

## **Portland City Council Hearing**

**November 30, 2016**

**2 PM**

### **Testimony regarding corporations to add to the city's No Buy List**

The following is testimony drawn from the [videotape](#) of the hearing provided by the City of Portland. The testimonies summarized here are from those who opposed the addition of Caterpillar, Inc. to the city's No Buy List. The document contains summaries of individual statements, followed by an overall summary of the arguments made and detailed transcriptions of comments made by two council members. Times listed with each entry indicate the point during the meeting and on the video where the statement is heard.

This document was created by Tessa Courtney, an intern with the Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace and Justice in Olympia, Washington.

#### **Steve Novick**

36:00

- You should not boycott a company simply because of who their customers are.
- If Caterpillar is going to be labelled as a weapon's manufacturer, them being the only one on the list makes it appear they are the worst weapon's manufacturer, and by association, Israel is the worst human rights violator. He worries this will play into the recent rise of antisemitism.

#### **Michael Trillebuff(sp?)**

41:20

- The BDS movement, which is behind the Caterpillar bid, exists to delegitimize Israel and demonize its supporters.
- The terms used by the movement, such as "genocide" are deeply problematic.
- There is a higher standard for Israel than any other country which is unfair; other countries commit worse human rights abuses.
- Prominent leaders in the government have openly opposed BDS.

#### **Randy Rosenfield**

43:40

- The Palestinian Authority and various West Bank and Gaza businesses have not divested from Caterpillar.
- Divestment in Caterpillar is used as a means for Israel bashing.
- We should instead promote unity and build bridges. Find Israeli-Palestinian co-owned companies to invest in.

#### **Bob Horenstein- member of Jewish Federation of Greater Portland**

53:40

- The mainstream Jewish community is unified in opposition to the Caterpillar proposal.
- The speaker's problem is not specifically with Caterpillar being on the list, but with the divisive nature of the opposition's agenda.
- Why didn't the council consider divesting from companies selling weapons to the Syrian government? They commit much worse human rights atrocities.
- Much of the evidence presented to the committee was one-sided and misinformed.

### **Craig Burn**

55:55

- The tone and tenor of the BDS movement makes Jewish students on college campuses feel unsafe.
- Jews have a historic claim to the land, and Palestinians have lived there for centuries, but the issues won't be solved by the council condemning one company, a company that does business with both the Israelis and Palestinians.
- This will not help constructive, productive measures towards a two-state solution.
- The BDS movement demonizes one side of the issue, meeting the definition of antisemitism.

### **Rabbi Fisher**

58:00

- Far-right and far-left fringe groups are celebrating the decision of the committee, which they rightfully see as (unintentionally) antisemitic.
- The supporters of the Caterpillar divestment bid are well intentioned, but this is emboldening fringe antisemitic elements.
- Beyond the merits of the company, which do not meet the committee requirements, singling out the Jewish community by targeting Caterpillar hurts them (the Jewish community) tremendously and "smells of antisemitism."

### **Ross Rossman**

1:07:20

- Including Caterpillar on the "do not buy" list demonizes Israel.
- Many countries around the world have a minority population accusing the country of human rights abuses. Is this committee prepared to look into all of those countries?
- UN and other agencies like this committee "enjoy making Israel their main accused, their repeated accused of choice," while ignoring other human rights violators.
- The role of city government should not be dealing with what other countries do. The role is to represent all of its constituents and this will sow disunity.

### **Cheryl Levin (sp)**

1:37:00

- The speaker has sympathy for Palestinian victims, but what about the Jewish victims of Palestinian terror?
- The discussion is being based on false claims, such as that Israelis are colonists displacing an indigenous population, when really the Jewish connection to the land dates back 3,000 years.
- The proposal is a smoke screen to attack Israel and its right to exist.
- It is very offensive to use the term “genocide” when Jews were the real victims of genocide. Also the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza has quadrupled since 1970 which debunks the claim of genocide.
- Condemning Israel will not bring peace to the region. Both parties must work towards solutions.
- This is a complicated issue that should be studied before the council makes a decision on it.

### **Anthony Safir- PSU Student**

1:39:00

- Omar Barghouti, founder of the BDS movement, wants a single state where Jews will by definition be the minority. He does not believe both parties have equal claim to the land.
- Although people within the movement may be well intentioned, Barghouti wants to see Israel destroyed and he is their leader.
- Occupation Free Portland came to PSU and convinced the student government to divest, and now Jewish students feel very unsafe on campus.
- The same thing will happen to the greater Portland Jewish community if the committee puts Caterpillar on the do not buy list. The speaker urges the committee to see this effort and movement (BDS) for what it is and keep Caterpillar off the list.

### **Michael Wiener**

1:41:45

- **The consensus of the Jewish community is that this proposal is divisive** and deeply offensive.
- It will result in nothing constructive and everything destructive.
- To the Jewish community this is a smoke screen representing hatred and antisemitism.
- The people supporting the movement may not be hateful, but the result certainly will be.
- The singling out of Caterpillar is a red flag which says the right of Israel to exist is under attack.
- If you really want to wade into the “quicksand” of Israeli-Palestinian politics, make sure you have all the facts.
- In these divisive times, why would you adopt a proposal which accomplishes nothing, but pits the Jewish community against the city of Portland.
- He is not defending Caterpillar, but they along with thousands of other companies sell a legal product, and what happens after that, is out of their control.

### **Rachel Rothstein Nelson**

1:44:00

- The proposal accomplishes nothing other than it attempts to discredit the only Jewish state in the world.
- Such offensive rhetoric does nothing to further the cause of peace.
- For many Jews, policies of divestment singling out Israel and only Israel are inescapably tied to historic boycotts of Jewish owned businesses. **Such policies have always been intended to divide people,** so the policy becomes the issue.
- Any attempt to deny Israel the right to exist as a Jewish state needs to be called what it is: antisemitism plain and simple. Pope Francis has said the same, as has MLK Jr.
- The goal of the BDS movement is to deny the Jewish people the right to national sovereignty.
- The speaker urges the council to join the many other political figures in rejecting and condemning such hateful resolutions.

### **Randy Peterson**

1:46:05

- The path to justice must be laid with truth, not half truths.
- This proposal, rather than promoting peaceful coexistence blames only one side in a complex situation. Placing full blame on Israel masks the full history of the situation.
- The Palestinian Authority pays families of terrorists who kill Israelis. Public squares in Palestine are named after murderers of Jews. Hamas summer camps teach children to commit violence against Israelis.
- The path to economic and social justice is not well served by this SSRI recommendation.

### **Michelle Bombet Minch**

1:48:20

- An IDF hospital was named #1 in the world for disaster relief by the UN. When disaster strikes, Israel is among the first to send supplies.
- Israel receives high marks from Freedom Health for political and civil rights, and Tel Aviv was voted one of the most gay friendly cities.
- Israel is one of the most democratic human rights oriented countries in the region if not the world.

### **Michael Horenstein- reading a letter from Floyd Smith**

1:50:40

- Please do not embrace this antisemitic, BDS driven resolution that would taint Portland and its leadership as a place where hate can rule the day.
- The BDS movement exists to delegitimize Israel and is linked with organizations openly working to drive the only serious democracy out of the region.
- This proposal is based on the bizarre notion that Israel should be punished for defending itself against Palestinian terrorism. The logic is further confounding when considering the fact that both Israelis and Palestinians use Caterpillar equipment.
- BDS supporters are on the wrong side of human rights issues, they want to obliterate democratic Israel. Please don't get sucked into this twisted expression of Jew hatred.

### **Rabbi Joshua Rose**

1:53:00

- It is heartbreaking for many in the Jewish community to find themselves divided from their natural political allies on this issue.
- It is important to think about the complexity of this issue. The speaker wants to affirm that not everyone supporting this bill is antisemitic, but BDS is inseparable from antisemitism.
- Selectivity matters. When we make choices and don't think about the root movements leading us to make those choices, we are in dangerous moral territory.
- Noam Chomsky and others on the far left oppose BDS.

### **Rabbi Michael Cahana**

2:03:50

- All of the rabbis that have spoken today, from across the spectrum, have been in agreement in their opposition to this proposal.
- It is clear that Caterpillar has only been included because of the committee's disagreement with the policies of the State of Israel.
- The council has to be very careful how they use this powerful tool. This statement will be seen as a slap against Israel.
- If we want to build peace, BDS is not the way.

### **Rob Jacobs**

2:06:05

- Caterpillar is only on this list because it sells a product to Israel. If we divest from all companies selling to Israel, we would have to divest from a LOT of companies.

### **Ron Swordman (sp?)**

2:07:20

- BDS exists solely to destroy Israel, the only democratic state in the Middle East.
- BDS is opposed to a two-state solution, and Omar Barghouti essentially advocates for the current state of Israel being free of Jews.
- BDS is a subterfuge to boycott Israel, and the leaders of the BDS movement hold America in contempt. BDS espouses ethnic cleansing of the Jews.

### **Ilene Lipkin**

3:08:05

- The proposal and the BDS movement exist to undermine the economy of Israel and will have serious ramifications. The city of Portland is looked at nationwide as an icon of political correctness and this will be viewed as censoring Israel.
- This may be used as a way to fan the flames of anti-Jewishness.

**Gary Darling**

3:13:20

- The Israel being portrayed in this hearing is not the one I know. Israel is the only free society in the Middle East and should be supported by the council.

**Alex Kaplan**

3:14:50

- There has been much talk of Palestinian suffering, but Israelis also suffer at the hands of Palestinian terrorists.
- The homes being bulldozed by Caterpillar are the homes of Palestinian terrorists.

**Main Arguments:**

- The proposal is at its core antisemitic. BDS exists to delegitimize Israel. Omar Barghouti is a proponent of the one-state solution and doesn't believe Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish state.
- Many prominent political leaders have come out to publicly condemn the BDS movement.
- Caterpillar is on this list because it sells products to Israel, but it also sells to Palestinians and many other countries.
- Singling out Caterpillar as the company to divest from makes it seem as if Israel is the worst of the worst in terms of human rights abuses. It ignores all the other countries committing worse violations.
- Israel is a democratic haven in the Middle East and is ranked highly by international organizations in the fields of political and civil rights. They are not human rights abusers.
- The BDS movement's use of various terms, such as "genocide" is deeply problematic and offensive.
- This is a hugely complex issue, but divesting from Caterpillar will do nothing to promote peace and will instead promote antisemitism.

**Steve Novick full statement regarding Caterpillar:**

My assumption is that in this barbaric capitalist economy, most big companies do at least something which liberals might find offensive. When I created this committee I was thinking the do not buy list would be companies that within the context of capitalist society were particularly reprehensible. In particular, when looking at the criteria I wasn't planning on recommending a company unless it violated more than one criteria. Looking at this list, I have a couple concerns regarding the worst of the worst. Some companies are on the list at least in part because of who their customers are and what they do. My thinking is that in a capitalist economy, most companies sell service to whoever. So asking a company to say it won't sell to certain customers goes beyond asking a company not to be evil and is instead asking them to be affirmatively good, which isn't normal. Another concern is reflected in a company which wasn't put on the list: Johnson & Johnson. The committee said the discussion over Johnson

&Johnson was to be taken up at a later date. Their discussion included the lack of comparison information for other pharmaceutical companies. This is a reasonable concern because if we put a company on the list, it will lead people to assume that it is worse than other similar companies. This brings up a specific issue, and it is the only time I will talk about a specific company. With regard to Caterpillar, the committee has placed it on the list essentially as a weapons manufacturer, thinking of bulldozers as weapons, which sells to a country which many believe is involved in human rights violations. There are no other weapons manufacturers on our eligible issuer list. So the idea of putting this one weapons manufacturer on the list concerns me, because I think that some people, not realizing how limited our eligible issuers list is, might draw conclusion that Caterpillar is the only weapons manufacturer that sells to companies that violate human rights, and frankly that Israel is the world's worst human rights violator; and I do have to tell you, in an era of rising antisemitism, I do have concern over making a suggestion that would play into that...

**Amanda Fritz:**

If Caterpillar was just on the list because they are now the prime contractor for the wall against Mexico apparently, or because they are active with the Dakota pipeline development, would you still feel the same way?

**Rabbi Cahana:**

Perhaps. But I have to say, Commissioner, no matter the nuance of the decision that is made here, it will be quite clear that Caterpillar will be seen as being on that list because of its policies in Israel. This is BDS's movement, this is their technique to isolate the State of Israel.