



Boycott apartheid Israel

Marcus Halaby Thu, 24/06/2010 - 14:48

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Israel's siege of Gaza since June 2007, its indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza's people in December 2008 and January 2009, and now its attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla have all brought about an increased momentum in favour of the campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS).

The Swedish dockworkers' union has called a boycott of Israeli goods and ships coming to and from Israel. They have appealed to other unions to take similar initiatives, and have called for a general blockade of Israeli goods, until Palestinian rights have been recognised and the siege has been lifted. A few days later Norwegian dockers joined the boycott call.

This excellent example of workers' solidarity with the Palestinian people, taking action where it matters, and at a time when the Swedish parliament could only debate issuing the mildest (and therefore meaningless) verbal protests at Israel's piracy, and the Swedish government preferred none at all. It is an entirely appropriate response to Israel's economic blackmail of the Palestinian people, and should be publicised and followed by other unions.

Certain voices on the left oppose the idea of a boycott in principle. They object on the grounds that this is 'singling out' Israel for criticism.

This is rubbish - socialists fight for the working class to boycott all regimes that are engaged in genocide and wars of oppression against subject peoples. We called for a workers' boycott of apartheid South Africa, for workers sanctions against fascist Chile, and most recently the trade union sanctions against Sri Lanka's genocidal war against the Tamils.

The claim that Israel is being singled out is an attempt by Israel's supporters to distract attention from Israel's crimes.

We should support the Palestinians through extending the boycott launched by the Swedish dockers, pushing support for it through union branches, publicising solidarity actions and supporting the movement by teachers and unions to launch an academic boycott.

Isolating Israel, by forcing our own governments to cease their support for its oppression of the Palestinians, is one of the strongest weapons we have in forcing it to end the siege of Gaza and to abandon its most repressive measures, like its vindictive policy of house demolitions, and its periodic near-total restrictions on Palestinian freedom of movement.

Israel was founded 60 years ago by ethnic cleansing - Arabs were driven from their land so that a Jewish majority state of Israel was created in Palestine, where there had previously been an Arab majority. The only way Israel can survive as a majority Jewish state is through large-scale Jewish immigration, and laws that discriminate against non-Jews and forbid expelled Palestinians from being able to return. Underpinning all this is a racist ideology - Zionism - that wants a specifically Jewish state in Palestine and is prepared to deny Palestinian Arabs their rights in order to keep it that way.

The hold of Zionism over the Israeli-Jewish population is strong, binding them to their bosses through privileges over the Arabs and nationalist lies. So every bit of international pressure on Israelis - not just words, but actions that really affect them - which shows them that the Zionist ideology works against their own interests can be tremendously important.

The most frequently raised objection to a boycott is that this hurts 'ordinary' working class Israelis and the small and

beleaguered minority of Israeli activists who have been willing to speak out against the actions of their state. But like in South Africa in the 1980s, where it was the black workers' unions that called for international sanctions against apartheid, it is the oppressed Palestinians themselves who are calling for a boycott, to help them against the power of the Israeli state.

We should all play our part in supporting Palestinians by extending the boycott as far as possible ? by pushing it through our union branches, publicising the solidarity actions by Swedish and Norwegian dockers and supporting the movement by teachers and unions to launch an academic boycott of Israel.

In every workplace and every industry, in every school and college, workers and students should get together and form groups to push active solidarity with the Palestinians and active support for the boycott.

Where unions do not officially back the boycott, activists should take action unofficially if necessary and appeal to the broader movement for support.

Action like the Swedish dockers' shows what can be done when workers show solidarity across borders. It is like a beacon of hope for the future, because it highlights the possibility of creating a really international working class movement able to come to the support of people in each country when they need it.

In a world where capital is international while workers are divided, this active internationalism is the key to building a successful fightback not just against the oppression of subject peoples like the Palestinians, but against imperialist war and occupation, and against the worldwide attempt of capitalists to make workers pay for the crisis.

That's why the fight for a workers' boycott of Israel is part of the fight for a new internationalism.

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