

## **ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE**

Dr. James P. Eckman, President Emeritus  
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska  
July 9, 2016

### ***Israel, “Progressive” Politics and Growing Anti-Semitism***

As I have reported in past editions of *Issues*, Israel faces the ongoing absurdity of the BDS movement—the efforts by western governments and individual citizens to “boycott, divest and sanction” (BDS) Israel. At the end of 2015, the European Union (EU) adopted rules that wine coming from Israel, some of which is produced in the West Bank, must be labeled “Product of the West Bank (Israeli settlement).” This effort to boycott or sanction Israel for its policies in the West Bank has been growing in the EU, which exports heavily from Israel. This labeling rule extends not only to wine but also to fresh fruit, vegetables, honey, olive oil, eggs, poultry, organic products and cosmetics coming from Israeli-owned businesses and farms outside the original borders of Israel. There are about 1,000 Israeli companies operating in more than a dozen industrial zones in West Bank settlements and roughly 23,000 acres of Jewish farms. The Golan Heights has many wineries, with a reputation for producing some of the world’s best wines. A final example of the BDS movement is recent events at Vassar College in upstate New York. For example, in 2014, students boycotted a course in the International Studies Program because it involved a trip to Israel. During the fall of 2015, attempts were made to boycott Sabra hummus, a popular food that is produced by a partly owned Israeli company. On 3 February 2016, Jasbir Puar, Rutgers associate professor of women’s and gender studies, gave an address at Vassar in which she exhorted Vassar students to support a boycott of Israel as a part of “armed resistance.” She passed on lies that Israel had “mined for organs for scientific research” from dead Palestinians and accused Israelis of attempting to give Palestinians the “bare minimum for survival” as part of a medical “experiment.” She spoke of Jews deliberately starving Palestinians, “stunting” and “maiming” a population. That such a lecture could occur at a prestigious institution illustrates the ridiculous level to which the BDS movement has sunk!

However, there are several additional examples of how the BDS movement is impacting American politics. Bernie Sanders has lost the nomination as the Democratic presidential candidate to Hillary Clinton, but, his success in the primaries has earned him to right to name several individuals to the Party’s platform-drafting committee. Sanders has named James Zogby of the Arab-American Institute and professor Cornel West to this committee. His goal was to have individuals who could push for a more “even-handed” position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But in 2014, West declared, “Let us not be deceived. The Israeli massacre of innocent Palestinians, especially the precious children, is a crime against humanity! The rockets of Hamas indeed are morally wrong and politically ineffective—but these crimes pale in the face of the US supported Israeli slaughter of innocent civilians.” West has also called Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu a war criminal and openly supports the BDS movement as an important attempt to ostracize and delegitimize Israel. West argues that Israel in the West Bank is an occupying army that engages in unconscionable oppression and that until Israel

abandons it, Israel should be treated like apartheid South Africa—“anathematized, cut off, made to bleed morally and economically.” Zogby, a longtime pro-Palestinian activist, has heartily endorsed the BDS movement as “a legitimate and moral response to Israeli policy.” Both of these men have argued that they are committed to “upend what they see as the party’s lopsided support of Israel.” They seek to “bend the Democratic platform to encourage such diminishment unless Israel redeems itself by liberating Palestine.”

But the position of West and Zogby is morally perverse. As columnist Charles Krauthammer observes, Israel did follow such counsel in 2005 when it terminated its occupation of Gaza, giving it solely to the Palestinians, who subsequently gave control of Gaza to Hamas, a terrorist organization bent on Israel’s destruction. Why must Israel be forced to do the same thing with the West Bank, exposing Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ben Gurion International airport to Hamas rockets? Further, as the *Wall Street Journal* argues editorially, “These views go well beyond the usual bounds of fair criticism of Israel. No other country—including a genuine occupier like China in Tibet—is being singled out for boycott the way Israel is. The suggestion that Israel deliberately ‘massacres’ innocent Palestinians is false based on everything we know about Israel’s military restraint and war practices. If Palestinians wanted to end Israel’s occupation, they could have taken the deal offered to them at Camp David in 2000 when Bill Clinton was president.”

Consider one final point about the anti-Semitic prejudice often at the center of progressive politics, even in Europe. In 2014, Naseem Shad, a Labour member of the British Parliament, shared on her Facebook page the suggestion that all Israelis should be “relocated” to the United States, arguing that the “transportation costs” of this action would be less than “three years of defense spending.” Former Labour mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, has argued that “a real anti-Semite doesn’t just hate the Jews in Israel,” for even Hitler was a Zionist “before he went mad.” Livingstone also praised an Egyptian cleric who called the Holocaust “divine punishment.” Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, maintains that it is “very easy to hate; it is very difficult to justify hate. Anti-Semitism’s permutations adapt it to changing needs for justification.” In the Middle Ages, Sacks argues, Jews were hated for their religion. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, they were hated for their race. Now they are hated for their nation. “The new anti-Semitism can always say it is not the old anti-Semitism.”

“Progressive” politicians, whether in the Democratic Party in the US or in the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, in their criticism of Israel and in their advocacy of public policy, are skating very closely to the edge of anti-Semitism. This is not only grossly unfair; it holds Israel to a standard required of no other nation and it is potentially very dangerous.

See *Issues in Perspective* (19 March 2016); George Will in the *Washington Post* (10 June 2016); *Wall Street Journal* editorial (28-29 May 2016); and Charles Krauthammer in the *Washington Post* (2 June 2016).