

THE GLOBAL BDS CAMPAIGN LAID BARE

1. The racist history of the BDS movement

The original BDS movement was established following the NGO Forum that was held during the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban in September 2001 ('Durban 1')

Article 425 of the Declaration issued by the NGO Forum announced *a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state...the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, aid, military cooperation and training) between all states and Israel.*

But the NGO Forum was thoroughly discredited by overt displays of naked Jew-hatred. During a BBC interview, Mary Robinson, who was then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said of Durban 1 that *"there was horrible antisemitism present — particularly in some of the NGO discussions. A number of people said they've never been so hurt or so harassed or been so blatantly faced with antisemitism"*.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/forum/1673034.stm

The campaign for a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions regime (BDS) against Israel underwent a "remake" on 9 July 2005 when 171 Palestinian non-governmental organizations declared that the objectives of BDS are (i) an end to Israel's "occupation and colonization of all Arab lands" [not defined], as well as dismantling of the security barrier (ii) recognition of the "fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality"; and (iii) realization of the so-called "right of return" of "Palestinian refugees" (see <http://www.bdsmovement.net/call>).

The "remake" of BDS occurred precisely because of its toxic association with Durban 1, and the singular failure of the campaign to gain any results. The proponents of BDS hoped that re-packaging BDS as a call from Palestinian civil society would give the campaign more credibility.

Despite the re-make, the BDS campaign can boast few tangible achievements. It has not managed to advance practical academic or consumer boycotts, divestment or sanctions. Since 2005, Israel's economy has enjoyed strong growth despite the intervening global economic crisis. In 2010, Israel was accepted as a member of the prestigious group of OECD countries.

2. **BDS leaders are dishonest about its real agenda**

The lack of success of the BDS campaign to date is at least partly due to the fact that it is deliberately and deceptively slippery about its ultimate aims. Even when its proponents appear to formulate their goals, they do so in a way that intentionally leaves much unsaid, and much unexplained. In particular they hedge on the question of whether or not the real aim of the movement is to seek a two-State solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and hence whether its true purpose is to attack Israel's legitimacy.

Here is the way one Palestinian spokesperson in Australia has put it:

BDS does not aim for either a one or two state solution, but for Palestinian rights... Whether that is in one state for both peoples or two sovereign, democratic states side by side has yet to be decided. The movement is consistently neutral on this, regardless of the diverse personal political views held by its various spokespeople.

http://www.palestinechronicle.com/view_article_details.php?id=16985

Let us consider just how “diverse” the “personal” political views of the main leaders of the global BDS movement really are on this crucial question.

Speaking at Carleton University in Ottawa in 2010, while he was a PhD student at Tel Aviv University, Omar Barghouti, the Palestinian founder of the BDS movement (the 2005 version), is recorded as saying:

“I clearly do not buy into the two-state solution... If the refugees were to return, you would not have a two-state solution. You would have a Palestine next to a Palestine, rather than a Palestine next to Israel.” See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifZLk6Ei9-U>:

In another interview at the same link, Barghouti stated:

“If the occupation ends, would that end our call for BDS? No it wouldn't.”

He wrote an even more damning piece in *Electronic Intifada* on 31 May 2009:

“...people fighting for refugee rights like I am, know that you cannot reconcile the right of return for refugees with a two state solution. That is the big white elephant in the room and people are ignoring it - a return for refugees would end Israel's existence as a Jewish state.”:

<http://electronicintifada.net/content/boycotts-work-interview-omar-barghouti/8263>

Barghouti claims that these public statements are only his “personal” views, not those of the global BDS movement which he leads. Yet Barghouti's views are in

conspicuous conformity with those of other BDS leaders like Ali Abuminah and Ronny Kasrils. Ali Abuminah states: "The two-state solution as typically expressed is no more than a last-ditch plan to save Zionism," See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifZLk6Ei9-U>: Ronnie Kasrils suggests: "BDS will help bring about the defeat of Zionist Israel, and victory for Palestine." See <http://vimeo.com/9617367>.

These statements show us just how "diverse" the "personal" political views of the main leaders of the global BDS movement really are. Quite clearly all the main leaders of the global BDS movement are using the movement to push their personal views which unambiguously oppose Israel's right to exist.

The BDS movement in Australia also includes many people who do not accept Israel's right to exist and who deliberately and dishonestly blur the lines between their so-called personal goals and the goals of the BDS campaign. The slogan adopted by many BDS supporters in Australia is not "*Boycott the settlements*", but "*Boycott Israel*". See for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGvKD3MmMx8>. This slogan is not just aimed at Israel's "*occupation*" of the West Bank, but at its right to exist. Other slogans shouted at demonstrations have been openly anti-Jewish and crossed the line into overt racism.

Why do these BDS leaders and supporters who openly oppose a two-State solution and Israel's right to exist feel the need to pretend that these are not also the objectives of the movement they lead and support? Because if they came clean and admitted that their unanimous personal views opposing Israel's right to exist are the official views of the BDS movement, they would lose much of their support.

The fact is that many BDS supporters around the world (and even the official line of the Palestinian Authority) only call for a boycott that is limited to the West bank settlements. They say they don't question Israel's right to exist within the 1967 Green Line and are not calling for a wider boycott against Israel generally. They say that a boycott limited to the West Bank settlements will help bring about a two-State solution.

But these people, many of whom are well-intentioned, are being used to serve the anti-Israel agenda opposing a two State solution of Barghouti and the other BDS leaders. This is implicit in the official BDS call for a so-called "right of return" to Israel itself of Palestinian "refugees".

Note that a 'right of return' is demanded not just for the limited number of 1948 refugees who are still alive but for all their descendants *ad infinitum*, who were born and have lived in other countries for their entire lives. Thus, somebody born and bred in Lebanon or Syria, who has never fled from anywhere, is considered to be a 'Palestinian refugee' if that person has, say, a grandfather or great

grandfather who was a 1948 refugee. This is without parallel in international law. A right of compensation for lost family property can legitimately be inherited, but not refugee status itself.

As Barghouti himself admitted in his 2009 piece, *“you cannot reconcile the right of return for refugees with a two state solution”*. It follows that the final goal of BDS, whether its pro-two-State-solution supporters intend it or not, is not merely to end Israel’s military and civilian presence in the West Bank but to change the demographic composition of Israel itself. This would transform the existing Jewish majority into a disempowered and vulnerable minority.

By endorsing the so-called “right of return”, BDS thus implicitly rejects the internationally-endorsed principle of “two States for two peoples” and is at odds with the global consensus which has always recognized Israel’s right to exist specifically as the nation-State of the Jewish people legitimately created under international law and the UN Charter.

The objective effect of the BDS campaign, regardless of the naive and well-intentioned wishes of some of its supporters, is thus to attack Israel’s legitimacy so as to isolate it internationally and clear the way for its eventual destruction.

What is too terrible to be stated, but is implicit in the assault on Israel’s legitimacy placed in historical context, is that the fate of Israel’s Jewish majority if BDS realises its final goals will be mass expulsion or even extermination and, for the remnant who survive, disempowerment and the denial of basic rights. Even though the leaders of the global BDS movement are political and philosophical opponents of Hamas, this end result is the secular equivalent of the “Islamic” solution which is called for in explicit terms in the Hamas Charter.

For all his high-sounding talk about universal human rights, Barghouti’s prescriptions would result in the fundamental rights of the Jewish people, including their internationally recognized right of national self-determination, being trampled into the dust.

The heart of the problem is that after more than 60 years a minority of Palestinians and their supporters still can’t accept Israel’s right to exist. They appeal to UN resolutions that have sometimes condemned Israel’s actions but ignore the more fundamental UN resolutions that have always recognised Israel’s right to exist as a state legitimately created under international law and the UN Charter.

3. A cost-benefit analysis of BDS: Palestinians themselves are voting against it with their feet

Omar Barghouti’s enrolment as a PhD student at Tel Aviv University until the end of 2010 is typical of the un-heroic posture of many leading BDS advocates. It is

easy for some people in Australia, half a world away from the Middle East, to call for a boycott of products made in the West Bank. Australia imports very little from the West Bank, so a boycott won't require them to make any personal sacrifices. Instead, they can comfort themselves with simplistic slogans and distorted accounts of history that omit all the gritty realities that don't fit their narrative.

It's the Palestinians themselves, especially those employed in Israeli settlements, who will have to pay the price – in lost jobs and declining living standards - for the crusading zeal of their Western “*champions*”.

An independent poll of Palestinians conducted in June 2010 found that while a majority of 72% supported, and 26% opposed, a boycott of settlements' products, only 38% of them supported, and 60% opposed, preventing Palestinian laborers from working in settlements. The poll was carried out by the respected Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, based in Ramallah. The results can be accessed at:

<http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2010/p36epressrelease.html>

The Palestinians seem to be saying that they want to put the Israeli settlements out of business, but without losing their jobs in those settlements. Clearly they have mixed feelings about a boycott. They support the idea of BDS against settlements in theory, but not in practice.

And who can blame them for having mixed feelings? If the Palestinians followed their leaders' orders and terminate their own employment in the settlements, they would lose not only their jobs but also any claim for compensation that they would have had under Israeli law if they were dismissed by their employers. And the employers would find other sources of labour to replace them. There are people all over the world who are desperate for jobs and try to get into Israel because Israel's economy is strong.

Another source reports that Israeli shops in the West Bank settlements are more crowded than ever with Palestinian customers, despite the call made by the Palestinian Authority for the Israeli shops to be boycotted (see e.g. <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=174959>) and the Palestinian Authority last year took the extreme measure of creating checkpoints outside the towns of Beit Sahur and al-Ram to stop their own people from shopping at a popular Israeli supermarket in the West Bank.

4. BDS will hurt Palestinian efforts to build the institutions of a state and civil society

What will a future Palestinian state be like? Will it give Palestinians freedom, democracy and human rights? Or will the Palestinians find that life under current Israeli control has been replaced by something much worse, like an Iranian-style religious dictatorship?

One litmus test will be whether or not Palestinians will have trade unions that are strong, free and independent, and are not merely puppets of the ruling elite.

At present, the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) is the Palestinians' biggest national union grouping and it is the only Palestinian union grouping affiliated to the International Trade Union Confederation. It has about 7,000 members but only a small percentage of them have jobs and pay union dues. About half of the PGFTU's dues come from workers employed in Israel or Israeli enterprises in the West Bank and are collected for the PGFTU by the Histadrut. No union can be strong and independent without a solid dues-paying membership base. So the PGFTU is still dependent on funding from the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Palestinian Authority.

The only way this situation can improve is if more, not fewer, PGFTU members get paying jobs. The Palestinian economy has greatly improved in the last three years but it will be many more years before it can generate sufficient jobs for all Palestinians who want paid work.

Statistics published by the Bank of Israel in April 2010 and confirmed by the Palestinian Finance Ministry show that work in Israel is highly important to the Palestinian economy. Some 44,000 West Bank Palestinians worked in Israel or in Israeli enterprises in the West Bank and constitute 14% of the total employed workforce among the residents of the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Total payment by Israeli employers to Palestinian workers came to \$649 million in 2008, which is more than 10% of the Palestinian gross domestic product that year and is also equivalent to total Palestinian exports that year. A further 32,000 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem worked in Israel or in Israeli enterprises in the West Bank.

Israel with its booming construction and high-tech sectors offers the best prospects for PGFTU members to get paying jobs, and for the PGFTU to acquire a sustainable inflow of union dues. Perhaps that is why the PGFTU held out against officially supporting a boycott of West Bank settlements until it was pressured to do so in late 2009. On 5 December 2010 PGFTU President Shahir Sa'ad announced that Palestinians employed in settlements will not give up their jobs until the Palestinian Authority provides alternative work. A strong relationship between the PGFTU and the Israeli Histadrut would also help train Palestinian unionists to push for better wages and conditions and OHS protections for their members.

The PGFTU leadership understands that "*a worker is a worker is a worker*" and that what's needed is practical support for efforts to build bridges between Israeli and Palestinian workers and their unions, not boycotts that drive them apart.

5. The rationale for BDS: the Israel=Apartheid myth

The idea that Israel is an “*apartheid State*” is often cited as the rationale for BDS. But the analogy with apartheid-era South Africa is easily disproven. Some 77% of Israel’s total population is Jewish. The other 23% are Palestinian Arabs, Bedouin, Druze and other groups. All of them are fully fledged citizens with the same voting rights as Jews. There are Arab members of the Israeli Parliament and Arab judges in Israeli courts (including Israel’s highest court). Jews and Arabs use the same public transport, eat in the same restaurants, get treated at the same hospitals, share the same beaches, shop at the same malls, play in the same sports teams, attend the same public schools and universities and work side by side in many occupations.

True, there is still serious discrimination against minority groups in Israel especially in employment, government spending and access to services. Discrimination exists everywhere. Just ask Aboriginal people and newly-arrived migrants in Australia, or non-white Americans or Britons of south Asian origin. But discrimination is not apartheid.

The blacks of South Africa were always South African nationals. Nobody disputed this. Theirs was never a quest for statehood. They wanted the same rights as other South Africans. The Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are not and never have been Israeli nationals. They see themselves, and are seen by others, as Palestinians, not Israelis. Their political movement seeks the establishment of a specifically Palestinian state and many of them (and not just Hamas) want it to be a specifically Arab and Muslim state.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the simplistic “goodies vs baddies” contest some people try to make it out to be. It’s about the real world struggle of two nations, each of which is determined to live in freedom, independence and security. It is one of history’s ironies that each needs the other to fully attain those goals.

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