

Inner city boycotters posture while Palestinians pay

Yair Miller | The Australian Jewish News | 28 January 2011

Early in December, the NSW Greens passed a resolution calling upon *“all Australians and the Australian government to boycott Israeli goods, trading and military arrangements, and sporting, cultural and academic events”*. This, it was said, would help end Israel’s *“occupation and colonisation of Palestinian territory”* and its *“system of apartheid”*.

Representatives of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies have challenged the NSW Greens, privately and publicly, over the resolution’s ill-considered analogies with colonialism and apartheid, and the absence of a defensible moral basis for such a boycott, but the NSW Greens have been unable to produce a coherent response. The analogies are historically unsustainable and intellectually dishonest. They are an insult to those who experienced and suffered real colonialism and apartheid first hand. And what the NSW Greens called for is not supported even by the Palestinian Authority itself.

The NSW Greens have been conspicuously coy about their resolution. It did not raise a blip in the mainstream media and the text cannot be found on their website. The Greens’ Federal body rejected a similar resolution in March 2010.

Also in December, Marrickville Council, a stronghold of the NSW Greens, called for a boycott of organisations or companies that support or profit from *“the Israeli military occupation of Palestine”*. The resolution is silent about which specific territories are considered to be parts of *“Palestine”* under *“Israeli military occupation”* leaving open the possibility that, like Hamas, it regards the entire territory of the State of Israel as *“occupied Palestine”*. It seems that the Council, like the NSW Greens, is more interested in posturing to its well heeled *“progressive”* inner city constituency than in troubling itself with bothersome detail.

But the real agenda being served by the NSW Greens and Marrickville Council is anything but progressive. By these actions, they have subscribed to the global campaign of Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, which is not about Israel’s policies or *“military occupation”* at all. BDS openly seeks to bring about the end of Israel itself or, in the words of BDS leader, Omar Barghouti, to establish *“a Palestine next to a Palestine, rather than a Palestine next to an Israel”*.

How progressive is it to join forces with a campaign aimed at destroying an established member State of the UN in violation of international law and UN resolutions? Or to seek to dismantle the only democracy in the Middle East and to have it possibly replaced by an Islamist theocratic dictatorship? Or to remove the only society in the Middle East with free trade unions, in which women do not live in feudal subjection, and in which gay couples can live openly without forfeiting their lives?

It is easy for some people in Australia, half a world away from the Middle East, to call for a boycott, which in reality won’t require them to make any personal sacrifices. Instead, they can comfortably take refuge in simplistic slogans and distorted accounts of history that omit all the gritty realities that don’t fit their narrative.

It's the Palestinians themselves who will have to pay the price – in lost jobs and declining living standards - for the crusading zeal of their western armchair “champions”.

More than 35,000 Palestinians are employed in the West Bank. Payments by Israeli employers to Palestinian workers came to a total of \$649 million in 2008, which was more than 10% of the Palestinian gross domestic product that year and equivalent also to total Palestinian exports that year.

A successful boycott would thus destroy the economic basis for a future Palestinian state. Even the Palestinian Authority has recently heavily qualified its previous call for Palestinians to cease employment in the settlements.

The NSW Greens, Marrickville Council and those parts of some unions supporting BDS in NSW can be far more constructive, and their members and rate payers better served, by supporting on the ground joint projects leading to further engagement and Palestinian nation building. Disengagement and denying legitimacy do nothing to help the Palestinians or the Israelis.

The BDS campaign has required the Board in NSW, the ECAJ in Australia, and the World Jewish Congress globally, to engage with sectors of society with which we have previously had scant contact, and to work more closely with faith groups, unionists and others who share our concern to promote peaceful co-existence between Israel and a future Palestinian state. That is necessary for the sake of Israel, the Jewish people and the Palestinians.

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