



The Drum on ABC News 24

8 APRIL 2011

It's democracy stupid

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If the resistance is armed, it is terrorism. If the resistance is unarmed, it is extremism. If the resistance is verbal, it is anti-Semitism. And if the resistance is crushed, it is colonialism.

Attempts to redress Palestinian human rights have been check-mated with a litany of labels that are aimed to invalidate their every move.

It is ironic that the Greens candidates who dared to take a moral and non-violent stand against the Israeli occupation have copped the wrath of those who carry the political whips. Labels such as extremist, anti-Semitic and Nazi have been used as an emotional weapon to deride the lunatic left and mask many sobering facts. The antidote to a perceived vilification of Zionists appears to be to the vilification of the individual.

With swastikas and loaded labels smeared onto the Greens candidates, the individuals are placed in a defensive position where they are permanently tattooed as guilty – defeated Greens candidate for Marrickville Fiona Byrne, successful candidate for Balmain Jamie Parker, and Senator elect Lee Rhiannon.

It is a profound price to pay and a powerful tactic to silence future critics of Israel or supporters of the global Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) campaign.

On cue, the major parties promptly paid their dues to Israel. Tony Abbott stated that “the Coalition completely rejects any campaign designed to weaken Israel...I call on the Prime Minister to pull her alliance partner into line”. He referred to the BDS as “nonsense”.

Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd said his government “did not condone nor support any boycotts or sanctions against the Jewish state”.

Opposition Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Julie Bishop referred to Lee Rhiannon’s pro-BDS comments as “extreme”, “highly prejudicial” and “deeply troubling”. This should come as no surprise given that Ms Bishop attended the Kevin Rudd-led delegation of 17 parliamentarians to the Australia Israel Leadership forum last December.

Trade Minister Craig Emerson referred to BDS as a “disgusting policy” and praised the Marrickville voters for rejecting this “Greens extremism”. The applause from Israel was almost audible from Australia.

If any of these whip crackers bothered to research the facts about the BDS, they would struggle to find any extremism. The BDS campaign was founded in 2005, one year after the International Court of Justice found that Israel’s wall, built on occupied Palestinian territory, to be illegal. Contrary to the scaremongering of its critics that compares the BDS campaign with Nazi propaganda, the Palestinian Civil Society BDS founder Omar Barghouti articulates the genesis and inspiration.

“We the representatives of Palestinian civil society call upon international civil society organisations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era... We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this call for the sake of justice and genuine peace.”

Anchored in international law and universal human rights, the BDS campaign has three stated goals: ending the occupation including the dismantling of the wall; equal rights to Palestinian citizens of Israel; the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes as per UN resolution 194. The movement categorically rejects all form of racism including anti-Semitism, and has attracted support from Jewish civil groups both within Israel and in the Diaspora.

Where exactly is the extremism with this vision that is “rooted in a century-old history of civil, non-violent resistance against settler colonialism, occupation and ethnic cleansing”? The extremism is more likely to be found in the anti-BDS propaganda, comparing this unarmed resistance to the Nazi boycott of Jews in 1930’s, whereby “dehumanizing them... is a vital step on the way to genocide”.

Australia’s bipartisan loyalty to Israel is apparently in question when the Greens gain the balance of power in the Senate in three months. Is this because the major parties need to save face with Israel or Australia? Over 100 Australian leaders have ‘graduated’ from the Rambam Israel Fellowship, including Julia Gillard, Kevin Rudd, Alexander Downer and Bill Shorten. The six day program is engineered by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. By their own admission, the Rambam organisers have declared that “for the money we invest in, you can’t ask for better results”.

The latest vilification of the BDS campaign is yet another example of a return on this investment.

Ironically, Ms Gillard has declared that “we are ready to support sanctions against Iran if it does not comply with the obligations placed on it by the international community”. But Israel will remain exempt from that same moral principle.

The BDS was borne out of frustration, where armed resistances and two Intifadas have failed to produce peace. The verbal resistance via successive negotiations and ‘road maps’ also failed. Hence, the BDS attempts to do what governments have failed to do. The most recent example of a non-violent and civil campaign took place across Israel’s border on 30 January, where the Egyptian Third Army deliberately and collectively disobeyed their president’s orders to crush the demonstrators in Tahrir Square. The momentum inspired a domino effect across the region.

If indeed the Greens senators cause a rethink of the Middle East foreign policy, this is not daunting. This is democracy. It may indeed



be a logical extension of a Roy Morgan national poll in June 2009 which found that 42 per cent of Australians found Israel's actions in Gaza 'not justified', compared with 29 per cent who found them 'justified'.

In our democracy, our politicians should shape our foreign policy based on our population and our national interests, not based on lubricated lobbying and 'behind the scenes' engineering.




Joseph Wakim is founder of Australian Arabic Council

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





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