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Israel is an Apartheid State And that is why they are losing Legitimacy

by Judy Rebick

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Before [Israeli Apartheid Week](#) (IAW) even began members of the Ontario Legislature and the Canadian Parliament are falling all over each other to denounce it. I can't remember another time when elected legislators formally denounced a student activity like this. Perhaps during the 1950s when McCarthyism was rampant but that was before my time.

Last week the Ontario Legislature unanimously passed a resolution denouncing Israel Apartheid Week submitted by PC Peter Shure who said calling Israel an apartheid state was "close to hate speech." While there were only 30 MPPs in the Legislature at the time, NDP MPP Cheri di Novo was one of them and spoke in favour of the resolution. This week a Conservative MP is introducing a resolution calling IAW anti-Semitic.

Before I deal with why these unprecedented attacks are taking place, I'd like to share with you a great talk I heard last night at Ryerson from Na'eem Jeena ([view video below](#)), a leading activist and academic from South Africa who works for Palestinian solidarity. He told us that South African apartheid had three pillars of apartheid and Israel shares all three.

1. **Different rights for different races.** In the case of Israel, it is different rights for Jews and for non-Jews. For example the law of return of 1950 says Jews can return to Israel

and be given citizenship even if they have no links to the country other than mythical biblical ones; whereas Palestinians cannot return even if their parents or grandparents lived there.

2. Separation of so-called racial groups into different geographical areas. Even within the borders of Israel, 93 percent of land is reserved as a national land trust or Jewish National Fund land is for the exclusive use of Jews. The 20 percent of the population that is Palestinians living in Israel have to share access to the 7 percent of private land that is left. The Israeli Supreme Court has made a number of decisions that Palestinians cannot live on Jewish lands. There are not only residential areas that are banned to Palestinians but there are separate roads for Jews and Palestinians. That was never true in South Africa even in times of crisis. Moreover Palestinians have less access to water than Jews living nearby.

Finally the movement of Palestinians is severely restricted much more so than were blacks in South Africa. The famous pass laws in South Africa meant that blacks had to show government issued passes to move around but Palestinians are even more restricted by walls and checkpoints and if they live in the Gaza Strip can't leave at all.

3. Security and Repression Matrix of Laws and Security. There was serious repression in the black townships but there were never tanks or planes buzzing overhead like there is in West Bank. Israeli military violence against Palestinian communities, says Jeena, is far worse than anything suffered by blacks in South Africa during apartheid.

If Israel is becoming a pariah in the world it is not because of anti-Semitism, it is because they are practicing a form of apartheid even more egregious than that practiced in South Africa. Others have [compiled comments](#) from some of the most respected leaders of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa who see what Israel is doing as apartheid. There is a reason why the [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions](#) (BDS) campaign is strongest in South Africa. People there recognize apartheid when they see it.

Finally the UN Convention on Apartheid condemns the crime of apartheid that refers to a series of inhuman acts – including murder, torture, arbitrary arrest, illegal imprisonment, exploitation, marginalization, and persecution – committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining the domination of one racial group by another. If the shoe fits.

So why are politicians including some from the NDP setting a student activity like IAW in their sites? An all party coalition of parliamentarians has been holding hearings on what they call the “new anti-Semitism,” by which they mean criticism of Israel. They heard from every University President who appeared before them that there is no rise of anti-Semitism on their campuses and yet the false rumours of such a rise persist because of the equation of criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Israel is beginning to see that the non-violent anti-apartheid and BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement is a greater threat to their power than the any military threat. In Israel and Palestine, they are moving to arrest non-violent activists who are leading the movement there. And they are

using all their economic and political power to push friendly governments to move against these protests. But there is a problem. It's called democracy and freedom of speech. However much you might disagree that Israel practices apartheid, you cannot shut down a discussion of the issue or a demonstration or disinvestment campaign against Israel because freedom of speech is a fundamental democratic right in most Western countries. In Canada, the only way to shut down the movement is to vilify it as hateful or anti-Semitic. That is what our parliamentarians are now trying to do.

I am Jewish and have been working on and off for Palestinian rights for many years, as have many other Jews who feel a special responsibility to speak out against injustices committed by Israel. During that time, I have rarely experienced any anti-Semitism. In the IAW organizing, I have experienced none. If Israel is losing legitimacy in the world, it is because of what their government is doing to the Palestinians, not because of anti-Semitism. This attempt to shut down criticism of Israel is the most frightening assault on freedom of speech I have ever seen in this country. Whether or not you think Israeli Apartheid Week is the best name for this week of discussion supporting Palestinian rights, please write your MP and your MPP and tell them you think it is wrong for Parliamentarians to denounce this kind of educational activity. •