

Australian media attacks Greens over criticisms of Israel

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The Australian Greens have been subjected to a series of slanderous attacks by the media, the Labor and Liberal parties, and various Zionist organisations for one of the party's state branch's support for the so-called boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign against Israel. The episode has underscored the extent to which the Australian political establishment regards as utterly impermissible any criticism of the Israeli government and its criminal activities.

In December last year, a resolution was adopted at the New South Wales (NSW) Greens state conference, calling on "all Australians and the Australian government to boycott Israeli goods, trading and military arrangements, and sporting, cultural and academic events as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel's occupation and colonisation of Palestinian territory, the siege of Gaza and imprisonment of 1.5 million people, and Israel's institution of a system of apartheid." The same month, the inner Sydney suburban Marrickville council, headed by Greens mayor Fiona Byrne, formally expressed support for what is known as the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaign.

These developments received little coverage until three months later, during the NSW state election campaign. The Greens were threatening to win at least two inner city lower seats from the disintegrating Labor Party, including in Marrickville, where the Greens candidate Fiona Byrne was challenging Labor's Deputy Premier Carmel Tebbutt.

In response, the Murdoch press spearheaded a vicious campaign, centred on accusations that the Greens were anti-Semitic. This has become the stock-in-trade response of Zionist forces internationally—in order to stamp out any criticism of the Israeli government and military, it is routinely and falsely identified with racism against the Jewish people themselves. Making a crude amalgam of the BDS campaign and the German Nazis' murderous pogroms in 1938, *Daily Telegraph* columnist David Penberthy accused Byrne of "advocating a polite modern rendering of

Kristallnacht in the Inner West."

The Murdoch media's commentary incited a series of attacks on the Greens' campaign in Marrickville. Byrne and other candidates received multiple death threats; Greens' campaign posters were defaced with swastikas; and illegal placards were stuck to telegraph poles accusing the Greens of opposing democracy and gay rights, and supporting terrorism, because of their criticisms of Israel.

None of these provocations was denounced or opposed by the media or the major parties. In fact, the anti-Greens furore escalated in the aftermath of the March 26 NSW election, in which Byrne narrowly failed to win the Marrickville seat.

A remark by federal Greens senator-elect from NSW, Lee Rhiannon, that her party's failure to win more seats in the state election reflected its failure to "amplify support for BDS", provoked a frenzy.

Liberal MP Andrew Robb described the "very extremist position" as "creeping anti-Semitism." Drawing deep from the putrid well of anti-communism, National Party Senator Ron Boswell, accused the Greens of having "morphed back into reds" and being a "rebranded socialist alliance party". Labor MP Michael Danby similarly accused Greens' leader Bob Brown of allowing a "watermelon faction" in the Greens to attempt "to delegitimise Israel as a prelude to its destruction".

Last Thursday's editorial in the *Australian* declared the "Greens' anti-Israel posturing is wrong and dangerous." It continued: "For many years the Labor Party was forced to quash this sort of theatrical railing against Israel but it has been largely relegated to the past because leaders such as Bob Hawke, Kim Beazley, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard have demonstrated a solid commitment to the US alliance and a healthy respect for the democracy of Israel. Sadly, the Greens have been all too willing to take up the ground

vacated by Labor's lunar Left... At a time when UN investigator Richard Goldstone has recognised his error in unfairly judging Israel over the Gaza war with Hamas, the Greens ought to be using the opportunity to apologise for their rhetoric and revise their policies."

The editorial served to underscore the political calculations underlying the anti-Greens' campaign.

For the last three decades, uncritical support for the Zionist state has become obligatory for all the parliamentary parties and factions, including Labor's "left". The Labor Party has become, in fact, the most enthusiastic supporter of the Israeli government. As the American diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks demonstrate, Julia Gillard's rise to the leadership was accompanied by a demonstrative embrace of the Zionist state—something she was well aware constituted a prerequisite for succeeding Kevin Rudd as prime minister. In December 2009, Gillard exceeded expectations in Washington and Tel Aviv, when, as acting prime minister, she enthusiastically endorsed Israel's murderous assault on the population of Gaza as a legitimate, "defensive" operation.

The *Australian's* reference to the cowardly capitulation of UN investigator Richard Goldstone over his report, which had condemned Israeli war crimes in Gaza, highlights the counter-offensive being waged by Zionist forces in Australia and internationally. As far as the Murdoch press is concerned, even the most obvious and brutal crimes carried out by the Israeli military are above reproach.

With numerous US client regimes in the Middle East facing challenges from revolutionary movements of workers and youth, Israel's geo-strategic significance as an imperialist garrison in the region has only increased. That is why there is such a frenzied media campaign for Gillard to rein in her alliance partner, and for Greens leader Bob Brown to discipline his colleagues.

Brown immediately obliged. He and other federal Greens' parliamentarians, including lower house MP Adam Bandt, remained silent on the issue throughout the NSW election campaign while their colleagues were being attacked as anti-Semites. Following the poll, Brown publicly declared that the NSW Greens would have polled better if they had withdrawn support for BDS. He also made clear that the federal Greens had rejected the boycott policy, and that he expected all MPs from NSW, state and federal, to fall into line.

World Socialist Web Site has emphatically condemned the politically misguided and demoralised demands for academic and cultural boycotts. As we raised in a 2002 statement ("Against the boycott of Israeli academics"): "Measures targeting ordinary Israeli citizens serve to reinforce Zionism's efforts to inculcate the fatalistic and deeply pessimistic idea that the entire world is against the Jewish people and that the state of Israel offers their only sanctuary... Israel, like the US, Britain and every country, is deeply divided by social and class antagonisms. These already find political expression in oppositional sentiment towards the Zionist establishment and its war crimes, and which must take on greater dimensions in future. To reject this is to deny any possibility of convincing Jewish workers and academics of a political alternative to Zionism, hence the resort by the supporters of the boycott to ostracism and coercion."

Bob Brown, on the other hand, opposes the BDS campaign from the right. Speaking on the ABC's "Lateline" on April 4, Brown declared that his advice to the NSW Greens had been "that you leave national matters to the national arena, and that includes foreign policy." The Greens' leader added that he had demanded a commitment from the sole Greens member of the NSW lower house, Jamie Parker in Leichhardt, that the BDS campaign would not be raised in the state parliament.

During the lengthy "Lateline" interview, Brown said nothing about the vicious smear campaign that was waged in Marrickville. His response to the NSW campaign demonstrates the Greens' determination to do whatever they deem necessary to win acceptance as a fully fledged member of the official political establishment. While the Greens have never had any principled opposition to Zionism, Bob Brown is now determined to quash even limited, largely tactical, criticisms of Israel's treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.



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