

BDS campaign wants Israel to abide by international law

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Boycott Divestment and Sanctions strategy arises from realisation that the occupation will not end unless Israelis understand it has a price

There is a considerable amount of misunderstanding about Boycott Divestment and Sanctions. BDS is not a principle but a strategy; it is not against Israel but against Israeli policy; when the policy changes BDS will end.

BDS is not about a particular solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but the demand that Israel abide by international law and UN resolutions.

It is, accordingly, something that you can support if you are for a two-state solution or a one-state solution. You can even support it as a Zionist.

It arises from the realisation, following years of experience, that the occupation will not end unless Israelis understand that it has a price.

In a sense, the need for a boycott is a sign of weakness following the polarisation and marginalisation of the left in Israel. We are witnessing the development of a proto-fascist mindset. I am, for example, extremely anxious about the extent that the space for public debate in Israel is shrinking.

One of the ways of silencing dissent is through the demand for loyalty, so that a slogan you hear a lot now is "no citizenship without loyalty". This reflects the inversion of the republican idea that the state should be loyal to the citizen and is accountable for inequities and injustices. The reversal of this relationship between state and loyalty, and the adoption of a logic similar to the one that informed Mussolini's Italy, is alarming. One of the expressions of these symptoms is the increasingly violent attitude to any dissent within Israel. I have received more death threats following my criticism of the flotilla fiasco than ever before.

When I walk on campus people ask in jest if I am wearing a bulletproof vest. Such jokes have a menacing undertone. It is not surprising that only three professors in Israel openly support a boycott; many others are in the closet because supporting BDS is not considered a legitimate critique, and people who back it risk being punished.

Yet there is also a sense that the pro-government proponents have gone too far. They are not only targeting people on the far left, but practically everyone who is even slightly critical of government policies. A couple of months ago a high-school principal who objected to military officers coming in to speak to his pupils, was all but crucified.

Clearly the outrage of so many Israeli academics against the assault on academic freedom has little to do with the boycott, but is rather against the attempt to silence any kind of critique.

There is an ever-growing sense that public discourse in Israel is dramatically shrinking.

Dr Neve Gordon is a prominent Israeli academic supporting a boycott and sanctions against Israel.