

THE LEFT PARTY – Federal Working Group on “Just Peace in the Middle East”

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The right to freedom of speech and non-violent resistance must be defended!

We are shocked by the most recent statement made by Omar Barghouti, one of the founders of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) Movement, in which he analyses threats made by Israeli ministers against BDS activists as incitement to physical violence. In particular, he believes that the most recent statement by the Minister of Intelligence, Yisrael Katz, calling for “targeted civil eliminations” of BDS “leaders”, can be seen as incitement to murder. Extremists could understand the addition of the term “civil” as meaning that civilians – i.e. not the army or the secret services – should carry out such murders.

The increasing number of threats against activists must be taken very seriously. In particular, the context in which they take place in particular sets the alarm bells ringing:

The Israeli government and security services routinely carry out extrajudicial executions of Palestinians; settlers carry out very serious attacks against and murders of Palestinian civilians and, in most cases, they are “safe” from any kind of criminal prosecution. Indeed, their crimes are even covered up and supported by the Israeli security forces and they are spurred on by politicians. The increasing shift to the right witnessed in Israel for many years now, both within the civilian population and amongst politicians, is extremely worrying. Members of Netanyahu’s cabinet are amongst those calling increasingly openly and radically for Palestinians to be murdered and driven out. The Israeli peace movement – like the Palestinian civilian population, refugees and any kind of minority – is exposed to massive and brutal attacks. Anybody who does not toe the line of the right-wing/religious government coalition is labelled a “traitor” and seen as fair game. These people, who ought to be natural partners for anybody striving for peace in the Middle East, are being left scandalously alone by the international community.

The worldwide BDS movement, created in 2005 by an initiative from Palestinian civil society, calls for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, until Israel complies with international law and grants Palestinians the right to self-determination. The movement is wholly non-violent and merely exercises its right to freedom of speech. The BDS movement explicitly describes itself as anchored in the Universal Human Rights Declaration. It rejects all forms of racism, discrimination and anti-Semitism.

This incitement to attack or even murder civilian protesters cannot simply be accepted. It is no longer a question of one’s personal view of BDS or one’s own preferred means of protest. It is also not a question of one’s stance on the Middle East conflict or preferred approaches to its resolution. Every democrat has a duty to make his or her voice heard when civilian protesters are threatened, when freedom of speech is trampled underfoot!

It is not “only” the Israeli government and its most radical representatives who are responsible for the rampant violence against dissenters. The German government and the EU, who allow this government free rein, who merely issue statements which are without consequence and generally much too tame, also share the blame. Weapons are still being supplied to Israel; even the most radical agitators need fear no serious consequences. The international community has allowed the Israeli government free rein for far too long. Instead of loudly and clearly condemning the incitement to physically attack BDS activists, as it does in the case of other groups, the German government, along with other EU governments and the US government, is involved in criminalising them and is restricting freedom of speech here in Germany too. It shares the blame for every person killed in Israeli wars, every person killed in a “targeted” execution and every person murdered by a radical settler!

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