

BDS AND THE PURIM STORY: DISTURBING PARALLELS



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The Purim Megillah, with its many tragi-comic twists and turns, keeps us entertained every year, while today's headlines remind us that the plotline is far from unique.

Mordechai, Esther and Achashverosh, the buffoon king, are (somewhat) exaggerated, but it seems that every generation has its Haman characters – including anti-Semites filled with hate, dedicated to attacking the Jewish People.

Today's version is known as BDS – the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement – whose leaders have the same goals as Haman. BDS is no laughing matter, but it has plenty of jokers – for example, Omar Barghouti, a perpetual student at Tel Aviv University masquerading as the “Palestinian” face of the boycott movement, and Ali Abunimah, the ranting head of an organization that calls itself *Electronic Intifada*, who spreads myths of Palestinian victimization from the comfort of Chicago.

Like Haman and his gang in the Purim story, the leaders of BDS warfare had a run of successes, but appear to be losing momentum and may be headed, if not to the gallows, at least to the dustbin of history.

In Britain, where hatred of Israel and Jews flourishes, the government recently prohibited the boycott of Israeli products and firms by any public body, citing anti-discrimination laws. The Paris municipality confirmed a parallel policy, while in Spain, which has spawned a number of radical anti-Israel hate groups, the city of Aviles backed down from a boycott after facing legal action.

In the United States, a number of states have passed legislation prohibiting boycotts of Israel, and Congress included an anti-BDS clause in important trade legislation, instructing negotiators to give high priority to this issue in talks with the European Union.

The EU has singled out Israel by requiring the special labelling of products from “occupied territories” – which is a preliminary form of BDS, designed to pave the way for boycotts of Israeli banks and other institutions. Going further, Congress is debating the Combating BDS Act of 2016, which would reinforce the power of state and local governments to “identify and divest from entities engaged in BDS activities against Israel.”

In a similar spirit, the Canadian House of Commons’ voted 229-51 in favour of a strong resolution calling on the government to denounce and condemn the BDS movement, which, as a columnist noted “has become such high fashion among the anti-Israel crowd in Canada.” The resolution, which was introduced by the Conservative opposition, was supported by the governing Liberals (the NDP voted against it).

And on a number of university campuses, there are signs that tolerance for BDS hate and the wider demonization of Israel is thinning out. Recently, McGill University students rejected a BDS resolution in an online vote involving thousands of students. In contrast to the resolutions steered by marginal radicals, led by Arab and Muslim activists with a thin veneer of fringe Jews, when the general student population is involved, they reject this immoral form of warfare.

Some of the inadvertent funders are also clamping down: a major law firm that gave student groups at the Harvard Law School a \$1-million donation changed course after learning that some of the money went to promote campaigns that single out Israel.

These successes are impressive, but they don’t mean the threat has passed or that the BDS war has been defeated and we can celebrate another victory of good over evil, as in the Purim saga. The BDS money continues to flow, and as some government funders in Europe close the taps, others – particularly the trustees of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in New York – are

playing the role of Achashverosh in affixing their seals to absurd decrees (in the form of grant requests from BDS groups).

We are at best half-way through the Megillah, after Mordechai realizes that the Jews are in danger, but before Esther succeeds in destroying Haman, winning over the king, and saving the day.