



AJDS Newsletter

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July 2010

Overcome denial in Israel advocacy!

Jeremy Ben-Ami & Debra DeLee

Some people see the world not as it is but as they would like it to be. Psychologists have a term for this: They call it living in denial.

Sadly, denial colours the way too many leaders of established institutions in the American Jewish community look at Israel when it comes to matters of peace and security.

Decades of telling and retelling a comfortable narrative in which Israel is always extending its hand in peace, only to have it rejected by the Palestinians, understandably makes it hard to accept when the facts show otherwise.

Yet when it comes to the state of the peace process in the Middle East today, the facts do show otherwise.

Granted, under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's leadership, Israel has spoken about freezing settlements. But in reality, construction continues unabated on the West Bank.

Granted, the prime minister has spoken about pursuing a two-state solution. Yet Israel's foreign minister tells the world that there is "no chance" for a Palestinian state in the foreseeable future and, in East Jerusalem, barely a week passes without provocative Israeli actions that directly undermine peace efforts and destabilise the city.

Similarly, facts don't support the charge that the present Palestinian leadership is not a partner for peace.

Israel today does have a partner for peace: pragmatic, moderate Palestinian leaders who genuinely support the two-state solution and are working to establish order and security in the West Bank. The looming threat of more

extreme alternatives to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad only underscores the urgency of taking advantage of the opportunity that exists today for peace and the peril of failure.

The real issue, however, is not the existence or quality of a Palestinian partner, it's what course of action best advances shared US and Israeli interests, including securing Israel's future as a democratic home for the Jewish people.

No matter who leads the Palestinians, Israel needs permanent, secure and recognised borders. Israel has to make clear both in word and in deed that it is ready to end the occupation, not with a verbal nod to the two-state solution but with a solid commitment to a Palestinian state on territory equivalent to 100 percent of the pre-1967 land with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Of course, Palestinians and the broader Arab world both could be doing far more to advance solutions rather than pointing fingers, and we are not saying only Israel bears responsibility for the present state of affairs. But the reality is that, partner or no, the status quo is unsustainable and the long-term outlook for Israel's survival as a Jewish and democratic homeland is bleak without an immediate change of course.

The United States and Israel do not benefit from making excuses for maintaining a self-destructive status quo. American pro-Israel advocates owe it to the Israel they love to stop hiding behind the latest incarnation of the "no

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The Renate Kamener Oration

Peter Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University

Living ethically in a divided world

Sunday 11 July, 7.15 for 7.30pm

Leo Baeck Centre, 33 Harp Rd, East Kew

\$15 admission

Further information/RSVP: Tom Wolkenberg email lintom@bigpond.com

or phone 9885 6260

Please note that the Leo Baeck Centre has advised us that they have an agreement with the City of Boroondara to not enforce parking restrictions in Harp Rd.

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Newsletter are not necessarily those of the AJDS.
These are expressed in its
own statements.***

What we stand for:

- Social justice and human rights.
- Opposition to the vilification and mandatory detention of asylum seekers.
- The struggle against racism, antisemitism in particular.
- Non-violent paths to conflict resolution.
- In line with this, the search for a negotiated solution to the Israel/Palestinian conflict.
- Equal rights, including land rights and justice, for Indigenous Australians.

In this issue

*Just enough room to sum up the key items in this issue. Of course the momentous farewell to Norman Rothfield involved lots of our members but everyone would find something interesting in **Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo's** account of the event (**opposite**).*

*In terms of the Israel/Palestine conflict I would like to highlight Leichhardt Mayor **Jamie Parker's** speech reprinted on **pp 8-9**. It is pleasing to note the positive developments in the combination of forces of council, supporters of the Palestinians and the local Jewish community in the projects that he outlines. The pseudonymous **Moshe Yaroni** provides us with yet another piece of his analysis, this time of Kadima's role in the Gaza siege on **pages 10-11**.*

*There are some hard-to-come-by items: an obituary of Nobel laureate Jose Saramago on **page 13**. Saramago was a far more complex character with a better ability to observe things than the one-dimensional criticism of Israel featured in some other commentaries on his death. The report on Northern Ireland's Bloody Sunday massacre and the subsequent apology by the British government has a potentially strong impact on other places (**p4**). Other items related to the conflict include the texts of the International Trade Union Confederation (**p12**) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (**p14**), resolutions on the subject which contain different attitudes to the global Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, subject of a forthcoming AJDS event and meeting on 8 August. [See formal invitation to our **Special General Meeting on page 11 and the forum on page 15.**]*

*There is also an encouraging item about the growth of the opposition to the regime in Iran (**p7**). We even have an item about the positive aspects of sport in the context of the World Cup by the very political **Dave Zirin** on **page 14**.*

Sol Salbe

(Continued from page 1)

partner" excuse for inaction.

No matter what you think of Abbas and Fayyad, there is no justification for expanding settlements, blockading Gaza (a point we have long argued and that now has been belatedly recognised by the Israeli government) or systematically planning the expansion of the Jewish presence in Arab neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem.

Americans—Jews and non-Jews—can see with their own eyes what is happening in Gaza, in Jerusalem and in the West Bank. It is clear to any objective observer that the actions of the present Israeli government have yet to match the promise of the rhetoric. Pretending otherwise does not help Israel; it risks further alienating the American and American Jewish publics.

Many Israelis, too, are asking us to break out of this mode of Israel advocacy. In a poll commissioned by B'nai B'rith, half of Israeli Jews recently said that it was essential that America pressure both sides to make progress toward peace. Those living in denial seem to be deaf to this plea.

It is tempting to let ourselves fall under the spell of the siren song that Israel is today extending its hand in peace, and that if there is no peace it is not for lack of effort. We may badly want it to be true. We may want to believe that Israel—the country that we love, support and defend—is living up to our hopes and dreams.

But siren songs have a tendency to leave ships wrecked on rocky shores. Those of us who care about Israel must be courageous enough to see things as they are, and act accordingly.

Jeremy Ben-Ami is the president and founder of J Street. Debra DeLee is the president of Americans for Peace Now. Our copy came via JewishJournal.com in the US.

Norman Rothfield farewelled in style

Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo

As the music of Schubert filled the room, around 300 people, most of them from Melbourne's Jewish Left, drifted into the St Kilda Town Hall to celebrate the extraordinary life of Norman Rothfield, who died on 4 June. Also in attendance were former Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe, former federal MP and Victorian government minister Race Mathews and his wife, author Iola Mathews, actor Max Gillies, author Arnold Zable, journalist Peter Weinger, and federal Greens candidate Phillip Walker.

The event was officiated by June Factor. Sol and Mary Factor were lifelong friends of the Rothfields, as was June. Projected onto a screen on the wall behind her as she outlined some of the memorable elements of Norman's life, a photo of Norman, sporting his characteristic grin and ski clothes, beamed out at us.

Factor gave a thumbnail sketch of Norman's working life, first in shmates in Flinders Lane, and later, in the building industry making low cost apartments. She spoke of his political life, his days in the postwar Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, the establishment of the Paths to Peace magazine with his wife Evelyn, and his role, later, in setting up the Australian Jewish Democratic Society.

Harold Zwier followed. His family, too, were lifelong friends of the Rothfields. Indeed, both families came to Australia on the same boat. Zwier entertained us with tales of Norman's skiing escapades, which included one incident when Norman got lost on the mountain, only to reappear several hours later, unharmed. Zwier recalled with great warmth many of the shared events in and the politics of the lives of these two families.

Long-time friend, former Hawke government minister Barry Jones, spoke warmly of Norman's political life. He went on to make some observations on the current political scene that raised laughter and much applause. Jones reminded us that Norman had stood as a Labor candidate in the 1950s. He remarked on the days when the ALP was dominated by men and women of ideas, such as Gough Whitlam, Jim Cairns, Lionel Murphy, Don Dunstan and Sam Cohen. Jones lamented that these giants had disappeared, replaced by the politics of sound bites and spin based on the latest opinion polls.

After Jones came Norman and Evelyn's three sons, in descending order by age: Robin, David and Jonathan.

Each spoke lovingly, admiringly of the man they all referred to as Pop. Each shared memories of their life with him: family life, the skiing trips, and the discussions about matters political.

Robin quoted excerpts from Norman's ASIO files, copies of which he held aloft. He described one page on which the agent had listed the car numberplates of all the visitors to Rothfield parties – such significant information. David spoke of his father's nine lives, in which he addressed Norman's personal development and relationships, immigration and, naturally, his political life. As Norman had some amazing lucky escapes of one kind and another, the notion of nine lives was fitting. Jonathan had us all laughing when he recounted Norman's attempt to dissuade him from being a lawyer, a profession Norman disliked. Ultimately, though, Norman's manipulations were to no avail.

Speeches were made by two of Norman's granddaughters, Deborah, who flew in from England, where she lives, and Tamari, who journeyed from Israel, where she lives, to be in attendance and to speak.

They spoke lovingly of the Pop they adored, of how much they respected his views and opinions, which they often sought, and how much they will miss him.

Daniel, Jonathan's son and tech for the day, played Phillip Adams' farewell to Norman that was broadcast as the lead-in to his recent Late Night Live program.

Daniel also screened some television footage of Norman, who, it became quite clear, was something of a wonder of the modern world, at least as a skier. There was a piece from Canadian television news about an uh-mazing nonagenarian Australian, skiing the Canadian slopes "at that age". In another, from an ABC TV 7.30 Report

Kerry O'Brien marvelled at how Norman, by now in his late nineties, still maintained his fitness regime and continued to ski and play tennis. In reply to a question about how he managed his longevity, Norman replied: "Keep yourself mentally and physically active, eat well and end the day with a Glenfiddich."

The last item from the airwaves was an excerpt from a 1988 3CR radio program, in which Norman spoke with feeling about what today would be called dog-whistle politics, and an AJDS meeting on multiculturalism that was held at B'nai B'rith.



Norman Rothfield

(Continued on page 5)

Lessons for elsewhere in Bloody Sunday apology

Sol Salbe

The apology was unreserved: "What happened...was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong. The Government is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the armed forces. And for that, on behalf of the Government, indeed on behalf of our country, I am deeply sorry." The speaker was the United Kingdom Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the apology followed the release of the Saville Committee's report on the events of Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland.

There was plenty to apologise for. And it was a lot more than the original massacre in which British troops mowed down innocent demonstrators, killing 13 people (a 14th died later of wounds) and injuring many more. What hurt the Irish nationalists a lot more than the initial killings was the decades-long campaign by the British army and government to turn the blame away from the perpetrators and onto the victims. Every inquiry and every statement of the government until recently accused the demonstrators of violence.

Former Westminster MP and leading activist at the time, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey wrote after the apology: "I was on the speaker's platform on Bloody Sunday. Despite burying the images in some deep mental archive, Bloody Sunday refuses to fade or mellow in my consciousness. Initially, disbelief gave way to fear, horror, anger, and then detachment. Finally, I was angry only with myself.

"My political analysis had until then discounted any real belief – despite the long history of Anglo-Irish conflict – that the British government would countenance killing the people in order to suppress the protests. Now that it had happened, it made sense to me that it had always been going to happen and would continue; it was fundamental to the nature of the British state in Ireland. I felt I should have known that, and now I did, I was still up for the fight.

"The key impact of Bloody Sunday was that a whole generation made a similar analysis and this fuelled some 25 years of violent political conflict, at least tolerated by the majority of the 'minority population' and actively pursued by a significant but sustainable minority. It is responsibility for this legacy that sets Bloody Sunday apart from subsequent atrocities on all sides."

Does the description of people marching for elementary rights – the right to vote, against discrimination in employment and against administrative detention without trial being accused of attacking elite troops sound familiar?

Before answering, perhaps it is worth remembering what PM Cameron said in his follow-on comment: "You do not defend the British army by defending the indefensible". The British inquiry took 12 years to compile, cost hundreds of millions of pounds and was summed up in a 5000 page report. But the people of Northern Ireland and those caring about human rights elsewhere are convinced that it was worth every penny.

Doug Saunders' of the Canadian *Globe and Mail* summation of the inquiry's finding is worth quoting: The report "[proved] beyond doubt what had long been

suspected: that none of the men killed in 1972 had provoked the soldiers in any serious way or possessed any bombs or pistols; that the soldiers had no reason to be firing, and shot the victims from secure positions, in some cases while the victims were cowering, crawling away, waving surrender flags or being treated for injuries."

Saunders added: "The Saville Report's utter lack of ambiguity, and the shocking clarity of its language, not only completely reversed an earlier British government report which said that some of the victims had been armed terrorists, but it made Mr Cameron's job relatively simple: His army was completely guilty, and the Londonderry Catholics were completely innocent." [Irish people prefer the original name of Derry.]

Does that not sound familiar? Cameron's apology came just as bloggers, reporters, peace activists, and (let's not beat

about the bush) partisan supporters of the other side, were trying to piece together the story of what really happened on the *Mavi Marmara*. Modern technology has made it impossible for the kind of lies that were being told by the British government to remain in currency for 38 years ever again. Despite the IDF confiscating/stealing all the electronic recording devices on that boat, some footage has already appeared and, being charitable, it does not appear to support the IDF's account. We still don't know exactly what happened but one of the lessons of Bloody Sunday is that armies and governments lie, and they do it big time. Those who rise to defend their accounts end up with egg on their face.

It was no wonder then that many commentators made the connection to the *Mavi Marmara*. Devlin McAliskey herself concluded her own account by writing: "Had the British state been speedily held to account at The Hague, things might have been different for a lot of people, not least for nine Turkish human rights activists on their way to Gaza. They might not have been so confidently slaughtered by the state of Israel."

The Jewish sages noted long ago that one that should make allowance for actions taken in anger. And Devlin McAliskey, who was prevented at the time from providing her eyewitness account to Parliament, is palpably angry, but ignoring her language, the point was made by others. No one should be beyond reproach -- the best way to prevent future Bloody Sundays or the kind of killing that took place in Israel at Kafr Qassem in 1956, Land Day in 1976 and in October 2000 is by opening up all such events to international scrutiny. In the long run, everyone will be a winner. There simply will be a strong disincentive against repeating such atrocities.



Bernadette Devlin McAliskey

A pluralist panel on homosexuality and Judaism

Michael Barnett

I was invited to participate in "A Pluralist Panel on Homosexuality and Judaism" by the Zionist youth group Hineni (Melbourne) and the Monash Jewish Students Society on 3 June. The other panellists were Michael Cohen, Rabbi Shamir Caplan (Orthodox), Rabbi Ehud Bandel

(Conservative), Rabbi Fred Morgan (Progressive). Absent from the panel due to illness was Hinde Ena Burstin [former AJDS *Newsletter* editor], who was to talk from a Jewish lesbian perspective.

Kudos to the event organisers Hineni and MonJSS for bringing this much-needed discussion to the community. It is perhaps the first time an intelligent, informed public discussion has been had in the Melbourne Jewish community on anything to do with homosexuality.

It was put to me that the evening was going to be controversial, not so much because of homosexuality being the topic, but that there was going to be one each of a Progressive, Conservative and Orthodox rabbi (a Neapolitan assortment?) in the same room at the same time. (I'm sure there's a joke in there somewhere.)

Aside from a few minor technical and logistical glitches the evening went really well. Each of the first four speakers delivered their address from their respective professional perspectives with no real surprises or revelations.

The Orthodox perspective apologised for being intolerant of homosexuality and didn't offer very much real

hope for same-sex attracted people.

The Conservative perspective was upfront about being "in the middle" of tradition and change, yet said that gay men and women were equal within the community and their sexuality needed to be taken into account and not ignored.

The Progressive perspective similarly acknowledged the importance of a person's sexuality and went on to say that the Progressive movement was supportive of same-sex relationships and would acknowledge them as much as possible, yet they weren't on a par with heterosexual relationships.

Both the Conservative and Progressive perspectives also acknowledged that children could be successfully raised in a same-sex relationship, something that the Orthodox perspective didn't seem to have the capacity to understand.

Audience members were asked to write questions down and then at the end

of the panel presentations, a selection of questions would be put to the panellists. The questions asked were intelligent for the most part, but didn't ask the tough questions that I felt needed to be asked of the rabbis.

What made me most unsettled about the line-up of speakers (aside from me) was that they were all heterosexual men, dictating the terms of acceptance, to one degree or another, of same-sex attracted men and women and our relationships. I would really like to have seen a female rabbi (yes, they do exist in the Progressive world) or an openly gay one (yes, they do exist) speak on the topic.

Michael Barnett is the convenor of Aleph Victoria. This is taken from his public blog.



Rabbi Ehud Bandel gave the Conservative Jewish perspective on homosexuality

Picture: Gregory Storer

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While each speaker had his or her own special niche they wanted to relate to the assembled crowd, there were themes that were consistent throughout.

That, while he hadn't been a religious man for many decades, Norman still did his best to live his life by the 613 Jewish mitzvot. That he was a man of great tolerance and patience. That his relationship with his beloved wife Evelyn, while not without some differences of opinion, was one of mutual respect and trust, comradeship and love. That he had a wicked, indeed, unique, sense of humour that was much admired and appreciated. That he was a man always seeking to build bridges between warring parties, particularly in political life, and, most especially

between Palestinians and Israelis, this latter his life's work. One speaker lamented that he had not lived to see this peace come to pass.

Factor pointed out that even in death Norman continued to work for a better world, in that he donated his body for research to the University of Melbourne.

Norman did not believe in life ever after, but, as one speaker pointed out, Norman will live on. He will live in the lives of his children, his grandchildren, and his great grandchildren. He will live on, too, in the memories and thoughts and actions of all those hundreds of people, from so many areas of life, in Australia and elsewhere, whose lives he touched.

Even so, Norman Rothfield will be sorely missed.

Forgecast case is important for all workers' entitlements

Cesar Melham

Last week, the Australian Workers' Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union launched legal proceedings against a company director to claim more than \$2 million in entitlements for retrenched workers.

It is believed to be the first time the new Fair Work laws have been used to sue a company director personally.



Picketing Forgecast workers

making sure that workers get 100 per cent of their entitlements when a company goes belly up is something that has got to be addressed sooner rather than later.

Every union official will have seen heartbreaking cases of workers who have given faithful service for 20, 30, even 40 years only to find themselves empty-handed with the door slammed in their faces when the crunch comes.

Forgecast Australia made its workforce redundant in November last year, but there was no money to pay out entitlements, those workers were told.

It was a terrible situation for people who had given long and faithful service to the company. People like Carlos Rendich, an AWU delegate for 10 years, and a worker at Forgecast for 34 years.

The claim is against Ian Beynon, the sole director of Forgecast Australia Pty Ltd, and Ideal Pty Ltd, another company also controlled by him.

The whole question of

This was the only job Rendich had ever had since he arrived in Australia from Chile. And now he had no job, and the only money he got was from the taxpayer-funded General Employee Entitlements and Redundancy Scheme (GEERS). GEERS is a limited safety net, but doesn't provide for 100% of entitlements.

The AWU and the AMWU both had agreements in place at Forgecast. In both cases those agreements had redundancy of eight weeks pay for the first four years of service, and three weeks for each year thereafter, capped at 85 weeks.

Workers, stunned by the position they found themselves in, picketed for five months, but it was obvious there was no money forthcoming.

This case is important for Forgecast workers, but it's also important for every other worker and employer in the country. It is an opportunity to set a precedent which could have far-reaching implications now and into the future.

It is not inexpensive to undertake a legal quest such as this, but the AWU and the AMWU have committed to seeking justice now and into the future for workers who lose their jobs.

No matter the outcome of this case, the bigger picture remains that Australia must have some form of guarantee of workers' entitlements. It should be a scheme that gives people who have lost their jobs 100% of what they are owed.

And that money should not come from taxpayers!

Cesar Melhem is Victorian Secretary of the AWU. We received his blog via Andrew Casey.



Cesar Melham

Jewish and Palestinian groups announce joint internships

This is a US story – when can we see a similar event in Australia? – Ed.

Americans for Peace Now (APN) and the American Task Force on Palestine (ATFP) are today announcing a new joint summer internship program. APN will host a Palestinian student and ATFP will host an Israeli student. The two interns are part of a group of students – Israelis and Palestinians – who are participating this summer in the first-ever Middle East program of **New Story Leadership**, a locally-based organisation that offers young adults from both sides of the conflict a transformative leadership experience in Washington.

The APN-ATFP program is not limited to hosting foreign students. The two interns from the Middle East will join APN's and ATFP's American interns to take part in joint programming designed to expose the students to Washington's Mideast policy community. Planned activities include brown-bag lunches, visits to Capitol Hill, and a speaker series. In addition, the Israeli and Palestinian interns hosted at APN and ATFP will work on a joint project of their choice, with the cooperation of the two organisations' staff.

"This initiative is a profound expression of the solid common ground that Jewish Americans and Arab Americans

share in our joint struggle to promote Middle East peace," said APN's President and CEO Debra DeLee. "Interns enter our program with a great deal of passion. We look forward to mentoring these students, so that they can return to their communities better equipped to advocate for peace. We are proud to do this in partnership with ATFP".

Dr Ziad Asali, ATFP's president said: "A two-state solution can only come about through partnership between Palestinians and Israelis, between Jewish- and Palestinian-Americans. Through this joint program, we are sending a clear message: peace is not a zero-sum game, it is in the interest of both nations, and it is in the interest of the United States. We are looking forward to continuing our close cooperation with our long-standing colleagues at APN towards a historic compromise for viable peace."

APN and ATFP have previously offered joint summer intern programming. The two organisations cooperate in a range of other programs, including joint speaking events. APN is America's leading Jewish organisation advocating peace for Israel. ATFP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan Palestinian-American organisation that advocates that an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement based on two states is in the American national interest.

Iran's oppositionists are winning

Reza Aslan

[The UN passed new sanctions against Iran in early June, just as Iranians prepared to mark the anniversary of last year's rigged election with more protests. But Reza Aslan says the regime is already crippled beyond repair—and has a lot more to deal with than more useless sanctions – The Daily Beast.]

As the Iranian regime deals with yet another round of UN sanctions, it arguably has a much bigger problem on its hands than the actions of the Security Council. This weekend marks the first anniversary of the disputed elections that returned Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power and, despite outward signs of defiance, the Iranian government is preparing for what it fears may be the resurrection of the Green Movement.

The truth is that the Green Movement was never actually dead. On the contrary, the broad coalition of young people, merchants, intellectuals, and religious leaders that took to the streets to protest the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a year ago this week has been spectacularly successful in achieving the one goal that they all had in common: the de-legitimisation of the Iranian regime. Put simply, the Green Movement, through its blood and sacrifice, has convinced almost all Iranians, regardless of their piety or their politics, that the Islamic Republic in its current iteration is neither Islamic nor a republic.

The Iranian regime bases its legitimacy on two fundamental pillars. The first is its self-ascribed role as the locus of Islamic morality. This has long been a persuasive argument for its supreme authority, particularly among the "pious masses," the large, mostly rural, working-class Iranians who look to the state to provide moral guidance. It is this pillar that has been most severely damaged as a result of the post-election demonstrations.

The brutality with which the regime cracked down on protesters—the beatings and murder of unarmed children on the streets, the rape and torture in Iran's sadistic prisons, the public attacks against some of the country's most senior religious figures—are certainly not new events in Iran. However, unlike in previous uprisings over the last decade (and there have been many), these actions were broadcast all across the country. Through satellite television, the Internet, and sheer word of mouth, almost every Iranian was able to keep up with the daily deluge of images that poured out the country.

But perhaps the biggest crack in the façade of Islamic morality came not from any actions by the Green Movement, but through the militarisation of Iranian politics. Iran analysts have for years been warning about the country's slow drift toward military dictatorship. But the chaotic aftermath of the elections, and the resulting usurpation of



New technology has played a major role in the growth of the Iranian opposition

the nation's police force by Iran's Revolutionary Guard (something Iranian law expressly forbids), have formalised the transfer. Today, the Revolutionary Guard controls almost all levers of Iran's government and, through its subsidiaries in the oil, natural gas, and telecommunications industry, nearly a third of Iran's annual budget.

What's more, Ahmadinejad, himself a former member of the Revolutionary Guard, has been steadily distancing himself from the mullahs who used to run the country. His cabinet has ceased attending meetings of the Expediency Council, whose members represent the interests of the clerical elite. Earlier this year, Ahmadinejad told a Farsi-language newspaper that in his opinion, "administering the country should not be left to the [supreme] leader, the religious scholars, and other [clerics]."

The regime's religious credentials are even being questioned by some of the most senior religious figures and institutions in Iran. The Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who before his death this year was Iran's highest religious authority (the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is the country's highest political, not religious, authority), issued a fatwa calling the government illegitimate. Even the hardline conservative Ayatollah Ahmad

Jannati, who has been one of Ahmadinejad's most vocal supporters, has been critical of the government. Ahmadinejad's relationship with the religious establishment has been so strained that some of the most prominent members of the powerful Assembly of Experts, the generally conservative religious body that chooses the supreme leader, boycotted his swearing-in ceremony—as did every single family member of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic's founder.

From top to bottom, the patina of religious legitimacy that the state has thus far enjoyed has been scraped away, most significantly by a new crop of seminary students in Iran's religious capital, Qom. They are increasingly tempering their disappointment in the Islamic Republic with their excitement at the growing influence of the Najaf School, headed by Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. He represents a more traditional, apolitical interpretation of Shia Islam, and has been flooding Qom's seminaries with his disciples. Najaf itself has also been admitting a steady stream of students eager to study a version of Shia theology un-tinged by the political theology of Khomeini.

Reza Aslan is an Iranian-American writer, a Shia Muslim, and a contributing editor for the *Daily Beast*. He was a guest of the Sydney Writers' Festival earlier this year.



Reza Aslan

Can Leichhardt show lead on Middle East peace?

Jamie Parker

This is an edited version of Leichhardt mayor Jamie Parker's speech opening the Friends of Hebron's Festival of Friendship.

I'm delighted to open this event tonight and thank all the people who have been working to make this evening come to reality. As the title suggests, tonight is about friendship and the power of that wonderful idea.

This idea speaks to the power of humanity over adversity. And here in this concept of friendship are the seeds to the resolution of many conflicts today.

And for people who genuinely care about peace and justice in the Middle East, we all have a choice. We can choose whether to nurture the seeds of peace, to build friendship, or increase divisions and difference. We can make an active choice to promote and nurture friendship between people. This is especially true of those of us who are neither Israeli nor Palestinian. This is not to forget injustice and suffering but to actively build the foundations of friendship over hate.

And we can see tonight in our local community these seeds of peace. Tonight we have Palestinians, Jewish people and a diverse range of Australians.

Many people ask about the role of local government. Well, I'm not about to debate a one- or two-state solution, but we know most keenly in our everyday work in our local community that people-to-people understanding is critical.

And we can see that the seedlings of peace are the many grassroots joint initiatives taken by courageous Palestinians and Israelis from both sides of the borders, often at considerable risk to themselves. These initiatives include common school, sports, health, business, artistic and community-building activities. These activities in the big scheme are fragile and need our support.

I wanted to talk about the project that this evening's event is supporting, "The Villages Group: Cooperation in Israel-Palestine".

Perhaps we cannot bring about a general peace, but we can perform deeds of peace.

We started as a group of Israeli individuals who, since 2002, have maintained daily contact with residents of two villages in the Nablus area. We have provided support to help them sustain and develop their communities under extremely difficult physical and emotional conditions. To date, we are not a formal organisation but rather an alliance of individuals who feel that the situation calls us to action. We do not operate under any banner or ideology, nor do we wage organised advocacy

campaigns. Rather than confront settlers or soldiers (where we are less effective), we choose instead to work where we can be most effective: in the human sphere.

As a result of ongoing visits to the villages over the last four years, our contacts have evolved into partnerships with mutual responsibility and dedication. We now consider ourselves one group with both Palestinians and Israelis.

They go on to say on their web site: significant and consistent improvement in relations between individuals and grassroots groups in human, cultural and economic relations can send a strong signal and incentive to the political leaderships, encouraging them to proceed towards a comprehensive settlement.

While the responsibility for the top-down political process clearly rests with the formal leaderships, the responsibility for the little-noticed bottom-up process is placed upon the shoulders of each and every one of us, Palestinian and Israeli, at any given moment. This activity, whether or not it is perceived as political, gives clear priority to individual lives and local issues.

Therefore, our Villages Group aims its activity to

improve awareness and familiarity between Palestinians and Israelis, and to deepen the human relationships between them. Our working assumption is that patiently creating and maintaining an infrastructure for such relationships on the local and personal level is essential for the possibility of peace between the two nations, especially in the present, when peace seems so far away.

The Council wants to make a commitment to nurturing the Palestinian/Israeli grassroots, people-to-people peacemaking, building the basis of civil society.

After many problems, in September 2007 Council unanimously adopted a resolution to lend its support to projects in the Middle East that included people from both sides of the conflict, had widespread local community support and were genuinely humanitarian, among other things. I note that both the Leichhardt Friends of Hebron and the Inner West Chavurah worked on this resolution.

I want to reassert and renew the heart of that that commitment here tonight

There are many excellent Palestinian and Israeli organisations and courageous people, who are working together on practical peace-building programs, some of which involve people from Hebron, or are taking place

(Continued on page 9)



Jamie Parker



Village League members assisted Palestinian farmers after their olive trees were cut by settlers.

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there and also in Bethlehem. Many of these programs have international supporters, including regional and national governments.

There are some great examples:

There are linked Peace Sports schools – an extracurricular program for schoolchildren, that has been taking place in Hebron in recent years, where the kids come together to play sport through a peace education program; similar programs include Palestinian and Israeli girls soccer teams and father and sons joint teams

There are linked Peace Kindergartens, where Arab and Jewish children meet weekly to participate in a joint session, that is delivered in both Hebrew and Arabic. The kids do activities that foster cooperation and teamwork, allowing them to learn about each other, and be open to “the other”. There are also Family Days so parents and siblings can also come together and be involved ...this may be something that could be built into the kindergarten project the FoH are fundraising for at the moment.

There is joint NGO cooperation – for example there is a Palestinian-Israeli Peace NGO Forum that brings together some 100 Israeli and Palestinian peace organisations, including groups from Gaza, sharing ideas and common learning and activities.

There are joint media initiatives – for example, there’s a Palestinian/Israeli network of women journalists, there have been projects that have co-produced TV series, docos, and films.

The Frames of Reality project is another interesting example. In 2009 and 2010, 12 Palestinian and 11 Israeli photojournalists met and worked together over the course of a year to share their perspectives of working in a conflict zone and their photographs, and by doing so, have deepened their understanding of each other, their common humanity and approach to their work. This program has resulted in an exhibition that has travelled internationally.

There are also other examples in the area of business and economic development, in artistic, cultural areas – a Palestinian-Israeli Chamber of Commerce started in 2009, there have been joint Business to Business semi-

nars, and so on.

These types of programs actively lay the foundations for future peace on the ground. They aim to break down stereotypes, break down barriers of language, and focus on the humanity people share – in short, build friendship among people of goodwill.

It’s not all sweetness and light, of course. I know there are genuine grievances, and much suffering, but what is fostered by these examples does not add fuel to the flames, it is an attempt to build on the common humanity and the needs of people on both sides to have a future for their children that is based on peace and freedom.

We want to lead the way in local government, here in Australia, by supporting a grassroots peacemaking project/program. Volunteer groups have made great progress in building relationships across the divide, but it’s important to provide institutional support to these activities.

This is where the role of local government can be important by bringing the resources and support of the organisation to bear. I will re-establish the committee established by council in 2007, and in the coming weeks we will work with our local community including the Friends of Hebron, The Inner West Chavurah, some of whom are here tonight – part of Jewish community in the local area who reflect the progressive makeup of our community and who are in the forefront of many important social issues in our community, and others to promote and support a project of which we can all be proud.

I believe the best approach will be bringing together community groups with a passion for peace and justice in the Middle East. I trust our commitment to this joint project will create trust both locally and in our own modest way internationally. I believe it opens a way for genuine discussion and reveals the truth of the struggles and hardships those who strive for a just peace face each and every day.

Finally can I say I’m very proud that this important message is being voiced at this Festival here in Leichhardt, and thank all the local councillors, community members and supporters who have encouraged and built such a positive start to what I hope will be an ongoing success.

Leadership mum about Gaza coriander

Think of our community leadership and the way the Israeli government changed its line on the Gaza siege overnight. As on every other occasion, they faithfully and instantly adjusted to the twists and turns of a government half a world away. Whom does this remind me of? Well, some of our local communist parties last century. One day the local Maoists were frothing at the mouth about “US imperialism”. The next there was not a bad word about the United States, for they were following “Chairman Mao’s revolutionary new line on diplomacy.”

Have another read of Les Rosenblatt’s report of the leadership rallying the community to support Israel, again, in our last issue. Zionist Federation of Australia president Phillip Chester told those at a meeting that Gazans were not really interested in rebuilding Gaza and had rejected offers of assistance from prestigious and credible financial sources such as James Wolfensohn. Blockade was

necessary to counter the threat from Hamas. Rosenblatt picked up a beauty: An ex-Israeli military man explained that it was necessary to stop instant coffee and coriander going into Gaza as these had strong aromas and could deflect sensitivity towards less aromatic but more dangerous items. It was a theme that recurred in coverage of the leadership’s message in the *AJN* and *J-wire*.

Guess what: all of a sudden the blockade is being lifted. And Netanyahu and others are telling us now that the siege basically had nothing to do with Israel’s security and it can be removed without any risk. Coriander’s strong aroma does not seem to matter anymore. But to paraphrase Laurie Oakes’ famous question in similar circumstances: do our leaders now feel like dills? If they are, they’re certainly not showing it. Everyone is back to business as usual.

Sol Salbe

Gaza a Kadima-made quagmire

Moshe Yaroni

The political mudslinging between Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Opposition Leader Tzipi Livni over the failure of Israel's siege of Gaza would be amusing if it were not so disturbing. The exchange basically comes down to Bibi saying that he inherited the Gaza siege from the previous government and Livni responding that under their version of the siege, the world wasn't condemning Israel for it.

We'll get back to Bibi in a moment, but let's look at the depths of Livni's disingenuousness.

Livni is not just the current head of Kadima; she was Foreign Minister when the siege was enacted and when Israel wreaked havoc in Operation Cast Lead. Unlike Avigdor Lieberman, the FM in the current government, Livni was at the very heart of policymaking under Olmert. She cannot duck responsibility for Gaza.

Under the watch that Livni was a central part of, Israel enacted a policy that was needlessly cruel and ultimately self-defeating. For three years, the civilians in Gaza have been devastated. They, not Hamas, bore the brunt of Israel's policies. They, not Hamas, were impacted by Israel barring all sorts of household items, cleansers, food-stuffs, coffee,



Coriander has become a key symbol of the Gaza siege

cigarettes, and other consumer products.

These effects were far from unexpected; they were the sole intent of the policies. This was the very definition of collective punishment.

The excuse that "the people of Gaza elected Hamas so they must live with the consequences of that choice" would be farcical even if it was a real reading of events. In fact, the people of Gaza and the West Bank voted Hamas into leadership of a unity government that still had Mahmoud Abbas dealing with all matters having to do with Israel. Hamas' pre-emptive strike against a US and Israel-sponsored coup attempting to oust them left them in sole control of Gaza, albeit not in the body of the elected government.

Livni, along with the two Ehuds, Barak and Olmert, decided to respond to these events by depriving the people of Gaza of all that they could without actually causing mass starvation. It was this same troika which would not ease the siege, as Hamas had expected would happen if it held its ceasefire (and though Hamas was unable to stop absolutely all rocket fire from other groups, it did completely halt its own and slow others' operations to a very small trickle).

That same group escalated the conflict again when they killed six Hamas fighters allegedly attempting to construct

a tunnel to kidnap more Israeli soldiers [On the day world attention was diverted by Barack Obama's election –Ed] . And that same group took advantage of the last days of the Bush regime to unleash hellish destruction on the Strip, killing many hundreds of civilians who, thanks to the same siege, had nowhere to flee to.

And Bibi? All he's actually done is to continue the siege policy until now.

I'm reminded of an aphorism that was very popular in the 1990s: "Likud promises twenty settlements and builds one, while Labor promises one settlement and builds twenty."

The problem the Netanyahu government confronts is its own hubris and obnoxiousness. Olmert, like Ariel Sharon before him and Ehud Barak before him, also built settlements in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank. But this government is so right-wing it needs to trumpet its activities as loudly as it can and refuses to delay things by a day or two to avoid friction with the US and Europe.

And that's really the big difference. On the ground, for the Palestinians, things don't look that different. Indeed, Netanyahu has done more than Olmert to remove checkpoints and ease conditions on the West Bank, and has really done very little else that is worse than his predecessor. That's not praise for Bibi; it's a comment on how little things change for the Palestinians with different Israeli leaders.

It has long been a canard among some analysts that right-wing Israeli governments are in some sense preferable because they garner less tolerance for similar policies due to their brash public statements which annoy leaders in the US and Europe. That's something of an oversimplification, but it's also got a strong element of truth to it.

The other side of that equation is the reason I was rooting for Netanyahu, and not Livni, to win the last election: the Americans and Europeans find it much easier to pressure a right-wing government that is widely perceived as refusing peace than a so-called centrist coalition (and it is a stark picture of how far Israel has shifted that Kadima can be labelled "centrist") that repeatedly and loudly embraces the two-state solution, in word if not in deed.

Kadima in government?

The extreme right-wing nature of the current Israeli government has brought a diplomatic isolation to Israel that is unprecedented in its history. The flotilla fiasco, as tragic as it was, brought a level of international rebuke that seems well out of proportion to what has been the norm when Israel uses overwhelming military force against civilians. This would seem to be due to a general loss of patience with Israel in the face of its open defiance on settlements, Jerusalem and a negotiated peace in general.

And that would be a sensible explanation if policies in those areas were really different under the Likud-led government than they had been under Kadima. But on the ground, they're not very different. It's only in the realm of diplomacy that there has been a change, which is part of the reason so many Israelis are convinced their current problems are due to bad public relations and not bad poli-

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

cies. After all, the same sort of policies hadn't brought this kind of response in the past.

These are now important considerations because of the possibility that Kadima might, in the near future, join with Likud to form a unity government.

Some see this as the way to save the two-state solution. And it might well be, but there is also a distinct danger in that unification.

The advantages in Kadima joining the government are obvious. It will allow Israel to make serious concessions and appease foreign pressure in sensitive areas like settlements and Jerusalem without causing the government to fall. It would allow Israel to take positions and, more importantly, actions that would open a door for real negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. And it would certainly help mend fences between Israel and the Obama Administration.

The danger, though, is that Kadima's joining would also allow the EU and especially the US to ease the pressure on Israel, which they might do to such a degree that peace becomes impossible and the only thing that changes is the perception of whose fault that is.

Tzipi Livni, and much of Kadima, are quite skilled in knowing what to say to appeal to mainstream Israelis who continue to support an end to occupation; to Americans who are generally inclined to seeing Israel as the good guys; and, especially, to diplomats who need Israel to be perceived as working towards peace.

She is also quite capable, under the right circumstances, of taking real steps toward peace. So were Ehud Olmert, Ehud Barak, and even Ariel Sharon. Indeed, so would Netanyahu be, given the right political dynamics.



Tzipi Livni has unquestionably a superior image to that of Binyamin Netanyahu but she is far more of an architect of the siege than he has ever been

But all of those steps require risks. Maybe a settler attacks a Palestinian and sets off more than he bargained for, or maybe he decides to exact a "price" from his Arab neighbours for Israeli peace gestures. Maybe a Palestinian recognises that any peace process is a fragile thing and a single act of violence might derail it. Whatever the cause, real movement toward ending an occupation which has now moved into its 44th year carries political

risks and is vulnerable to the acts of extremists.

Only with consistent pressure, applied judiciously and strategically, from Western powers, especially the US, can any Israeli government stay on a course toward an eventual resolution. Kadima can help protect the government as it makes moves that the far right in Israel will vehemently oppose.

But to avoid letting Kadima be a figleaf, covering a tightening occupation with nice words and empty gestures, as was Olmert's legacy, the West must push for an attitude change in Israel. They must

insist that Israel encourage and aid Salam Fayyad's state building efforts; find a way to accommodate a Palestinian unity government and reconnect, through safe passages, the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and, most of all, cut out the nonsense that the government is powerless to halt settlement expansion.

Of course, these are big shifts and cannot be accomplished overnight, but these must be the goals and ideals of Western pressure. They may not come true, but if they are held strongly, they can keep the needed pressures on both Israel and the Palestinians to finally resolve this conflict. And then Kadima cannot be a figleaf, but rather a shield protecting needed changes.

The pseudonymous Moshe Yaroni is a Hebrew-speaking veteran US peace activist.

Australian Jewish Democratic Society

Special General Meeting

Notice is hereby given for a Special General Meeting of the Australian Jewish Democratic Society at 4.00pm on Sunday 8 August 2010 at 1590 High Street Glen Iris.

The purpose of the meeting is to vote on this resolution:

The AJDS is opposed to any BDS campaign aimed at the breadth of Israeli economic/cultural/ intellectual activity. Nonetheless, given AJDS's long-term opposition to Israeli occupation, blockade and settlement of legitimately claimed Palestinian lands (outside of the June 1967 Israeli borders), the AJDS will support BDS programs which are designed to bring about politically negotiated change through drawing attention to their specific unacceptability as obstacles to conflict resolution.

Such limited and focused BDS support might include boycotts of settler-produced export products, divestment from

military R&D and boycott of industrial/military activities unrelated to Israel's defence and security. It might also include selected sanctions or boycotts against specific Israeli academics openly supportive of the occupation, blockade and settlement practices in clear breach of international law.

The AJDS will make any decisions on these matters on a case by case basis and exercise its judgement as to the political/social cost-benefits of any such actions before granting specific endorsement or approval.

International unions' resolution on Israel/Palestine

The International Trade Union Confederation, the single organisation formed in 2006 to unite most union organisations and national federations, held its second congress in June. For most Australians the biggest single news item to come out of the Vancouver congress was the election of outgoing ACTU president Sharan Burrow as president of the world body.

But among unionists and interested observers, one of the



Sharan Burrow

most important debates related to Israel/Palestine. The Congress of South African Trade Unions led moves for a strong resolution supporting "the expression of solidarity with the suffering people of Palestine as a result of Israel's occupation and aggression." Nobody in the union movement has more moral authority to speak about "Israeli Apartheid" than COSATU. Yet for all their prestige, the South Africans were unable to garner enough support

for their resolution even to reach the congress floor.

What was adopted by the congress was a nuanced resolution containing points similar to those argued by many in the Israeli peace movement. It was not what COSATU would have liked, but it went further than the stance of the Netanyahu government in opposing the settlements and Israel's disproportionate use of force. Here are relevant extracts from the concluding resolution.

12. The quest for a comprehensive peace between Israel and Palestine, based on the co-existence in conditions of security of two sovereign, independent and viable states, requires renewed international attention and support as a highest and urgent priority. Congress asserts that the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967), which recognises the 1967 borders, and 338 (1973), are fundamental to the achievement of a just and lasting peace. Congress recognises that action to address the plight of Palestinian refugees, also in light of the relevant UN resolutions, is a key building block for peaceful and constructive relations between Israel and Palestine and their neighbours. Congress further calls for universal recognition of Israel's right to exist, next to an independent viable Palestinian state, acknowledging that this is essential to achieving a peaceful solution.

13. The continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the existence of illegal Israeli settlements there and their impacts on the lives of Palestinians including their access to water, along with the blockade of Gaza and the extremist policies of Hamas, impose severe constraints on the potential for Palestinian economic and social development and make many Palestinian workers dependent on precarious work in the settlements. Egypt's decision to impose heavy restrictions on its border with Gaza will

worsen the already deep economic crisis affecting those living in Gaza.

14. Israel's December 2008 invasion of Gaza in response to rocket attacks, and the failure to respect the UN Security Council Resolution calling for a ceasefire were reckless and unacceptable, costing the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians. These events were yet another example of the deadly cycle of provocation and reaction, which only serves to deepen extremist attitudes and puts the prospect of a resolution of the conflict yet further from reach.

15. Recognising the ending of Israel's presence in Gaza as an important step towards resolving the conflict, Congress calls for the lifting of the blockade on Gaza in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1860 (2009) and for Israel to end the occupation of the West Bank and to remove all settlements. Congress recognises that economic relations with the settlements help to sustain their existence, in violation of international law.

16. While every country has the right to defend recognised borders and the lives and well-being of its population, the building by the Israeli government of a separation wall which intrudes substantially into Palestinian territory is a violation of international law which can only make peace and mutual coexistence harder to achieve. Congress calls for the wall to be removed, recognising that the mutual security of and respect between Israelis and Palestinians is central to the quest for peace. Congress calls for Israel and Syria to reach agreement on Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights, with the attendant guarantees for its security.

17. Congress urges both Israelis and Palestinians to renounce violence, commit to an immediate and lasting ceasefire and immediately engage in direct negotiations as envisioned in the "Road Map" launched in 2002 by the US, Russia, the UN and the EU. It recognises that agreement on the status of Jerusalem is central to resolving the conflict, and underlines the urgent and imperative need for the international community to support, in every way possible, the realisation of a peaceful and just solution.

18. Congress welcomes the landmark agreement between Histadrut and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions on the rights of Palestinian workers, which was finalised with the assistance of the ITUC in August 2008, and initiatives by Global Union Federations in their sectors to support cooperation in defence of workers' rights. This agreement, and other actions to promote decent work and end discrimination, are crucial to building the basis for just and equitable economic development.

19. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian workers are unable to find employment under current conditions, causing widespread despair and disillusion, and Congress calls for urgent action to promote decent work opportunities for them. Congress commits the ITUC to continue to support the strengthening of cooperation between the Palestinian and Israeli trade union movements and calls upon the international community to support Palestinian economic reconstruction and development, including through the ILO Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection.

Vale Jose Saramago

Sol Salbe

An Israeli maven had a neat turn of phrase about Jose Saramago, who died in June. Menachem Peri, Professor of Literature at Tel Aviv University, told *Haaretz's* Maya Sela that until the day he died the Portuguese Nobel Prize laureate was the greatest living writer, in the sense of the genuine great writers Nikolai Gogol and William Faulkner. Now that he has joined them the competition there is somewhat tougher. There are other great writers in the place to which he has gone.

Peri is also chief editor for *Hasifriya Hahadasha*, which publishes modern literature in Hebrew, including Saramago's works. In the Hebrew *Haaretz* he was able to make some other observations about Saramago, whom he escorted several times in Israel. But most Israelis (and Diaspora Jews) were familiar with Saramago for his strong language on Israel. The entry about him in the English Wikipedia contains a whole section describing his statements regarding Jews, the Holocaust and Palestinians.

"During a visit to Ramallah in March 2002 during the second intifada, Saramago compared the Palestinian city, which was blockaded at the time by the Israeli army, to the Nazi death camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Holocaust survivors and pro-Israeli intellectuals condemned Saramago's statement as false and antisemitic. On the same occasion, Saramago opined that 'the Jews are unworthy of any more sympathy for their sufferings during the Second World War'."

Charge of antisemitism

The latter point was a theme that he came back to, articulating it best when he said this in a speech in Brazil in 2003: "Living under the shadows of the Holocaust and expecting to be forgiven for anything they do on behalf of what they have suffered seems abusive to me. They didn't learn anything from the suffering of their parents and grandparents." The message wasn't particularly radical; many Israelis have been saying the same thing, but the tone was certainly jarring. Maya Sela reported that Saramago said that Israel cannot level the charge of antisemitism at every single criticism.

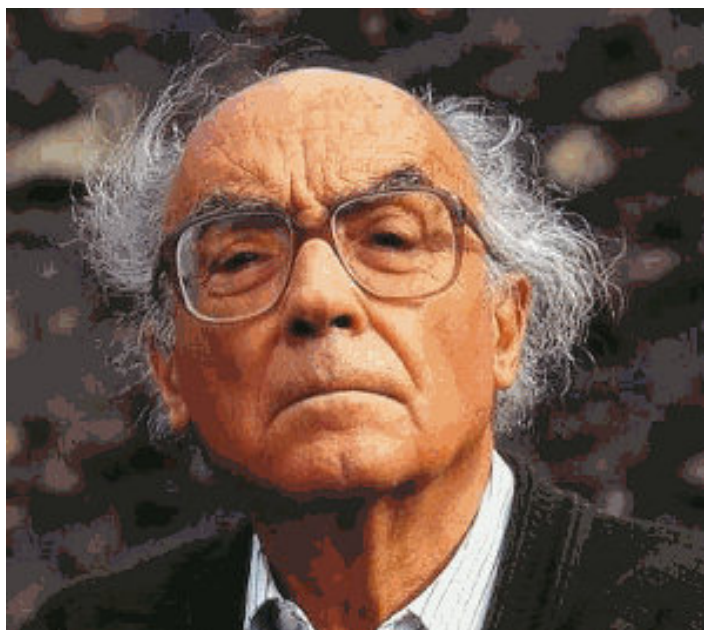
Yet it seems as if being strongly critical of Israel has had little or no impact on sales of his books in Israel, with his publishers continuing to make more titles available in Hebrew. Perhaps one reason for that is the way Saramago was just as harsh in his criticism of others, especially the Catholic Church. His 1991 Gospel according to Jesus raised the ire of the Christian world. In this book as in all his others he took issue with a domineer-

ing God and his cruel demands.

Professor Peri pointed out that the Jesus book was inspired by the writer's visit to Israel. His excitement became palpably visible as soon as they saw the Jerusalem hills. "He was taken in by the view and I could see how his brain took everything down," Peri told the paper.

A varied career path

José de Sousa Saramago was born on 16 November 1922 into a family of landless peasants in the small village of Azinhaga. Although he was a good pupil, his parents were unable to afford to keep him in grammar school, and instead moved him to a technical school at age 12. He worked as a car mechanic for two years. Later he worked as a translator, then as a journalist. He was assistant editor of the newspaper *Diário de*



Jose Saramago

Notícias, a position he had to leave after an unsuccessful Leftist coup gave impetus to more rightwing forces to assume power in 1975.

Amazingly, Saramago did not achieve widespread recognition and acclaim until he was in his mid-fifties, when the publication of *Baltasar and Blimunda* brought him to the attention of an international readership.

His work was always tied in with his politics. He joined the underground Portuguese Communist Party in 1969 and remained in it until the end of his life. He was always part of the liberal,

Eurocommunist wing. He himself explained that he was a "hormonal communist -- just as there's a hormone that makes my beard grow every day. I don't make excuses for what communist regimes have done -- the church too has done a lot of wrong things, burning people at the stake. But I have the right to keep my ideas. I've found nothing better." Yet he did write in 2003 that, after years of personal friendship with Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader "has lost my confidence, damaged my hopes, cheated my dreams".

According to Wikipedia Saramago's funeral was held in Lisbon on 20 June 2010, in the presence of more than 20,000 people, many of whom had travelled hundreds of kilometres, but also notably in the absence of rightwing Portuguese President Aníbal Cavaco Silva, who was holidaying in the Azores as the ceremony took place. Silva, who was Prime Minister when Saramago's name was removed from the shortlist of the European Literary Prize [for offending the Church], said he did not attend the funeral because he "had never had the privilege to know him". Mourners, who questioned Silva's absence held copies of the red carnation, symbolic of Portugal's democratic revolution.

Does sport have redeeming features?

Dave Zirin

Terry Eagleton has been one of the great minds of the European Left seemingly since Cromwell. But in his recent piece on the *Guardian's Comment is free, Football: A Dear Friend to Capitalism*, his absence of understanding on the relationship between sport and modern society demands a response.

Eagleton writes: "If every rightwing thinktank came up with a scheme to distract the populace from political injustice and compensate them for lives of hard labour, the solution in each case would be the same: football."

He continues that "for the most part football these days is the opium of the people, not to speak of their crack cocaine". And finally he hammers home: "Nobody serious about political change can shirk the fact that the game has to be abolished."

This message is an old trope for the Left and so musty that reading Eagleton's column seemed to kick up dust from my computer screen. Those of us who love sport must also be hoodwinked. We must be bamboozled. Are we just addicts permanently distracted from what "really matters" as we engage in a pastime with no redeeming value? This is elitist hogwash.

We don't love sport because we are like babies suckling at the teat of constant distraction. We love it because it's exciting, interesting and at its best, rises to the level of art. Maybe Lionel Messi or Mia Hamm are actually brilliant artists who capture people's best instincts because they are inspired. By rejecting football, Eagleton also rejects what is both human and remarkable in physical feats of competition. We can stand in awe of the pyramids while understanding the slave labour and misery that comprised its construction. We can stir our soul with gospel music even while we understand that its existence owes itself to pain as much as hope. Similarly, amid the politics and pain that engulf and sometimes threaten to smother professional sport, there is also an art that can take your breath away.

But like all art, sport at its essence - what attracts us to it in the first place - holds within it a view of human potential unshackled, of what we could all be in a society that didn't grind us into dust. Yes, far too many of us watch instead of play. But that's not the fault of sport. For our current society is but a fleeting epoch in history. But sports spans ages, and to reject it is to reject our very history as a species.

We now know that as soon as human beings could clothe and feed themselves, they played. Sports is as human an act as music, dance, or organising resistance. While sports may in a vacuum have no "significance", the passion we invest transforms it. Sport morphs into something well beyond escape or a vessel for backward ideas and becomes a meaningful part in the fabric of our lives. Just as sports such as football reflect our society, they also reflect struggle.

Therefore, when we think about the black freedom struggle, our mind's eye sees Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali. The story of the modern women's movement is incomplete without mention of Billie Jean King's defeat of the male chauvinist Bobby Riggs. It explains why the Al-

gerian football team was motivated to outplay England after watching Pontecorvo's anti-imperialist classic, the *Battle of Algiers*. And, of course, one of the most stirring sights of our sport in the last century: Tommie Smith and John Carlos's black-gloved podium salute at the 1968 Olympics.

Sport is, at the end of the day, like a hammer. And you can use a hammer to bash someone over the head or you could use it to construct something beautiful. It's in the way that you use it. It can be brutal. It can be ugly. But it also has an unbelievable potential to bring us together, to provide health, fun, enjoyment, and of course pulse-racing excitement.

Eagleton, who has written extensively about Marx, would do well to remember his maxim: "Nothing human is alien to me."

This latest polemic is more about Eagleton's alienation than our own.

Dave Zirin is the author of the forthcoming *Bad Sports: How Owners are Ruining the Games we Love*. Receive his column every week by emailing dave@edgeofsports.com. We received our copy from *Portside*.



Dave Zirin

And the AMWU's view of BDS is...

National Council is of the view that peace can only begin to take root in the Middle East when the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories ends and a sovereign, independent Palestinian State is created under the auspices of international law and the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council.

Further, Council is of the view that the so called "facts on the ground" represented by the continued expansion of illegal Israeli settlements present the most immediate obstacle to meaningful final settlement negotiations between the parties.

National Council supports the call for a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign and believes that a boycott of products made in the illegal settlements is justified and is the kind of solidarity action that can send a message loud and clear to the Israeli government.

National Council further resolves that we pursue this issue within the labour movement, both at an international level and in Australia including the ACTU and the ALP.

The approach recommended on the BDS campaign question remains one aspect of the broad solidarity and support that should be rendered to the long suffering Palestinian people until a just and lasting peace is secured with a durable two-state solution.

Resolution carried on 22 June by the National Council of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union.

AJDS speak-out/forum

BDS — Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions

How do you feel about BDS in relation to Israel?

BDS has been a burning issue for people on all sides of the Israel/Palestine conflict and it is not going to go away any time soon. The AJDS *Newsletter* has covered the subject extensively for well over a year now presenting as many points of view from a progressive perspective as we could.

In consequence of a decision of the Annual General Meeting a resolution is to be put to a special general meeting (see formal invitation on page 11).

In order to facilitate further understanding, the Executive has arranged for a speak-out forum an hour earlier where various points of view would be put.

3.00pm, Sunday, 8 August, 1590 High Street, Glen Iris

Call Tom Wolkenberg on 9885 6260 for further information



The weather was wet and miserable but AJDS Members, friends and supporters were among those who proudly attended the rally and march on World Refugees Day.

The traditional march through Fitzroy to the local Town Hall ended up at the annual celebration of diversity, the Emerge Festival.

Emphasis on the issue of refugees and asylum seekers is part of the AJDS's major aim of fighting for human rights not only in Australia and the focus countries of the Middle East but everywhere.

AJDS letter to media on new asylum seeker policy

The following letter was sent to Australia's broad-sheets by Harold Zwier and Tom Wolkenberg on behalf of the AJDS on 7 July 2010:

In a world without recognition of human rights, or humanitarian concerns, or human dignity, or sense of justice, it would be logical, acceptable and valid to treat asylum seekers as badly as possible as a way of discouraging others.

Some in our community think that these sorts of attitudes should underpin the way our federal government deals with the issue of asylum seekers. Some in our parliament think that good public policy necessitates relegating humanitarian considerations to the fringe. After all, how can you discourage asylum seekers if you start by treating them as people in need?

Vilification and Villawood was the approach taken by the Howard government and now by Tony Abbott in opposi-

tion. And the more the opposition tries to find ways to discredit asylum seekers, the more they justify the fear felt in our community and add to the fear that motivates asylum seekers in the first place.

There are no quick fixes or simple policies that will stem the flow of refugees fleeing from conflict, persecution, harassment and displacement. In selling its regional approach to refugees, the federal government also has a strong obligation to move this discussion to a level well above the politics of fear, and allay the anxieties in the community, with leadership that upholds the values of fairness, dignity and humanity that we believe are fundamental to Australia in the 21st century.

But if the fear of electoral consequence by both Labor and the Coalition ultimately drives a debate which nurtures fear, we are all diminished by that act of cowardice.

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