

A still, small leftwing voice against BDS

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As members of the General Assembly of the Jewish Federations of North America gather for their annual meeting in Jerusalem, the threat posed by anti-Israel demonization and political warfare is a central concern. In the US and Canada, this threat remains confined to university campuses, some labor unions, and hostile church groups, but the hatred of Israel is gaining ground among the Left, including among a small but vocal group of radical Jews. To combat and defeat this threat, it is necessary to engage with the rational Left — the students and others who are most vulnerable to the moral language and symbols of campaigns that single out and target Israel.

Ameinu, a Jewish organization that supports “progressive causes in Israel”, has taken a refreshing and long-overdue step in naming, shaming and pushing back against these hard-core anti-Zionists. In a publication entitled “The Third Narrative: Progressive Answers to the Far Left’s Critiques of Israel”, Ameinu condemns the “relentless barrage of accusations against Israel on the web, on campus and in other settings”.

This notably harsh language is fully justified. For many years, liberal values and moral causes have been exploited for immoral political warfare against Israel, including boycott campaigns and false accusations of “apartheid”. Fundamental principles such as human rights, peace, and democracy are cynically abused in distinctly anti-progressive and anti-liberal attacks that demonize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

Ameinu’s counter-offensive is particularly important for Jewish students who are naturally sympathetic to the language and appeal of social justice, but have little knowledge of the history and facts, and are easily brainwashed. Many well-intentioned liberals are taken in by a well-financed network of self-proclaimed human rights groups obsessed with hatred of Israel, and by marginal individuals who misappropriate the Jewish framework of “tikkun olam” (repairing the world). The discredited Goldstone report, published in 2009, whose false claims caused major damage, demonstrated the destructive influence of this network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The radical anti-Zionist Left also promotes what is euphemistically referred to as a “bi-national solution”, and invents legal arguments, such as a “right of return” for millions of Palestinian who claim refugee status. Both concepts have no substantive foundation, and are the equivalent of wiping Israel off the map.

This political warfare goes far beyond criticism of occupation and settlements, and debates on Israel’s policies on the complexities of borders, Palestinian terrorism, and security. In launching their campaign to counter the radical Left, Ameinu’s leaders recognize that the use of terms like apartheid, accompanied by systematic discrimination against the Jewish homeland, and boycott campaigns (BDS) are designed to roll back the clock to 1948 and delegitimize Israel, regardless of borders. As many Israelis have long known, this means that even with a peace agreement, the hatred and mass terror would continue, nullifying benefits from concessions required for a two-state solution.

In what they call “The Third Narrative initiative”, Ameinu seeks “to engage people on the left who appreciate informed and passionate objections to Israeli policies and behavior....but also suspect that it is wrong to lay all blame for the conflict at the feet of Israelis.” On this basis, they are providing tools “to combat unfair or inaccurate attacks on Israel.”

This is an agenda that goes beyond the simple- minded ideological barriers that have been created within the Zionist movement, and highly destructive attacks from the left on the right, and visa versa. Internal ideological warfare, which is also (and in some cases, primarily) a power struggle involving individuals seeking to expand their own importance, has severely impeded the counter- attack against demonization. Instead of cooperating against a common threat, officials from other “progressive” organizations claiming to “love Israel” have been silent in the face of loathing, hatred and intolerance.

While repeating the slogans of human rights, these organizations do not organize protests in front of United Nations meetings that ignore Syrian war crimes, and instead continue to promote blood libels against Israel. In contrast, Ameinu has joined other groups in fighting the exhaustive battles over “Israel apartheid week” on campus, BDS (boycotts, divestment and sanctions) and other ugly expressions of modern antisemitism.

In its initiative, Ameinu asks “Do you know a student who could use our support when confronted with charges of ‘Israel is an Apartheid state’ or that ‘Israel has committed ethnic cleansing?’ Do you have neighbors or coworkers asking difficult questions about the Israeli- Palestinian conflict?” The same questions are asked by Zionists on the right, as well as the majority of rational centrists – on this issue, there are no political divisions.

If the more powerful groups on the Jewish Left would follow this lead and act on their own liberal principles, these attacks could be defeated. For the many organizations and constituencies that are represented at the meeting of the Jewish Federations of North America, many of which define themselves as progressives, this is a central challenge.

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