

No Surrender to Israel's Bullying. False Accusations of Anti-semitism

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Global Research, May 14, 2016

[Al-Ahram Weekly](#) 12 May 2016

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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Those in the comfort zone of the West should not give in to false accusations of anti-Semitism

There comes a time in a movement's struggle when success is both a rewarding moment but also a very dangerous one. The apartheid regime in South Africa pursued its most vicious and lethal policies shortly before the fall of that regime. If you do not threaten an unjust regime or state and its supporters, it will ignore you and will see no need to confront you. If you hit the nail on the head, the reaction will come.

This is what has happened to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement. This movement is the logical extension of the great work done by all the solidarity groups and committees working with Palestine.

It displays unwavering support for the Palestinian people through direct contact with authentic representatives of Palestinian communities inside and outside Palestine. Until recently, Israel deemed the BDS Movement as marginal and ineffective, and even some of Palestine's friends in the West objected to BDS on the same grounds of its ineffectiveness.

Well, it seems the movement is now more effective than even its founders hoped for. This is not surprising as it represents a new *zeitgeist* in politics, as was manifested in the young electorate who voted for Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the opposition Labour Party in the UK and for Bernie Sanders, a possible Democratic Party candidate in the forthcoming US presidential elections.

The desire for a cleaner, more moral politics that dares to challenge the neo-liberal set up of the economy and politics in the West brought these young people's support for, ironically, two old gentlemen representing a purer form of politics.

Among the followers of this purer politics one can find firm support for the Palestinian people. The only way today to show support outside Palestine for the Palestinians is through the BDS Movement. In the UK, this logic is understood by those who voted for Corbyn and by those who are active elsewhere on behalf of causes such as social justice, ecological protection and human and indigenous people's rights.

Members of the political elites in senior positions are voicing their clear and unashamed support for Palestine. When did you hear such support from the leader of the opposition in Britain and a presidential candidate in the US? Even if the latter's support is feeble, in the context of American politics any candidate who can afford not to go to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and find that the sky does not fall in is part of a revolution.

This is the background for the current vicious attack on the Labour Party and Corbyn in the UK. What the Zionists in Britain point to as expressions of anti-Semitism (in the main, legitimate criticisms of Israel) have been said before over the last 50 years. The pro-Zionist lobby in Britain under direct guidance from Israel picks them because the clear anti-Zionist stance of the BDS Movement has now reached the upper echelons of power. This lobby is genuinely terrified by this development.

The reaction, one has to admit, has been powerful and vicious. However, succumbing to it by suspending party members, firing student leaders, and unnecessarily apologising for crimes that have not been committed is not the right way to confront it. We are in a struggle for a free and democratic Palestine and Israel, and fear of Zionist intimidation is not the way forward.

The coming period will be very tough, and we need to be patient and go back to the podium, the website, the radio and television network and re-explain what for many of us is obvious: Zionism is not Judaism, and anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism.

Zionism was not the antidote for Europe's worst chapter of anti-Semitism during the Holocaust. Zionism was the wrong answer to that atrocity. In fact, when European leaders lent without hesitation their support for Zionism their motives in many cases were anti-Semitic.

How else can one explain a Europe that stood by when the Nazi regime in Germany committed genocide against the Jews and asked for forgiveness by supporting a plan to get rid of the Jews by despatching them to colonise Palestine? No wonder this absurd logic did not kill the anti-Semitic impulse, but rather kept it alive.

However, these things are bygones. Jewish settlers and native Palestinians share the same land and will do so in the future. The best way to fight anti-Semitism today is to turn this land into a free democratic state that is based as much as possible on just and equitable economic, social and political principles. This will be a complex, painful transformation of the present reality on the ground, and it may take decades to implement. But it is urgent to begin talking about it clearly without fear and unnecessary apologetics or false references to *realpolitik*.

Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party leader in the UK, may find it difficult to educate his party of the need to adopt honest and moral language about Palestine, and he has already done so much for the cause that we have to be patient even if some of his and his party's reactions have been disappointing. However, this is not the issue.

What lies ahead is far more important than the domestic political scene in Britain. What really matters is to recognise that in Britain, as well as in the US, a new stage has begun in the struggle for peace, justice and reconciliation in Palestine. This is not a struggle that replaces the one on the ground, but it is the one that enhances and empowers it.

What we are facing is a cluster of struggles: against legislators who are either intimidated or bribed by Israel; against judges and policemen who are forced to abide by unjust and ridiculous laws that will condemn the BDS Movement as anti-Semitic; against university managements that will cower in the face of intimidation and pressure; and against newspapers and broadcasting companies that will violate their ethical codes and betray their professional commitments in the face of the new attacks.

The struggle on the ground in Palestine is far more difficult and far more dangerous, and it demands heavy sacrifices that none of us is asked to bear in the West. The least we can do is not be intimidated by absurd accusations and feel secure that at this time the struggle against Islamophobia and the evils of neo-liberalism and for the rights of indigenous peoples around the world and for Palestine is the same struggle.

This is not only a campaign of Muslims in Britain, Palestinian exiles in Europe, old leftists in America and anti-Zionists in Israel. It is part of a much larger movement of change that has brought new parties to power in Greece, Spain and Portugal, new values into the UK Labour Party, and different voices into the Democratic Party in America.

We should not be worried by the proposed legislation in the UK, the new police guidelines, or the media hysteria. Even the cowardly behaviour by the Labour Party in its recent purge of local councillors should not detract us from our achievements in the struggle for the public's heart and mind on the question of Palestine.

Perspective is essential. If Israel believes it can choose Mark Regev as its ambassador to London, the public face of its criminal policy in Gaza, and get away with it, and if the Israeli ambassador in Washington decides to fight against the BDS Movement by sending products from the Occupied West Bank to every senator on Capitol Hill in strict violation of American laws, these are not proofs that Israel is invincible but rather that it has an imbecilic political system that fails to understand where history is taking us.

Like any phobia, Palestinophobia can intimidate and paralyse, but it can also be successfully defeated, especially in this unique period we live in. Those of us who live in the comfort zone of the West should not cower and should not give in to false accusations of anti-Semitism by Anglo-Zionists, timid politicians and cynical journalists. It is time to fight back in the courts, in the squares, in parliament and in the media.

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