 2020, with 60 Democrats signing a letter that echoes the attitudes of those dark times.

J Street played a major role in organizing the Congressional letter. In a December 10 press release, the group announced that “J Street supporters across the country are contacting the offices of their members of Congress and urging them to sign on to this important and timely letter.”

The letter was sent to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on March 16, bearing the signatures of 60 members of Congress, all Democrats. They urged the US government to prevent Israel from using American-made equipment in “the ongoing home demolitions and forcible transfer of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank.”

The letter’s reference to “Palestinian civilians” indicates that J Street misled the members of Congress. Evidently, the J Streeters did not explain to potential signatories that house demolitions in Israel are not based on the race, religion, or ethnicity of the homeowners.

Israeli courts authorize dismantling illegally built homes on

the basis of whether the homes were built illegally. The Israeli government does not have a policy of demolishing Palestinian homes. If it did, it would be doing quite a poor job of it, since 99.9% of Palestinian homes are still standing!

Both Jews and Arabs in the West Bank have illegally built homes. Some are on “state and waste” lands that are owned by the Israeli government, and from which permission for such building had not been obtained. In some cases Jewish settlers have wrongly claimed – as was the case with the settlement at Amona – to have bought the land they built on from Palestinians, claims that did not stand up in court. Individual houses, owned by Arabs and Jews – though mostly by the former – have been pulled down when the builders violated building codes so egregiously that only demolition would discourage them, and warn others, from continuing to flout the law.

Clearly, J Street never informed these members of Congress that the Israeli government has been demolishing illegally built Jewish homes too.

On October 24, Israeli bulldozers destroyed two housing structures in the unauthorized Jewish community of Shevah Ha'aretz, near the town of Yitzhar. On November 26, the government sent tractors to level a Jewish housing structure near the community of Bat Ayin and to plow over an adjacent olive grove that had been planted by Israeli Jews and their Christian Zionist supporters. On January 15, the bulldozers were active in Yitzhar, destroying two more Jewish homes that were built illegally.

Had you heard or read about this Israeli destruction at Shevah Ha'aretz, near Bet Ayin, and at Yitzhar of Jewish houses that had been built illegally? No, of course not. It's not something the Times or the Post or the BBC or any other part

of the mainstream media would want brought to your attention. And while we hear constantly about the destruction of "Palestinian" olive trees by mad-dog Jewish settlers, have you ever heard of Israeli tractors plowing over an olive grove planted by Jews that the government considered "illegal"? No, you never have, until just now.

So why didn't the Congressional letter ask Secretary Pompeo to make sure that no American-made bulldozers were used to smash those Jewish homes?

There are two possible answers.

One would be that those members of Congress are a bunch of racists who care only about the demolition of homes owned by one ethnic group and don't care about the ones owned by another ethnic group.

But I don't believe that. I believe that the signatories, except for a few die-hard Israel-haters such as Michigan Rep. Rashida Tlaib, are simply unaware of the reality on the ground in Judea and Samaria. They are unaware because J Street misled them. J Street led them to think that the Israeli government has a racist policy of targeting Arab houses. Comment:

The Israeli government demolishes with equal firmness both Arab and Jewish houses that have been built illegally, or that for security reasons needs to be demolished. Some Arab homes have been built on state or waste land the Palestinians did not own. In other cases, demolitions may be carried out to enforce building codes and regulations that have been repeatedly flouted. The IDF also carries out house demolitions as a counter-insurgency measure to impede or halt militant operations. An Arab house may have been strategically built just above an Israeli settlement, from where those in the house could do the most damage to Jewish civilians living below. That could be grounds for its demolition.

House demolitions are also carried out to discourage terrorism. The demolition of houses belonging to the families of convicted terrorists is used both to punish terrorists and to deter future would-be terrorists, who might not want their families to suffer. As a policy, it seems to have worked, in significantly decreasing Palestinian terrorist attacks.

If J Street had fully informed these 60 Congresspeople about the situation, then the entire premise of the anti-Israel letter would have collapsed.

Racism has no place on Capitol Hill. There should be no discrimination between houses owned by Arabs or Jews, whites or blacks, or any other racial or ethnic groups.

J Street, the so-called "pro-Israel, pro-peace" lobby, should be ashamed of itself.

In 2005, the Israeli government demolished many houses of Israeli settlers who were transferred in accordance with the Israeli disengagement from Gaza. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said this was done by request of the Palestinian Authorities.

In addition to removing all traces of the Israeli settlements in Gaza, as demanded by the Palestinians, who might have used for their own purposes both the residential housing and the greenhouses left intact by Israelis, were they not so consumed with hate, Israel has routinely demolished "illegal" buildings put up by settlers in the West Bank – that is, "illegal" because their builders had failed to obtain permission from the Israeli state. Sometimes entire outposts have been demolished, if the Israeli government determines they were built "illegally." Yet very little attention is given to these Israeli actions in the world media, for it would not do to deflect attention from what so many see as the only outrage, that committed by those oppressive Israelis, in destroying structures put up by the inoffensive Palestinians.

When Israel tears down “illegal” buildings or settlements put up by Jews, it does so either because the land on which the settlement was built turns out, according to scrupulous investigation by the Israeli officials, to be owned by Palestinians, or it is state land on which the Israeli government had refused to give permission for Jews to build. It may, for security reasons, want to prevent new Israeli settlements to be built too perilously close to Arab villages – given the enormous effort that might be necessary to defend their inhabitants in case of hostilities. Some settlements or outposts may actually weaken the state if they are likely to prove hellishly difficult to defend.

The government of Israel has not hesitated to remove settlers, and demolish their settlements if, after judicial decisions and appeals that go all the way up to the Supreme Court, they are given the go-ahead. Israeli decisions to demolish Arab structures are also subject to the same judgements and appeals.

In February 2017, Israeli forces began an operation to evacuate settlers from the West Bank outpost of Amona after the Supreme Court stated that it must be demolished by 8 February. According to the Supreme Court the outpost had been built on private Palestinian land settlers claimed they had bought; the land had been declared a “closed military area” by the government.

At Amona, it took thousands of Border Police to subdue a crowd of 10,000, who had come from all over Israel to protest the decision. But the sight of Israeli police violently subduing fellow Jews who were protesting the demolition of Jewish homes did not make it to Western media; it didn't fit the story that the media likes to present of ruthless Israelis demolishing, for no conceivable reason, Arab houses.

Perhaps some of those 60 Democratic Congressmen will take the

time to find out more about the reasons for Israel's demolition of Jewish settlers' houses, demolishments about which they appear not to have heard, which might provide them with a more nuanced view of the matter. And then they should have the decency to listen to the Israeli government's explanation of the reasons for its demolition of a handful of Arab homes – an infinitesimal number, though you wouldn't think so from the mainstream media reports – including gross violations of building codes, and erecting structures – without permission – on state and waste lands. Finally, the Congressmen should understand that demolishing the family homes of terrorists in order both to punish them and to discourage other would-be terrorists, does, in fact, work. It took the Israelis quite a while to fully comprehend, but now they do. They know that given their merciless and relentless enemy, there is no point in gentle persuasion or observing Marquess of Queensberry rules. This is the Middle East.

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