

CUPE's Israeli boycott: 'historic' or a 'death warrant'

[June 13, 2006 05:28 PM]

National Post

Thu 01 Jun 2006

Page: A21

Section: Letters

Byline: Khaled Mouammar

Source: National Post

As a Palestinian-Canadian whose family became refugees when the State of Israel was created in 1948, I applaud the courageous and principled stand taken by CUPE Ontario at its recent convention, for passing Resolution 50 in support of the global campaign against Israeli apartheid.

The resolution expresses CUPE Ontario's support for the international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions until Israel meets its obligations to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, including their right to return to their homeland.

I recognize that this has not been an easy decision for CUPE Ontario and that the union will face the extreme pressure put upon the union by outside forces, including the Israeli government and the organized Israel lobby.

The vote is a historic step forward both in expressing Canadian unions' solidarity with the Palestinian people and also in helping persuade the Canadian government that it is time to cease silent complicity with the illegal acts of the Israeli state and to stand up for peace and justice in Palestine.

Khaled Mouammar, Richmond Hill, Ont.

Move would not lessen Israel

[June 13, 2006 05:23 PM]

The Toronto Star

Tue 06 Jun 2006

Page: A23

Section: Letter

Do CUPE leaders have right to call for boycott of Israel?

Opinion, June 4.

In her article, Linda McQuaig addresses a subject rarely spoken of in mainstream North American media - the plight of the millions of Palestinian refugees and the inherent injustice of the Israeli treatment of these refugees. As a Palestinian refugee, I was born "stateless" and felt, for much of my life, as though I was a non-entity. When I moved to Canada as a child, eventually becoming a Canadian citizen, I realized for the first time what it meant to have a real passport, to be able to travel freely without threat of harassment or imprisonment. I also finally gained the right to visit my homeland of Palestine as a Canadian citizen, a right I had been denied as a Palestinian refugee.

I am not opposed to the idea of Israel as a state. Nor am I opposed to the idea of Israeli Jews and Palestinians living peacefully and equally side by side. However, I am opposed to the discrimination and injustice perpetrated against the Palestinian people. Granting Palestinians the right to return to their homes, as well as the right to live with dignity - equal to their Jewish counterparts - would not lessen the state of Israel. It may take away from it the fact that it is a Jewish state but, as McQuaig mentions in her article, what is wrong with a state that is pluralistic and inclusionary?

Eman Loubani, Halifax, N.S

Observed bullying of Palestinians

[June 13, 2006 05:17 PM]

The Toronto Star

Sat 03 Jun 2006

Page: F7

Section: National Report

CUPE wrong to boycott Israel

Letter, June 1.

I led a group of 10 Torontonians on an independent fact-finding trip that ended May 6. Most were from the United Church, one is a Jewish activist. We visited more than two dozen Palestinian and Israeli organizations in the 16 days we spent in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. We had excellent Palestinian guides and were privileged to experience in a small way the oppression they are faced with.

While I'm sure that Rabbi Aaron Flanzraich has travelled to Israel, I assume he has not been forced onto the treacherous roads that those living under occupation are forced to use.

I assume he has not been humiliated at checkpoints and turned back. One of our trips took about seven hours (about five too many) as a result of being rejected at checkpoints, facing concrete road barriers and taking the terrifying roads Palestinians must use.

Hamas has held to its unilateral ceasefire for almost a year and a half in the face of this constant goading, and with Israel claiming that its illegal wall has brought it "peace." We heard the nightly shooting at Nablus, saw the apocalyptic landscape and malnourished children of Gaza and witnessed the intimidation and humiliation dished out to Palestinians in virtually every aspect of their lives.

Flanzraich's description of "tiny" Israel, with the fourth most powerful military in the world, facing a largely unarmed and often malnourished civilian population without a functioning police force is simply laughable. Palestinian police are not even allowed to have any weapons showing if they see armed Israelis.

Flanzraich's version of reality is not beneficial to either him or the Jewish community. In fact, the Israeli treatment of Palestinians is creating anger against Jews everywhere. Israel is clearly doing everything in its power to make Palestinian lives unbearable.

The Jewish community should support the CUPE initiative to work for a just peace based on international law.

Karin Brothers, Toronto

CUPE'S Stand Brave?

[June 13, 2006 05:14 PM]

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR COLUMN

The Toronto Sun

Sat 03 Jun 2006

Page: 18

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Column: Letters to the Editor

CUPE'S Stand Brave?

Re "Protesting against Israeli apartheid," (June 2): As a South African I want to commend CUPE Ontario for taking such a brave and principled stand in support of Palestinian human rights. It was such international solidarity that saw us relegate apartheid to the dustbin of history. I call upon all Canadians and members of CUPE to support the struggle for self-determination for Palestinians, and indeed others in our fractured world.

DR. SHUAIB MANJRA

CAPE TOWN

SOUTH AFRICA

A democratic decision; This was not imposed on the membership by an autocratic leadership but voted for unanimously

[June 13, 2006 05:03 PM]

The Toronto Star

Fri 02 Jun 2006

Page: A23

Section: Letter

CUPE wrong to boycott Israel

Letter, June 1.

In the wake of CUPE Ontario's decision to support an international boycott of Israel and to support Palestinian rights, the press has been full of letters and editorials condemning the union - but for contradictory reasons. On the one hand, the union is accused of taking up "political" and "global" issues that don't represent its members' interests. On the other hand, the union is accused of "singling out" Israel when it should target other states instead. CUPE's critics can't have it both ways.

The trade union movement in Canada has a long tradition of building international solidarity for oppressed people around the world - an act not incompatible with fighting for the day-to-day interests (wages, working conditions, benefits, etc.) of its own members. Canadian unions were among the first that, amid similar controversy, supported a boycott of apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. Today, we reflect on such campaigns with pride.

Furthermore, CUPE Ontario's decision was an impressive act of democracy. Nearly 900 elected delegates - the largest convention in the union's history - participated in the discussion and debate about the boycott while many of them had already passed similar resolutions at the local level.

This was not a decision imposed on the membership by an autocratic leadership. The members themselves made an informed and democratic

decision. Just because some critics disagree with the decision, doesn't make it undemocratic.

As pressure mounts on Israel to respect international law, debates like these will continue. And so, too, will the accusations that Israel is being "singled out" from other states. The reality, however, is that Israel is being held to the same international standard that we've come to expect from countries that claim to be "democracies." Statehood means more than just status; it also means accountability and responsibility to the international community. It's time that Israel accepted this fact.

James Clark, Toronto

Stood up for rights

[June 13, 2006 05:00 PM]

The Toronto Star

Mon 05 Jun 2006

Page: A17

Section: Letter

A democratic decision

Letter, June 2.

As a CUPE member who participated in our recent Ontario convention, I was relieved to read in your paper an accurate description of what actually happened there. So far, most press reports have suggested the decision to boycott Israel was imposed on us by our leaders without any discussion among our membership. The reality is that the resolution had been served to delegates months before the convention happened, giving both supporters and opponents plenty of time to debate its merits. No one can suggest the process was undemocratic.

Furthermore, CUPE also passed an emergency resolution - which has received no coverage in the press - condemning the recent crackdown by the Egyptian government on pro-democracy activists in Cairo. CUPE Ontario hasn't "singled out" Israel; instead, we have stood up against human rights violations everywhere, whether they're perpetrated by Israel, Egypt or any other repressive government.

Ali Mallah, Vice-president, CUPE District Council, Toront

Restored balance to CUPE debate

[June 13, 2006 04:58 PM]

The Toronto Star

Mon 05 Jun 2006

Page: A17

Section: Letter

A democratic decision

Letter, June 2.

Thank you to the Toronto Star for restoring some balance to the debate about CUPE Ontario's decision to support a boycott of Israel.

I am a Jewish member of CUPE who was unable to attend this year's conference but who, nevertheless, supports the resolution that defends Palestinian human rights. I have been offended by all those critics of CUPE's decision who claim to speak for all Jews, as if our community acts and thinks as some kind of monolithic bloc.

I have also been offended by the claims that CUPE has no right to engage in international solidarity, a long-standing tradition that has provided real support for oppressed people all over the world, Jews and non-Jews alike. It is refreshing to read in your paper other Jewish perspectives that actually reflect my own experience.

Alex Kerner, Toronto

CUPE deserves praise for its stance on Israel

[June 13, 2006 04:51 PM]

The Ottawa Citizen

Mon 05 Jun 2006

Page: A11

Section: News

Page Name: Letters

Byline: Janet Desroches

Source: The Ottawa Citizen

Re: CUPE's stance disgusting, June 2.

Bravo to CUPE delegates. I don't know why people seem incensed that CUPE has taken the brave step of boycotting Israel over its brutal treatment of Palestinians.

More than 2,000 Palestinians have been killed in the conflict with Israel over the past five years. Almost one-quarter of the dead are children under 16 years old. Many Palestinians have lived in refugee camps for two generations. Israeli blockades, coupled with western boycotts, are dealing a death blow to the economy of Palestine.

I applaud CUPE for its courage.

Janet Desroches,

Ottawa

Very Canadian action

[June 13, 2006 04:46 PM]

Very Canadian action

(Globe and Mail Letters to the Editor)

REV. ROBERT ASSALY

Ottawa -- Canadians do not need extremist politicians from abroad telling us what is un-Canadian (This Boycott Call Is Un-Canadian -- June 1). Natan Sharansky, as part of Israel's most extremist government on record, successfully advocated for the most oppressive and violent measures to ensure that Palestinian statehood may never be achieved.

Canada's foreign policy requiring an end to Israel's decades of illegal and brutal occupation has not changed, reflecting Canadian values of peace, justice and democracy.

CUPE has joined hundreds of NGOs, church groups and peace groups in calling for selective divestment to achieve Palestinian rights and peace, replacing Israel's hegemonic domination.

This non-violent action to end oppression is very Canadian. It is, however, un-Sharansky, and uncharacteristic of successive Israeli governments.

Apartheid states

[June 13, 2006 04:42 PM]

Apartheid states

Globe and Mail Letters to the Editor

John Baglow

Ottawa -- Rex Murphy and others object to the use of the word "apartheid" in the recent CUPE Ontario convention motion critical of Israel (Sid Ryan's Apartheid Smear -- June 3). Why not listen to an expert on apartheid -- Nobel laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said in 2002: "I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa

CUPE boycott is right

[June 13, 2006 04:34 PM]

The Gazette (Montreal)

Sat 10 Jun 2006

Page: B6

Section: Editorial / Op-ed

Source: The Gazette

Re: "CUPE's boycott is misguided and absurd,"(Editorial May 31).

CUPE is saying and doing what most influential people and organizations are probably thinking but afraid to say.

Israel has occupied Palestine for almost as long as Israel has been in existence, with the help of the U.S. Palestinians live in refugee camps. Neither Israel nor the United States would allow their country to be occupied.

Suicide bombers are not born, they are a product of occupation.

Reginald Watson

Burlington, Vt.

Palestinians have endured years of oppression

[June 13, 2006 04:29 PM]

The Ottawa Citizen

Sun 11 Jun 2006

Page: A13

Section: News

Page Name: Letters

Byline: Shawn Smith

Source: The Ottawa Citizen

Re: CUPE Ontario supports campaign to boycott Israel, May 28.

The Israel-can-do-no-wrong crowd should get ready for more boycotts by grassroots organizations around the world and for more condemnation of that country's prolonged oppression of its native Palestinians.

As more people learn the truth about how Palestinians have been mistreated by Israeli occupation forces since June 1967, the international groundswell of indignation is bound to grow to a level that will force an end to this gross injustice, which has no parallel in modern history.

Peace-loving Canadians should be proud of the boycott resolution against Israel's apartheid policies, approved last Saturday by Ontario members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

During the largest provincial convention in CUPE history, held May 24 to 27 in Ottawa, an overwhelming majority of the 900 delegates, representing some 200,000 Canadian public-sector workers, voted to support the growing international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions until Israel meets its obligations: to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination; and to fully comply with international law, including UN Resolution 194 calling for the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

For nearly four decades, Palestinians have endured targeted killings and assassinations, aerial attacks, unprovoked incursions, arrests, property confiscations, home demolitions, destruction of civil infrastructure, border closings, forced impoverishment and the daily humiliation that comes with being classed as non-citizens, and virtually non-humans.

Israeli tanks almost daily invade West Bank cities. Israeli soldiers often arresting scores of Palestinians without charge. The already sealed-off Gaza Strip is further beaten down by a regular onslaught of Israeli missile and mortar attacks that can number in the hundreds on any given day.

The worst excess of Israeli injustice is blatantly exhibited to the entire world with the notorious "apartheid wall," built on expropriated (stolen) Palestinian lands to separate illegal for-Jews-only settlements from the towns and farms of indigenous Palestinians.

This is the ugly reality of an ugly occupation.

Only through justice can peace come to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Shawn Smith,

Ottawa



PROTESTING AGAINST ISRAELI APARTHEID; TWO VIEWS ON A UNION'S CONTROVERSIAL STAND IN MIDEAST POLITICS ...

The Toronto Sun

Fri 02 Jun 2006

Page: 25

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY SID RYAN

Last weekend, amid resolutions on health care, pensions, social services, education and matters of social justice, CUPE Ontario delegates attending our annual convention in Ottawa voted overwhelmingly to support a global campaign against Israel's apartheid-like policies until that state recognizes "the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination."

The conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories have been likened to the apartheid system in South Africa. This was the official government policy of racial segregation that divided people by the colour of their skin.

Blacks were segregated into so-called homelands, or Bantustans, with their own institutions and voting procedures.

Non-whites were forced to carry passes to travel outside the Bantustans. Checkpoints were set up to police this racist policy. Blacks living in white South Africa were treated as less than citizens and only held rights in their far-away designated "homeland." In effect, they became aliens in their own land.

As the famous Jewish South African cabinet minister, Ronnie Kasrils, who fought against the apartheid South African regime, said on a visit to Jerusalem, "Apartheid was an extension of the colonial project to dispossess people of their land. That is exactly what has happened in Israel and the occupied territories; the use of force and the law to take the land. That is what apartheid and Israel have in common."

There are two groups of Palestinians living under Israeli rule.

One group is in the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank. The others are Israeli citizens, but even so with fewer rights than Jewish citizens of Israel regarding where they can live.

Those living in the occupied territories have no Israeli citizenship, yet are subject to the military might and laws of Israel and need the permission of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to move about, thus restricting their ability to go to school, work or even get health care. Israel has allowed Israeli settlers to grab prime pieces of land and set-up settlements for Israelis only. The Palestinians are forced to use inferior quality roads that take hours longer to travel. The network

of roads combined with the labyrinth of checkpoints has carved up Palestinian communities and created long and humiliating waiting periods at the checkpoints.

The former archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, said after visiting the occupied territories, "I have seen the humiliation of Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks, suffering like us when young white police officers prevented us from moving about." Israel is now building what has been called the "apartheid wall" because it has led to the expropriation of land, expelled Palestinians from their homes and separated farmers from their livelihood. As NDP foreign affairs critic Alexa McDonough said in a letter last week to Minister Peter MacKay, it is a "685 km barrier -- deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice in July 2004 -- which annexes 8% of the West Bank and places internationalized East Jerusalem firmly within a unilaterally-drawn Israeli border by 2008."

It was this wall that spurred CUPE Ontario delegates to adopt a policy in support of an international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions. Like members of many church congregations, a large number of organizations in Quebec and the 67,000-member union of university lecturers in the United Kingdom, they are frustrated by Israel's lack of response to what has been tried through reason and law with United Nations resolutions and the International Court of Justice. The resolution submitted by several CUPE Ontario locals was designed to draw attention to the lives of ordinary innocent civilians living in horrific conditions in Palestine.

For the record, our members have also decided at a previous national convention to "call for and actively work towards an end to all acts of violence that take the lives of innocent people, whether they be Palestinian or Israeli." We continue to support a negotiated peace process based on equality -- and that means the wall must come down.

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Illustration:

* photo by Abed Omar Qusini, Reuters

* Palestinian farmers ride past a watchtower of the Israeli security barrier near the town of Qalqilya in July, 2004.

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The Toronto Star

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Section: Letter

CUPE wrong to boycott Israel

Letter, June 1.

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As pressure mounts on Israel to respect international law, debates like these will continue. And so, too, will the accusations that Israel is being "singled out" from other states. The reality, however, is that Israel is being held to the same international standard that we've come to expect from countries that claim to be "democracies." Statehood means more than just status; it also means accountability and responsibility to the international community. It's time that Israel accepted this fact.

James Clark, Toronto

CUPE's boycott of Israel

I am writing in support of CUPE Ontario's passing of resolution 50. I am a Jewish woman and am a part of a large and ever-growing community of Jews across Canada who support this resolution and who are working for justice for the Palestinian people.

It is time the media pay some attention to these other voices out here, the voices calling for an end to the grave human, civil and social rights violations perpetrated against the Palestinian people by the state of Israel.

Naomi Binder Wall, Toronto

cupe's boycott of israel

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CUPE deserves praise for its stance on Israel

The Ottawa Citizen

Mon 05 Jun 2006

Page: A11

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Page Name: Letters

Byline: Janet Desroches

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TORONTO STAR

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Alex Kerner, Toronto

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Ali Mallah, Vice-president, CUPE District Council, Toronto

Union drawing attention to Israeli injustice, argues Linda McQuaig

The Toronto Star

Sun 04 Jun 2006

Page: A16

Section: Editorial

Byline: Linda McQuaig

A CBC TV news report on the recent Israeli election vividly captured the "agony" Israelis were going through as they pondered the key election issue Israel's plans to unilaterally withdraw from the West Bank.

Entirely absent from the report was any notion that their decision also had an impact - in fact, a much bigger impact - on millions of Palestinians who live under Israeli occupation in the West Bank.

Under its "unilateral withdrawal," Israel plans to permanently annex key chunks of Palestinian land.

The tendency of North American media to render the Palestinians invisible - except as terrorists - helps explain why the Ontario wing of CUPE decided last week to champion the Palestinian cause by joining some churches and unions in an international boycott of Israel.

The CUPE boycott, unanimously endorsed by 900 delegates, is mostly an attempt to draw attention to our lopsided view of the Mideast conflict.

The most contentious aspect is CUPE's support for the "right of return" of Palestinian refugees, who have been living in camps since being driven out of their homes, some as long ago as Israel's war of independence in 1948.

The Canadian Jewish Congress argued last week that this "right of return" would spell the end of Israel as a Jewish state. This may be true. If it remained democratic, Israel might become a multi-religious and multi-ethnic state - like Canada - rather than being an exclusively Jewish state.

CUPE therefore has raised an important, routinely ignored question Do we as Canadians support Israel's policy of giving preferential rights to members of one religion? Clearly, we wouldn't pass laws like that in Canada.

But preferential rights for one religious group are central to the notion of Israel. Israel was created as a Jewish homeland.

Jews born anywhere in the world have the automatic right to become Israeli citizens - a right denied to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians refugees who were born on land that is now part of Israel. International law gives them the right to return home, but Israel refuses to let them back in.

CUPE's resolution - like one passed by the 70,000-member union of British university teachers - maintains that this amounts to discrimination similar to South African apartheid. Nelson Mandela has also made such a comparison.

Under apartheid, blacks were confined largely to "Bantustans," nominally independent areas that were, in fact, under military control. Blacks were severely restricted through myriad government rules from moving around these disconnected areas - much as Palestinians are restricted in the West Bank. Movement will become even more difficult once Israel annexes key parts of the West Bank, leaving Palestinians in isolated Bantustan-like enclaves.

Israel, which was born out of the horrors of the Holocaust, arouses our sympathy in a way that white supremacist South Africa never did. But Palestinians weren't responsible for the Holocaust.

And for the victims of discrimination - whether blacks or Palestinians - the suffering is the same.

NATIONAL POST

CUPE boss explains reasons for boycott

National Post

Sat 03 Jun 2006

Page: A21

Section: Letters

Byline: Patrick (Sid) Ryan

Source: National Post

Re: CUPE's Bigoted Agenda, Jonathan Kay, May 30.

I was sorry to read Mr. Kay's solution to my union's disagreement with official Israeli government policy -- that public sector unions should be smashed. Happily, CUPE Ontario has a more democratic outlook.

We have a history of supporting just causes at home and abroad. That is why our members, at their 2003 national convention, supported a resolution calling on the Israeli government to withdraw immediately from the occupied territories and to abide by UN Resolution 242 and 338. As well, they agreed to actively work toward an end to all acts of violence that take the lives of innocent people, whether they be Palestinian or Israeli.

But they are frustrated with a government that continues to construct a wall that was declared illegal in 2004 by the International Court of Justice. They voted to join with many church congregations, a large number of organizations in Quebec and other unions around the world to support a boycott campaign against Israel.

The resolution submitted by several CUPE Ontario locals was designed to draw attention to the lives of ordinary, innocent civilians living in horrific conditions in the area controlled by the Palestine Authority. At the same time, our union continues to support a peace process based on equality between Israelis and Palestinians and based on the implementation of United Nations resolutions and international law.

At the same convention, delegates condemned Egyptian government arrests of activists protesting disciplinary action against two judges who raised concerns about fraud in the 2005 elections there and called for guarantees of judicial independence. We also have policy on the books regarding support for union activists in China, workers in Colombia and much more.

Patrick (Sid) Ryan, president, CUPE Ontario, Toronto.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR COLUMN

The Toronto Sun

Sat 03 Jun 2006

Page: 18

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Column: Letters to the Editor

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DR. SHUAIB MANJRA

CAPE TOWN

SOUTH AFRICA

(CUPE's leaders should remember the C in their name stands for Canadian)

TORONTO STAR

Observed bullying of Palestinians

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Flanzraich's version of reality is not beneficial to either him or the Jewish community. In fact, the Israeli treatment of Palestinians is creating anger against Jews everywhere. Israel is clearly doing everything in its power to make Palestinian lives unbearable.

The Jewish community should support the CUPE initiative to work for a just peace based on international law.

Karin Brothers, Toronto

Apartheid states

JOHN BAGLOW

Ottawa -- Rex Murphy and others object to the use of the word "apartheid" in the recent CUPE Ontario convention motion critical of Israel (Sid Ryan's Apartheid Smear -- June 3). Why not listen to an expert on apartheid -- Nobel laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said in 2002: "I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa."

CUPE chief's omission

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Lu Decheng's example