

Americans Vote Yes for Equality Between Jews and Non-Jews Inside Israel

November 5, 2008

Election day in the United States, 2008, will be remembered in most history books as the day Americans elected the first African-American as president. But it also deserves to go down in history for another reason. It was the first day when Americans rejected the instructions of their pro-Israel politicians and newspapers and instead voted for the principle that non-Jews should be equal with Jews under the law inside Israel, and not discriminated against as they are today in apartheid Israel.

The Somerville Divestment Project (SDP) placed Question 4 on the ballot in two state representative districts, one in Somerville and the other in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The question asked, "**Shall the state representative from this district be instructed to vote in favor of a non-binding resolution calling on the federal government to support the right of all people, including non-Jewish Palestinian citizens of Israel, to live free from laws that give more rights to people of one religion than another?**" The "Yes" votes outnumbered the "No" votes 9,100 to 5,542 in Somerville, and 9,637 to 3,650 in Cambridge. If Obama had won by this kind of a margin it would have been declared a Super-Landslide!

Not a single politician or newspaper supported Question 4. On the contrary, the *Somerville Journal* reported in its election week edition that, "The City of Somerville, including all city aldermen, does not support questions 4 and 5, said spokesman Tom Champion. The mayor of Somerville also opposed Question 4 and the so-called "Progressive" Democrats of Somerville were silent (apparently supporting equal rights is not part of the "progressive" agenda.) The only other Somerville newspaper, the *Somerville News*, editorialized, "The Somerville Divestment Project has divided Somerville residents by bringing up far-away, world conflicts in a municipal context. Reject the tactics of the Somerville Divestment project and **vote no on Question 4.**" Apparently the voters saw things differently.

In 2006 the SDP placed two questions (5 and 6) similar to Question 4 on the ballot in Somerville. One called for Somerville to divest from Israel and the other called for supporting the right of all refugees, including Palestinian refugees, to return to their homeland. The *Boston Globe*, both Somerville newspapers and the Israeli Consul for New England told people to "vote no" on both questions. Mayor Curtatone, Congressman Capuano, and both candidates for governor—Deval Patrick (now the Democratic Party governor) and Kerry Healy the Republican—jointly produced glossy mass mailings and signboards with photographs of all four politicians saying "We Stand With Israel, Vote No on Questions 5 and 6." The unanimity of all these "respectable" leaders saying "vote no" made many voters wonder if perhaps the SDP's ballot questions that seemed so reasonable on the surface might actually reflect some kind of bad hidden agenda. And yet despite this intense "vote no" campaign, the "Yes" vote was 31% for divestment and 45% for supporting the right of return of Palestinians. Tuesday's vote was therefore not the first time voters rejected the mainstream politicians to support human rights for Palestinians.

The law prohibits placing the same question on the ballot twice in a row, which is one reason why Question 4 focused on apartheid inside Israel this time.

How Did Somerville Voters Respond to the Stance of Politicians and Editors?

Voters watched three presidential debates in which the two candidates offered unconditional support of Israel's apartheid enterprise. Yet instead of towing the party line (both parties' line!), voters looked at the facts, they read the SDP's Question 4 brochure (we distributed 15,000 of them, reaching nearly every household in the Somerville district) that said "Apartheid Is Inside Israel, Not Just the Occupied Territories" and that presented copious examples of specific Israeli

apartheid laws, and then they chose to side with justice and equality.

Somerville and Cambridge voters are to be congratulated for being the first voters in the United States to clearly stand up for equal rights for Palestinians and oppose Israeli apartheid.

The Significance of This Vote is Enormous

The significance of this vote is enormous. It demonstrates that Americans support the principle of equality, and believe that Israel is wrong in discriminating against non-Jews under the law. It shows that Americans do not want their government to support this discrimination inside Israel, regardless of whether Israel is "our ally" or a "Jewish state." It shows, in other words, that when given a chance to choose between the principle of equality versus the Zionist principle of inequality (that Israel must be a "Jewish" state in which the sovereign authority is "the Jewish people" and not all citizens equally) then Americans chose equality, even when their politicians and newspapers tell them not to.

Pro-Apartheid Zionist Forces Tried to Block the Ballot Question in September

Zionist influence on the American public depends on preventing Americans from understanding clearly that Zionism conflicts with the principle of equality, and preventing them from ever having an opportunity to express their choice. This is why the pro-Zionist forces in Somerville hired a lawyer to try to keep Question 4 off the ballot. The lawyer wrote to the state's Attorney General that the question was pretending to be just about equality but that it was really also criticizing Israel, and that to be "fair" the question should be split into two separate questions, one about equality and the other about Israel. The Attorney General rejected this argument and replied that the question upheld a general principle and merely stated that it also applied to Israel. What drives the Zionists crazy is that the SDP has successfully framed the debate about Israel as a question of being for or against the principle of equality. The Zionists know they can only win when the debate is framed as being for or against anti-Semitism. They are quite skilled at winning the latter, but incapable of winning the former.

Now that voters in Somerville and Cambridge have made it clear where the majority stands, pro-Israel forces are trying to put the best spin on it that they can, by denying the significance of the vote, saying things like, "Of course Question 4 won, it's just 'Mom and apple pie,'" as if affirming equality for non-Jews and Jews under the law in Israel did not constitute a scathing indictment of the entire Zionist enterprise.

Equality and Democracy are Inseparable

The SDP also placed Question 5 on the ballot in Somerville, in order to inject into the public discussion an opinion that many hold but few express out loud--that we do not have real democracy in the United States, because ordinary people have no real say in what the government does, and Big Money calls the shots. Question 5 asked, therefore, **"Shall the state representative from this district be instructed to vote in favor of a proposal to amend the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to replace the state Legislature with 100 randomly selected adult residents of the Commonwealth, each serving a one year term, to be called the Commonwealth Jury and to have all the legislative and other powers of the current Legislature?"** At first this might seem like a dramatic change, but consider that a recent University of Rhode Island poll found that 74% of Americans do not think their government should take the side of Israel in the Israel/Palestine conflict. Yet no American politician expresses this view, which illustrates just how unrepresentative our so-called "representative democracy" is. When (and only when!) the spirit of Question 5 prevails at the federal level, and ordinary Americans shape U.S. foreign policy, will it stop giving unconditional support to Israel's ethnic cleansing and apartheid laws. This is why the fight to turn around the pro-Israel foreign policy of

the United States, and the fight to win real democracy in the United States, are inseparable.

The *Somerville News*, not surprisingly, wrote, "Vote no on Question 5 and reject this silly measure." The *Somerville Journal* opted to scare people into voting "No" by writing, "Question 5 attempts to overthrow state government" (as if letting ordinary people make the laws amounted to overthrowing government.) Despite the novelty of the idea and the scare tactics of the press, and despite the fact that the people who think our "representative democracy" doesn't really represent us are the people who are least likely to vote, Question 5 received a "yes" vote from 23% of the voters--3,468 people.

Why Do the Politicians and the Mass Media Defend Israeli Apartheid?

Before mass-distributing brochures for Questions 4 and 5, the SDP distributed thousands of copies of a leaflet titled, "Why Our Government Supports Israel's Government, and Why We Shouldn't." We wanted people to understand why all the politicians, Jewish or not and no matter what political party, support Israel and tell people to vote "No" on SDP questions. The reason, we explained, is that the politicians and the media are beholden to Big Money. Big Money in turn needs to keep ordinary Americans under their control lest they revolt in anger against what Big Money is doing. Big Money is making our society dramatically more unequal and undemocratic. Big money is transferring trillions of dollars from ordinary Americans and good purposes--like health care, education, infrastructure and jobs that produce other useful products and services--to the pockets of a corporate elite for bad purposes--like enabling a small number of people to be billionaires and producing more and more weapons. The weapons aren't really for protecting us from real enemies, but rather to make the wealthiest and most powerful people around the world more secure. Big Money is transferring these trillions of dollars from us to them by means of the new "bailout" of banksters and by means of the long-standing military-industrial-complex scam. This scam is fueled by lies such as the infamous one about "weapons of mass destruction." But it has two real purposes. One is to transfer our tax money to the owners of the military-industrial-complex. The other is to provide Big Oil and other huge corporations--who fear losing their huge profits if real democracy ever "broke out" in the Middle East or elsewhere--protection from pro-democracy forces in the world by an American military with a budget that alone accounts for 48% of all military spending by all nations in the world.

Big Money controls Americans with Orwellian wars of social control--today it is the "war on terror." But the "war on terror" needs a credible enemy. To make us fear terrorists, our rulers tell us that Israel is "the only democracy in the Middle East" and that the anger of Palestinians and others against Israel is the anger of irrational hate-filled anti-Semitic terrorists who "hate our freedom" and will kill us unless we obey our leaders in every way and surrender whatever freedoms they say are necessary to dispense with so they can wage their "war on terror."

What Next?

The SDP aims to help Americans throughout the nation understand that the principles of equality and democracy that they overwhelmingly support are the opposite of the principles of inequality and top-down control that our politicians and mass media defend by telling us lies about Israel and about Palestinians.

People from cities across the U.S. have already called in asking for information and help from the SDP so they can replicate what has happened in Somerville and Cambridge, and some have already begun planning campaigns. The SDP will certainly provide all the help to such people that we can.

Why the SDP Focuses on the Israel/Palestine Conflict

This relationship between Israel and the "war on terror" and its employment by America's rulers

as an Orwellian means of controlling Americans, is the reason why the SDP focuses on the Israel/Palestine conflict more than, say, the conflict between the Saudi Arabian government and the victims of its notoriously undemocratic and brutal regime that denies people the right to worship in any religion other than the state-approved one and even denies women the right to drive a car, or the conflict between the Iranian government and Iranian workers whom it arrests for simply going on strike to get wages they earned but were not paid, or other conflicts elsewhere in the world where brutal regimes kill innocent people in large numbers. As long-lasting and as horrible as the oppression of Palestinians by Zionists is, it is not the only example of brutal oppression. Some people, therefore, still wonder, "How come the SDP focuses on the Israel/Palestine conflict and not others?" Here is why.

We live in the United States, not some other country. In the United States, no other conflict is used by our rulers the way the Israel/Palestine conflict is used, to control Americans. Whenever people oppressed by the Saudi Arabian government--or the Iranian government, or the Egyptian or Syrian or Chinese government, or by any other foreign government besides the Israeli government--fight back, even violently, to protect themselves or resist oppression, they are hardly ever reported on by our mass media; and if their struggle is reported, it is not done so in a manner to persuade Americans that they are evil terrorists who would kill us if they could. But when Palestinians fight Israeli oppression, the American mass media cover up the truth about their oppression--the ethnic cleansing to make Israel a "Jewish state" and the apartheid laws that make life as difficult as possible for non-Jews who are Israeli citizens--and lie to us that their struggle is fueled by anti-Semitism and irrational hatred that supports terrorism against Americans because we defend "the only democracy in the Middle East."

Related to this is the fact that, as Americans, we need to focus on what our government has chosen to focus on. If the U.S. government gave more military, economic and diplomatic support to the Saudi Arabian government than any other government, then it might make sense to focus there. But the United States government has chosen to give virtually unconditional diplomatic support (all those UN vetos!) and over-the-top economic and military support to Israel, not to any other government. (Egypt is the 2nd largest recipient of economic aid, but it comes with strings to prevent Egypt from opposing Israel; Israel's aid has no strings to prevent it from opposing any of its foes.) Our government's support of Israeli ethnic cleansing and apartheid is a beam in our own eye. The principle behind focusing on the Israel/Palestine conflict is simple, and was stated clearly a long time ago: *"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"*

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SDP opposes all attacks by anyone, anywhere, and at any time where unarmed civilian casualties are clearly likely, whether the attacks are aggressive or retaliatory. At the same time we support self-defense actions and armed resistance against individuals who use physical violence to oppress people.