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American Jews and President Obama

Edward Klein and Richard Z Chesnoff, JWR 13 October 2010

http://jewishworldreview.com/1010/obama_remorse.php3

"The Jews have three veltn (worlds): di velt (this world); yene velt (the next world); and Roosevelt."

Judge Jonah Goldstein, the 1945 Republican candidate for mayor of New York City.

In the nearly 80 years since President Franklin Roosevelt launched the New Deal with a pledge to "help the forgotten man," relations between American Jews and the Democratic Party have been as close as lips and teeth. Even as Jews prospered and assimilated into the mainstream of American life, most of them remained loyal to F.D.R.'s liberal vision and refrained from following the pattern of other affluent groups by shifting to the Republican Party.

Over the course of the past 20 elections, 75 percent of the Jewish vote has on average gone to the Democratic presidential candidate. As the old saying goes, "Jews earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans."

If further proof of this were needed, it was provided by the 2008 election of Barack Obama. On a key issue for many Jewish voters - support for Israel

- the hawkish John McCain had an advantage over Obama, whose past associations with the anti-Semitic Reverend Jeremiah Wright and the Israel-bashing Columbia University professor Rashid Khalidi raised troubling questions. Yet, when the vote was tallied, Obama trounced McCain among Jews by a staggering 57-point margin.

"After decades of involvement in the civil rights movement by American Jews, Obama stirred deep emotions in the Jewish community," Bret Stephens, a deputy editor of The Wall Street Journal's editorial page, told us. "The black-Jewish alliance was shattered in the late 1960s, and Jews have yearned ever since to restore it. Jews felt good about voting for Obama, for not only were they voting for a guy they agreed with and liked, but they were also voting for a kind of redemption."

All this should give comfort to President Obama as his party heads into the fall's hotly contested mid-term elections and struggles to hold on to its majorities in the House and Senate. Faced with public frustration over the flailing economy, high unemployment, massive federal deficits, and out-of-control illegal immigration, Democratic candidates need all the help they can get. And although Jews represent a mere 4 percent of the American electorate, their political activism and fund-raising prowess give them leverage in important battleground states.

There's only one hitch. Today, a sizable number of American Jews are having some serious misgivings regarding Obama. Recent polls of the Jewish community reflect a significant decline in support from 2008, when 78 percent of Jewish voters pulled the lever for him. According to a recent McLaughlin & Associates poll, nearly 40 percent of Jewish voters disapprove of the president's handling of relations with Israel, and a majority of them would now consider voting for someone else for president.

These poll numbers do not begin to measure the depth of displeasure felt by many Jews over Obama's performance. Their bill of particulars covers a wide variety of complaints, including the president's frosty behavior toward businessmen in general and Wall Street in particular. But what really appears to irritate American Jews is the president's roughhouse treatment of Israel.

Obama has recently backed off from his previous harsh stance toward Israel and he even managed to convince the Israelis and the Palestinians to engage in direct peace talks, replacing the indirect "proximity" talks that had been going on for more than a year. But Obama is still not entirely out of the woods with large segments of the Jewish community. And his awkward comments about the proposed mosque at Ground Zero - he seemed to be in favor of the mosque before he was against it, or at least neutral about it - didn't help.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the coordinating body for 52 Jewish groups, estimates that Obama may have lost the support of as much as one-third of Jewish voters. That may overstate the case, but, as we discovered during interviews with more than a dozen Jewish

leaders, many Jews have become so annoyed with the Obama administration that they have closed their wallets and are seriously thinking of sitting out the 2010 election. According to an analysis of Federal Election Commission records by The Washington Post, contributions to Democratic candidates from the financial sector are down 65 percent from two years ago. While much of that is due to the Obama administration's widely perceived hostility to the business community, at least some of it is attributable to the White House's handling of Israel.

"I started breaking with Obama 12 months ago," says Martin Peretz, editor in chief of The New Republic. "And I know that a lot of West Coast Jews are also having buyer's remorse. The gut of it is Israel. Will Jews mobilize for Obama in the fall elections? They might be too embarrassed to come out directly against him. But I'll give you one sign of the times: Chuck Schumer [New York's senior senator] waited a year and a half before he stood up for Israel, and he's been having trouble raising money on Wall Street." (Schumer did not respond to repeated requests for comment.)

"The assumption on the part of the Obama administration is that, because Jews are liberals, they simply will not vote for Republicans," says the Hollywood billionaire Haim Saban, one of the Democratic Party's mega-donors.

"Obama can invite the 10 most prolific Jewish campaign bundlers to the White House for a discussion, and give a wonderful speech, and he'll think that this may resolve all his problems with American Jews. And it may. Or it may not."

"The idea that we saw a black president in our lifetime is wonderful," says former New York City mayor Ed Koch. "It conveyed to us that this country has come such a long way. But I never fully accepted that Obama didn't hear his minister [Jeremiah Wright] make those awful anti-Semitic statements over 20 years. I wanted to believe him. I willed myself to believe him.. What he has done is break that trust. Like Humpty Dumpty, once you break it, you can't put it together again."

The Jewish problem with Obama can be traced back to his first full day on the job. On January 21, 2009, he summoned his national-security team to the Oval Office and laid out a tough new policy toward Israel. According to a source who is in touch with the situation, Obama said that, in order to make good on his campaign promise to extricate American troops from the war in Iraq, the US had to create a grand coalition of moderate Muslim states and Israel to isolate Iran, which has made no secret of its ambition to become the nuclear hegemon in the Middle East.

The only way to accomplish that goal, the president said, was to eliminate the poisonous effect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which provides Iran with an excuse to stir up trouble. Thus it was a vital national interest of the USA to stop Israel building settlements in the occupied West Bank and housing in East Jerusalem, and to force the Jewish state to resolve the Palestinian problem.

Previous administrations had made similar noises about bringing peace to the Middle East, and at first Jewish leaders weren't alarmed by the leaks concerning a fundamental change in American policy. However, a

clue to Obama's true intentions came in March 2009, when Abe Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, met with the president's chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel.

"This is Israel's moment of truth," Emanuel said, according to Foxman. "This president is determined to make peace between Israel and the Arabs."

To many Jews, it seemed highly improbable that a brand-new president would choose to alienate Israel, America's oldest and most loyal ally in the Middle East. But then, in April 2009, when Obama made his first trip overseas, he visited Turkey, a Muslim country, and during a meeting in London he bowed to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. Two months later, he returned to the area and made a landmark speech in Cairo, where he announced his intention to seek "a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world."

Understandably enough, American Jews were annoyed that the president had failed to include Israel in his trip to the Mideast. But what rankled them even more was that Obama seemed to adopt the Arab narrative to explain the existence of Israel - namely, that Israel deserved to exist because of past Jewish suffering in Europe, particularly during the Holocaust. Nowhere in his Cairo speech did Obama mention the fact that Jews had a 3,000-year history in the Promised Land.

There was no discernible improvement when the president called a meeting of Jewish leaders in July. Fourteen major Jewish organizations were represented, including J Street, the newly formed left-of-center Jewish lobby.

"I agree with your goal to bring peace to the Middle East," Abe Foxman told the president. "But the perception is that you're only pressuring Israel, and not the Arabs." Foxman said the president agreed.

Someone else at the meeting said, "If you want Israel to take risks for peace, the best way is to make Israel feel that its staunch friend America is behind it."

"You are absolutely wrong," the president reportedly replied. "For the past eight years [under the Bush administration], Israel had a friend in the United States and it didn't make peace."

"I came away from the meeting being convinced that the Obama administration has introduced a new strategy and that it's revealing itself in steps," Foxman told us. "Unlike other administrations, this one is applying linkage in the Middle East. It's saying that if you only resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict most of the problems in the Middle East can be ameliorated and the lions will lie down with the lambs."

Another source who attended the meeting also told us, "All the president's advisers on the Middle East, starting with George Mitchell, believe in linkage, and they're telling the president you have to prove to the Arab Muslim world that you are different from previous presidents and that you can separate yourself from Israel, distance yourself from the settlements issue. After all, settlements are

something that American Jews don't like anyway, so it's a win-win proposition."

The Anti-Defamation League was the first mainstream Jewish organization to openly criticize the president on the Middle East issue. Soon other groups joined in. However, the great majority of Jews remained steadfast behind Obama's liberal agenda. They simply were not ready to criticize their country's first African-American president, in whom they had invested so many of their hopes and dreams.

That is where things stood until March 9 of this year, when a relatively low-level official in the Israeli Interior Ministry issued a permit for 1,600 new housing units for Israelis in the Ramat Shlomo section of East Jerusalem, a neighborhood that has been entirely Jewish for more than 100 years. The ill-timed announcement came the day after Vice President Joe Biden arrived in Israel to help kick-start a round of indirect peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately apologized to Biden, who accepted his expression of regret. But Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, called off the "proximity talks."

According to our sources, the next day at the regularly scheduled Thursday breakfast meeting between the president and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Obama made his feelings clear. He was livid. As he saw it, the Israelis had purposely humiliated the vice president and tried to sabotage the administration's peace plan. It was a personal affront. He instructed Clinton to call Netanyahu and read him the riot act.

The following day, during a 43-minute harangue, Clinton delivered a set of ultimatums to Netanyahu. Prefacing each remark with the phrase "I have been instructed to tell you," she demanded that Israel release a substantial number of Palestinian prisoners as a token of goodwill; lift its siege of Gaza; suspend all settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem; and agree to place the question of the status of Jerusalem up front at the peace-talks agenda.

"If you refuse these demands," Clinton told Netanyahu, according to informed sources, "the US government will conclude that we no longer share the same interests."

Netanyahu bit his tongue and remained noncommittal about the American demands, though he did eventually agree to ease the blockade of Gaza.

That same Friday, Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador to Washington, attended a meeting at the State Department and was given a severe dressing-down. Someone who saw Oren that night at a dinner described him as "shaken."

And things did not end there. Ten days later, Netanyahu was invited to the White House, where photographers were banned from the meeting, and the Israeli prime minister was treated less than elegantly.

The White House seemed strangely indifferent to the feelings of resentment that this treatment of Netanyahu aroused in the Jewish community.

Furthermore, shortly after Netanyahu returned to Israel, the president risked provoking even greater Jewish outrage by insinuating that

American troops were dying in Iraq and Afghanistan because Israelis and Palestinians could not agree to make peace. Conflicts such as the Israeli-Arab one are "costing us significantly in terms of both blood and treasure," the president said.

A perception began to spread throughout the Jewish community that the Obama administration was not only outwardly hostile to Israel but perhaps, without even knowing it, hostile to Jews as well. This thesis was forcefully argued by Jonathan Kellerman, the best-selling suspense novelist and a professor of clinical pediatrics and psychology at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine.

"My personal opinion . is that the bifurcation of Israel and Judaism is structurally fallacious," he wrote. "The Land of Israel is an essential ingredient of Judaism practiced fully. Thus, it is impossible to be anti-Israel and not be anti-Jewish. And in fact, the war being waged against Israel by the Muslim world is, at the core, a religious dispute. Radical Islamists no longer talk about Zionists; they come right out and broadcast their goal of eradicating worldwide Jewry."

The impression of an anti-Jewish bias at the highest echelons of the Obama administration, though unproved, was reinforced in April when James Jones, the retired Marine Corps general who then served as Obama's national-security adviser, began a speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy with a joke that was interpreted as flagrantly anti-Semitic.

"I'd just like to tell you a story that I think is true," Jones began. "It happened recently in southern Afghanistan. A member of the Taliban was separated from his fighting party and wandered around for a few days in the desert, lost, out of food, no water. And he looked on the horizon and he saw what looked like a little shack and he walked towards that shack. And as he got to it, it turned out that it was a little store owned by a Jewish merchant. And the Taliban warrior went up to him and said, 'I need water. Give me some water.' And the merchant said, 'I'm sorry, I don't have any water, but would you like to buy a tie? We have a nice sale of ties today.'"

"Whereupon the Taliban erupted into a stream of language that I can't repeat, but about Israel, about Jewish people, about the man himself, about his family, and just said, 'I need water, you try to sell me ties. You people don't get it.'"

"And impassively the merchant stood there until the Taliban was through with his diatribe and said, 'Well, I'm sorry that I don't have water for you and I forgive you for all of the insults that you've levied against me, my family, my country. But I will help you out. If you go over that hill and walk about two miles, there is a restaurant there and they have all the water you need.' And the Taliban, instead of saying thanks, still muttering under his breath, disappears over the hill, only to come back about an hour later. And walking up to the merchant, he says, 'Your brother tells me I need a tie to get into the restaurant.' "

Although Jones later apologized for his gaffe, many Jews began to wonder if there was something more behind the Obama administration's

confrontational approach toward Israel than a simple difference of policy. As a result, they began to take a second look at Obama's past for clues to his current behaviour. In particular, they were curious as to how Chicago's bare-knuckle politics had shaped Obama's outlook.

(End of Part One)

Dershowitz: Obama has undeserved 'Bad Rap' on Israel

David Lev, Arutz Sheva, 14 October 2010

President Barack Obama has gotten a bad rap - and it's undeserved, says American attorney and Harvard Professor Alan Dershowitz. Known for his libertarian views and his opposition to Israeli presence in Judea and Samaria, but still a strong supporter of Israel, Dershowitz said in a radio interview this weekend that Obama was a supporter of Israel - more so than some other presidents - and that groups like J Street, which is sharply critical of nearly everything Israel does, are far to the left of Obama.

"Just this week, Obama said that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is right to demand that the Palestinian Authority recognize Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people," Dershowitz told radio host Zev Brenner on his weekly call-in radio talk show in the New York area. "I know Obama's views on Israel. I don't agree with all of them, but he is definitely not anti-Israel."

Earlier in his administration, Obama snubbed Netanyahu, and Dershowitz says that Obama realized he had gotten off on the wrong foot with the Prime Minister. "Obama agrees that early on he made some terrible mistakes in relation to Israel," Dershowitz said, even though he had never made any declarations against Israel. "Possibly the words were okay, but the tune was not - I think the Cairo speech could have been better," Dershowitz said.

"But I want to judge him on the totality of his performance."

That totality includes Obama's actions on the issue of the most overriding concern to Israel, as Dershowitz sees it - the president's policy on Iran.

"So far Obama has been much tougher on Iran than Bush. Bush was soft on Iran," Dershowitz said. "You can't get a better person in the White House than Dennis Ross, and Ross is the one he has chosen to lead policy on Iran."

In fact, Obama is the victim of a demonization campaign when it comes to his alleged views on Israel. While many in the Jewish community are concerned over Obama's ties to anti-Semites and far-left figures such

as Jeremiah Wright, Rashid Khalidi, and Bill Ayres, Dershowitz believes the impact of these figures on Obama has been minimal. "I know who Obama's mentors are," Dershowitz said. "The include Charles Ogletree, an African American Zionist who has been to Israel on many occasions, and the current dean of Harvard Law School, Martha Minow, a very prominent Jewish woman whose daughter just graduated a Jewish high school. He has mentors from every group," Dershowitz adds. "It just demonizes when you present only one side of the story; it's not fair and not right."

Dershowitz adds that he has no problem with Obama's apparent adoption of the Middle East as his "pet project." The noted attorney said that he agrees with Obama's views on Jewish construction in Judea and Samaria, and, like Obama, urges Israel to finalize borders with the PA so it will be clear what areas belong to Israel. "Once they agree on borders, the settlement issue will fall into place. When it comes to peace-making I trust Binyamin Netanyahu. He is not going to compromise Israel's security needs."

"I'm not here to push for Obama," Dershowitz said in the interview. "I just think it is important not to demonize him. He is the President of the United States, the most powerful man in the world. There is no reason to make an enemy of him, and there is every reason to try to get him to increase his support for Israel, to keep the pressure on him. It is important that the pro-Israel community ensure that Israel not become a wedge issue - Republican vs Democrat, right vs left, religious vs. non-religious. We should try and get the widest range of support for Israel from every group - Jewish, Christian, right, left, and even from Muslim moderates."

Standing up to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement

Speech by Paul Howes to Zionist Federation of Australia conference in Melbourne, Sunday October 10 2010

<http://www.tuliponline.org/?p=2649>

TULIP - Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine

<<http://www.tuliponline.org/>> .

Thanks for inviting me to speak to the Zionist Federation of Australia conference.

We are here at both an exciting time: - the new round of peace talks between the Palestinian leadership and the Israeli leadership; And at a time of a new threat to Israel: -- a spreading international de-legitimisation campaign largely under the banner of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

I am proud to join you here because like you I am a firm supporter of the State of Israel. I believe that the Jewish people have a right to a homeland. No ifs. No buts. And I believe that the best way to deliver on that right to a homeland is the two-state solution.

Can I say that this support for the State of Israel - and the two-state solution - is part of a long tradition in our union.

I am proud of the fact that our union believes in, and supports, democratic societies, democratic institutions. I am proud to say our union has a long history of supporting the building of democratic civil society groups - like unions. We have always been ready to stand side-by-side with those who fight against authoritarian, dictatorial regimes. I am proud of the fact that our union actively backed the creation, growth, and eventual success, of the Solidarity movement in Poland in the 1980s.

Well, how am I to apply AWU tradition in the context of the Middle East?

I think I am upholding that union tradition when I work to support the development of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions as an independent, democratic, civic society institution.

I think I am upholding that union tradition as I stand with the union movements of both Israel and Palestine, as they fight for workers rights on both sides of the Green Line.

I think I am upholding that union tradition when I support the trust-building co-operative projects that the Israeli trade union movement - led by the Histadrut - and the Palestinian trade union movement - led by the PGFTU - are promoting.

If you truly believe that a-worker-is-a-worker-is-a-worker then the function of any trade union is to ensure fair pay for a fair day's work and a safe and healthy workplace.

This applies to an Israeli worker, this applies to a Palestinian worker. I can't see how you can discriminate between an Israeli worker and a Palestinian worker. (Let alone a foreign worker from Asia or Africa working in Israel)

Our task now is to support and ensure that trade unions - Israeli or Palestinian - have the capacity to address these issues; and to do so co-operatively.

It is because of these principles that I joined with fellow union leaders in the UK and the USA to establish Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine (TULIP).

That leads me to the new threat to Israel - Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS).

In this room I don't think there is much need for an explanation of BDS. It is an attempt to demonise Israel; to undermine its legitimacy by suggesting that none of its people:
the working families;
the companies seeking to export;
academics wanting to take part in intellectual pursuits with colleagues everywhere .. should be treated fairly, decently and equally in the global marketplace.

On that basis I can't see how any unionist can back the international BDS movement.

Now I know there has been a lot of talk in the media, both here and abroad, about trade unions backing the BDS movement. But let's take a step back from the headlines. Take an overview of the global situation.

The reality is that despite the headlines most of the trade union movement in Australia, and across the globe, has not backed BDS. The bulk of the international trade union movement, and in particular unions in countries like the USA, Germany and Austria, are rock-solid in their support for Israel.

Let's remember just a few months ago, in Vancouver, Canada, the World Congress of the global union movement, the International Trade Union Confederation - the ITUC - stared down attempts to label Israel an apartheid state.

The international trade union movement delivered a stinging rebuff to advocates of the campaign to boycott Israel.

In an even-handed response - this was supported by both the Palestinian and Israeli trade unions - the World Congress praised the landmark agreement between the Histadrut and the PGFTU on the rights of Palestinian workers.

The ITUC - now led by my former ACTU colleague Sharan Burrow - of course played a key role in delivering that Palestinian-Israeli agreement. The ITUC Congress statement declared: "This agreement and other actions to promote decent work and end discrimination is crucial to building the basis for just and equitable economic development."

Most importantly - in a stunning blow to BDS activists in some unions - the Israeli national trade union centre, the Histadrut, was honoured by the global trade union movement. Its leader, Ofer Eini, was elevated to the ITUC's 25 member Executive Board, as well as its General Council. And Mr. Eini was also elected as one of the global union groups Vice Presidents.

And now we are seeing a range of new, admittedly small at the moment, initiatives by global unions in different industrial sectors supporting co-operation in defence of workers' rights in Palestine and Israel.

None of this means there are not real threats; that the social movement traditions of the union movement will not be turned against Israel using the language of the international BDS movement.

But the majority of unions are with Israel.

We should use this majority to maintain support for a peace process which delivers security to Israel and justice to the Palestinians.

I know later this month there will be a conference here in Melbourne to build the BDS movement in Australia - and especially to create

strategies to get Australian unions backing BDS. We have to be clear-eyed about this conference.

I've looked through the speakers list. There is not one person of significance in the Australian union movement speaking here. There is not one person from the 50-plus ACTU Executive speaking here. That should give you an indication of the status and importance of the Melbourne meeting, at least as far as Australian unions are concerned.

But yes we do have to keep a watching brief if we are to stop that movement gaining strength in Australia.
We must know our arguments against the international BDSers.

The BDS movement likes to compare themselves to the boycott campaign against apartheid South Africa.
We have to explain to people why the two are just not comparable.

The South African boycott apartheid movement was home grown, it originated in South Africa and was run and controlled by Nelson Mandela and his ANC and the peak South African trade union organization COSATU.

Australian unions played a major role in backing the South African boycott.
Nelson Mandela travelled to Australia soon after his release and told a union rally here in Melbourne that he specifically wanted to thank the ACTU, and its affiliates, for their work.

Most importantly we must explain that the BDS movement, as it relates to the Palestinian struggle, is not really a home-grown initiative. Today's international anti-Israel boycott movement is largely an initiative imposed on the Palestinian body politic by outside agitators who run so-called solidarity groups. These solidarity groups have little or no institutional connections or support from within the Territories - especially not the West Bank.

The person credited for founding this international BDS Movement, Omar Barghouti, was born in Qatar, grew up in Egypt and moved only relatively recently to Ramallah. Omar Barghouti is actually now a post-graduate student in Israel at Tel Aviv University. He is due to complete his PhD this year I believe. When Israeli students at the university raised a petition to protest his presence on campus, and demand he be expelled, the university authorities rejected the petition and announced they would not expel him.
They were not going to boycott Mr. Barghouti because of his ideas - even though Omar Barghouti himself promotes and supports an academic boycott of Israeli universities.

When Omar Barghouti was asked about this irony he told the media "my studies at Tel Aviv University are a personal matter and I have no interest in commenting."

My Palestinian acquaintances have pointed out to me a number of times that, unfortunately, the Palestinian Diaspora are by far bigger agitators for the BDS cause than the people who actually live in the Territories. My Palestinian acquaintances also point out that there always has been a difference, a disconnect, between the Palestinians in the Territories, and those in the Diaspora.

The Palestinian Diaspora is less willing to compromise, more willing to keep the fight going, because they don't have to actually live the oppressive life suffered by those in the Territories.

Living comfortably in Australia, Canada, USA, UK or Europe these Diaspora activists are happy to fight to the last blood of Palestinians who actually have to live under the Occupation.

It is interesting to note that that all three featured Palestinian speakers at the upcoming Melbourne International BDS conference, whose names I have seen - Rafeef Ziadah; Samah Sabawi and Yousef Alreemawi - all live in the Palestinian Diaspora.

It is easy to promote the international anti-Israel BDS cause if you don't have to live through the practicalities of the day-to-day lives of the workers in the Territories. It is easy to oppose the compromises that both sides will have to make to achieve security, justice and peace.

Now even if you have only a passing knowledge of Palestinian politics you will know that the Palestinians who actually live in the Territories are only just now - and ever so slowly - backing a limited boycott campaign.

The Palestinian Authority talks about a boycott against the West Bank settlements - not Green Line Israel. On the other hand the solidarity groups stress an international BDS against all of Israel. No differentiation at all between Green Line Israel and the West Bank.

If you read closely, between the lines, you will also see that the PA and its instrumentalities place many, many qualifications, and adjectives, in front of their boycott statements because they are aware of the pain it will cause their own people.

The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions - who are also late, and in my view reluctant, boycott backers - have been at pains to limit their calls to a boycott only of goods produced by companies which operate in the West Bank.

The PGFTU have said they only want the BDS implemented by the Palestinian Authority if alternative jobs can be found for the thousands of Palestinians who daily work in the Israeli West Bank settlements.

The PGFTU has been explicit in their rejection of any call for a general BDS, or one that extends to companies which operate only in Green Line Israel and not the West Bank.

The leader of the PGFTU, Shaher Saed, is respected around the globe for his street smarts. People tell me that he is a realistic, pragmatic trade unionist - who knows when to compromise to achieve a deal. Now in my view they're the types of trade union leaders who best succeed in representing workers

The reality is that after the peace process is finally settled Israelis and Palestinians, in a region which is a third of the size of Tasmania, will have to learn to live together, work together. Once peace and

justice have come, I believe Palestinian and Israeli workers will see a well-spring of new economic and job opportunities for themselves and their families. But they will need the support of good unions on both sides of the Green Line, to protect them, promote their interests and push for improvements.

To improve the lifestyles of Palestinian workers the PGFTU and the Histadrut will have to build a strong relationship; build co-operative projects.

To do that we need to help establish trust-building exercises between the PGFTU and Histadrut members.

The international BDS solidarity groups, and their spokespersons across the globe may from time-to-time mouth words about their support for a two-state solution. But they are in reality one-staters. Defacto they support Hamas. They do not back President Abbas and his Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

I like the recent analysis of the Chicago-based Palestinian-American commentator Ray Hanania who abhors the extremists. He rightfully says that the international BDS movement is playing a pea and thimble trick with their BDS targeting; they are happy to play with perceptions, so you are never quite sure where they are with the BDS 'pea'.

The international BDS movement has adopted a strategy which says if you can't get commitment to a complete anti-Israel BDS in a particular international community, oh well they're happy with the wedge potential of just targeting the West Bank settlements.

But this stance should be seen for what it is - the pea and thimble trick. Confuse people so you never really know under which shell the pea is hidden.

It is of course a variation on the old Soviet strategy of building coalitions with 'useful fools' as allies. The 'useful fools' in this instance are people who are really, truly, quite genuine and honest peace campaigners. They genuinely only want to target the illegal settlements in the West Bank. But they are being used!!!!!!

In reality, for the international BDS movement leadership, there is no difference between the West Bank and pre-1967 Israel. For them if the 'useful fools' want only to talk about the West Bank that's OK. For them this is the first step; part of their broader campaign to demonise all Israel; this for them is just a useful first step to attack the legitimacy of the State of Israel.

It doesn't take much to find out what the international BDSers actually back: a campaign which wants to see Israel disappears.

Omar Barghouti - the international BDS movement founder - has been quite explicit in stating that his real aim is not a two State solution but the end of Israel itself. In Barghouti's own words he supports: "a Palestine next to a Palestine, rather than a Palestine next to an Israel."

The international BDSers want to fight the good fight, ready to spill more blood – both Israeli blood and Palestinian blood.

Now I am sure you are all keenly aware of the extraordinary history of Zionist institution building in pre-state Israel. It is now possible to legitimately argue that the PA, under the leadership of PM Fayyad and his Ministry of the National Economy, are actually mimicking the Yishuv era. The Zionist movement should be flattered that PM Fayyad is copying their tactics.

Mr. Fayyad is demanding Palestinians should prefer Palestinian product over settlement products; and so help create what they call "a solid shield to build and protect the Palestinian economy." Fayyad – like the leadership of pre-state Israel – is working hard to build up the institutions of a future Palestinian state, building the economic infrastructure for a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel.

That's why I am saying to you that in developing a strategy to counter the international BDS movement we have to adopt a nuanced understanding of what are really different campaigns.

The international BDSers should be looked at differently from what the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, Mr. Fayyad is proposing. The international BDSers should also be treated differently from the Israeli actors who are participating in the active, very loud, very vibrant, democratic argument that goes on in Israel -- all the time. They choose not to take to the stage at the new Ariel Cultural Centre in the West Bank – that is their democratic right. That doesn't mean they are attacking Israel, attacking Zionism.

They like many other Israelis are debating the vital issue of how we achieve a secure peace for Israel and Palestine; how we win the two-state solution.

The actors are not like the international BDSers who want to attack Israel.

Demonise Israel. Delegitimise Israel.

The PA targets in the West Bank – and let's remember they are half-hearted – should also be treated as part of the 'game' that is international diplomacy and part of an attempt to build healthy economic institutions for the future Palestinian state.

Now the Israel haters want to muddy the waters. They want to play with your perceptions. They want to play the pea and thimble trick. They want to claim the PA and the actors as part of their campaign. We should not fall into this trap. We should not take part in their pea and thimble game playing.

We need to be smart, nuanced, understand the strategy of the international BDSers – and act to suck the wind out of their effort.

In less than two months I will be visiting Ramallah and Jerusalem so I can get a deeper understanding of how Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine can provide more support for the joint work of the Histadrut and the PGFTU.

I will be there to explore what co-operation between Israeli and Palestinian trade unions we can validly back with our meagre resources.

While there I also plan to take time out to visit Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' Centre. I'm especially interested in checking out the site being prepared for a tribute to William Cooper, the Aboriginal leader who led the Melbourne protest over Kristallnacht.

A ceremony memorialising him will be held at Yad Vashem shortly after I visit Israel. It is unfortunate that I cannot stay on to witness this important event.

A little known fact is that William Cooper, a shearer, was a prominent member of the Australian Workers' Union. Historians have argued that it was his membership of my union that gave him the skills to organize dispersed Aboriginal communities, as well as the famous Melbourne Kristallnacht protest.

I believe it is part of my role as a leader of my union with strong connections to your community; a national labour voice; and an activist in the international union movement; that during my visit to Israel and the West Bank I look to creating links between Israeli and Palestinian workers; and links between Israeli, Palestinian and Australian workers.

That is the role of Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine - TULIP. Thank you.

Bits and Pieces Clips from various media in the Middle East
and
elsewhere

ICEJ News, 13 October 4, 2010: Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad paid a high-profile visit to Lebanon on Wednesday, a move that is sure to bring added tensions to a country already fearing renewed civil war. Ahmadinejad toured southern Lebanon, which he recently called "Iran's border with Israel." Ahmadinejad's smiling face was seen emblazoned on dozens of giant billboards mounted on overpasses and hundreds of smaller placards along highways near the Israeli border. Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah insisted that Lebanon should thank Iran for helping to rebuild Beirut's southern suburbs and south Lebanon after the 2006 war with Israel. "Where did this money come from? From donations? No, frankly from Iran."

ICEJ News, 12 October 4, 2010: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has protested remarks made by French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner this week that the possibility is open for the UN Security Council to give recognition to a Palestinian state outside of a peace agreement with Israel.

ICEJ News, 12 October 4, 2010: Europeans in the grassroots "Stop the Bomb" coalition demonstrated in front of several Swiss embassies all over Europe this week in protest of a Swiss firm's multi-billion dollar gas deal with Iran and the Swiss government's general lack of enthusiasm for joining in international efforts to curtail Iran's renegade nuclear program.

ICEJ News, 12 October 4, 2010: In September, Bank of Israel governor Stanley Fischer was named as one of the world's top 10 central bankers by the renowned Global Finance magazine. This month his spirit of excellence was once again honored when Euromoney, an international magazine specialized in banking and finance gave him the title of the "central bank governor of the year" "for successfully managing the economy through the aftermath of the global financial crisis". Fischer's outstanding performances contributed to Israel's admittance to the prestigious OECD earlier this year.