

The content on this page reflects the opinions of the writers. Not those of the Excelsior or its editorial board.

# Opinions

February 5, 2013

## BDS: Boldly Defending Security (No Hate Involved)

BY SARAH ALY

An overwrought and dishonest Assemblyman, Alan Maisel, claimed last week that the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) event at Brooklyn College, scheduled for this Thursday, holds “the potential for a second Holocaust.” His rhetoric is despicable fear-mongering of the worst sort.

Assemblyman Maisel has no business conflating our support of equal rights for Palestinians with anti-Semitism. Opposing Israel’s occupation with the non-violent tool of BDS is not anti-Semitic. In fact, we are simply embracing strategies employed to topple Jim Crow and South African apartheid. We are a diverse movement of Palestinians, Jews, and many other concerned groups and individuals.

What scares our opponents is that our message is finally being heard and is making it more difficult for companies such as Veolia and Caterpillar to turn a profit at the expense of Palestinians.

Church groups are considering our approach and

moral giants such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu are publicly expressing support for our efforts.

Rather than challenge the substance of our equal rights and anti-occupation arguments, our opponents are resorting to ad hominem attacks and vile falsehoods intended to paint us as anti-Semites.

It won’t work. Instead, they are foolishly trivializing the term anti-Semitism by recklessly throwing it about in a political argument over whether Israeli occupation and discrimination are still acceptable in the 21st century.

What is that political argument? For us, the question is how to end the Israeli occupation, secure equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and ensure the right of return for Palestinian refugees forced to flee homes and land in 1948 and 1967.

Rather than entrust action to an international community that has allowed Israel to expel Palestinians, discriminate against them, and make off with their private property, we are taking up BDS as a means by which concerned citizens can act

while governments dither and sometimes even uphold Israeli actions.

BDS is one component of a larger nonviolent movement that for years has worked to open the eyes of the world to the situation Palestinians face in the occupied territories. Palestinians and their Israeli and international allies have worked jointly to stop Israel’s land-grabbing wall and barrier inside the occupied West Bank.

Israeli forces have killed and injured nonviolent activists. President Obama appeared to give his support to Palestinian nonviolence in his 2009 Cairo speech, but in the years since, he has failed to speak out on behalf of these courageous efforts. His failure to act makes it incumbent upon concerned citizens to put pressure on Israel to change its discriminatory policies.

But these human rights concerns mean little to nothing to many of those inveighing against our event – an event protected not just by academic freedom and free speech, but by the fact that our support for equal rights

is one of the greatest aspirations of people around the world.

Any scoundrel can take refuge in the First Amendment. Yes, we cite the First Amendment but also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are both on our side.

Strikingly, some of our most vocal opponents are supporters of Rabbi Meir Kahane, whose Kach party is regarded as a terrorist organization by the US State Department. Assemblyman Dov Hikind and Helen Freedman, executive director of Americans For a Safe Israel are both supporters of Kahane.

Hikind seems to revel in intimidating college officials – and not for the first time at Brooklyn College. He played a significant part in the 2011 firing of then-Brooklyn College adjunct professor Kristofer Petersen-Overton (who was later rehired after strong efforts by faculty, students, and other allies).

Upon hearing that Brooklyn College President Karen Gould would not be making a trip to secure funding for the college, he highlighted

his gate-keeping role: “You don’t think it has anything to do with the fact that I said I would make her life a little miserable?”

There it is: an admirer of Kahane is threatening Brooklyn College funding because administrators had the temerity to uphold academic freedom and co-sponsor an event calling for nonviolent action to end Israel’s occupation and secure equal rights for Palestinians and Jews alike.

Hikind is a modern day George Wallace, standing in the schoolhouse door and screaming “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” And he backs it up with his professed desire to buy a home in a segregated Israeli settlement.

Hikind will say more terrible and dishonest things about our event in the days ahead. Don’t believe him. Come hear for yourself, and make up your own mind between equal rights or endless occupation and discrimination.