

Notes on Jan. 15 UCLA talk by Omar Barghouti

by Jeff Warner, Jan. 16, 2014

Omar Barghouti is an excellent speaker, well organized, with lots of facts and ready responses to almost any question. His best line was his last "if you want to stop the violence, stop the oppression."

Barghouti did a good job of documenting the oppression, especially considering that he only spoke for 20 minutes. He explained the logic of BDS is modeled after the BDS that "ended" apartheid in South Africa. A coalition of Palestinian organizations solicit BDS from the international community as a way to punish Israel (that word never used) until Israel satisfies their three demands: (1) end occupation, (2) equality for Palestinians citizens of Israel, and (3) return of refugees.

To a question about economics, Barghouti said yes, economics are part of the equality the BDS movement seeks. But in response to a later question about women's rights, he narrowed the scope of BDS and said other Palestinian groups worked on issues like that.

Barghouti challenges Peter Beinart and others to a debate on BDS. He claimed that Beinart refuses to debate. I did not understand the motivation behind Barghouti's challenge to Beinart who is a supporter of Palestinian solidarity because he sees it as important for Israel. Never mind why, he is a supporter of ending the occupation and equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel - 2 of the 3 BDS demands. Barghouti says people should do BDS as they feel comfortable and indeed Beinart supports the boycott of settlement goods. So why attack this guy who I would think Barghouti should be embraced?

That said, I make three general comments that Barghouti's talk made me think about:

1. We all feel that the poisonous role of United States policy is what keeps the present system "stable." Yet the role of the U.S. was hardly mentioned. As an American I feel my role is to work to change U.S. policy. BDS helps that cause by forcing a debate - evidenced when there is a "larger" BDS win like with the ASA academic boycott resolution.

The key to changing U.S. policy is a public media debate. The only way I have seen of getting media attention is when there is controversy. So if the ASA had passed their resolution and it was not contested, it would have passed with no media attention. But the lobby and Israel fought the ASA resolution and that is what generated media attention. The Ahava and SodaStream boycott campaigns are not contested and the protests are ignored. The Park Slope food coop boycott vote was contested and it hit the media. There was no media discussion of the Hillel guidelines that limited speakers until it was challenged by Swarthmore college. There was no media attention when Hampshire College students votes for divestment and the lobby did not contest, but lots of media attention when larger school student bodies voted for divestment and the vote was challenged.

2. Barghouti's logic for BDS rests on the belief that BDS played a key role in ending apartheid in South Africa. In my understanding, that is not so clear. Thirty years of B and D activity had almost no effect on South Africa (see my article in the *Palestine-Israel Journal* (2007) at <http://lajewsforpeace.org/Essays/Warner-SA.pdf>). Apartheid fell after three key events came together:

- Military defeat of the South African army by Cuba in Cuito Cuanavale in Angola in 1987-88.

- Government sanctions enacted in the 1980s by the U.N., the U.S., and several European countries. By the way, the U.S. sanction bill was vetoed by Reagan and his veto was overridden by Congress
- The persistent, massive demand of the South African people for their freedom. These demands included strikes that threatened to bring down the economy and fear among the whites of a personal and property violence.

3. I am beginning to get optimistic. Israeli hubris is what will bring about a change in U.S. policy, and that will force an end to the occupation. Israeli hubris is expressed in their efforts to stop divestment resolutions that is opening up the debate. Israeli hubris is expressed in their effort to kill the Iran nuclear negotiations that will rub most American wrong. And Israeli hubris shows up in the building fascism in Israel (Blumenthal's 2013 book *GOLIATH*) that is turning Jewish Americans away from support of Israel.