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'Our Enemies Are the CEOs . . . Our Comrades Are in Gaza'

The SEIU equivocates about Hamas atrocities, as some lower-level leaders side with the terror group.

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Days after Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel, pro-Palestine demonstrators rally in Time Square in New York, Oct. 8. PHOTO: RICHARD B. LEVINE/ZUMA PRESS

Liberals and conservatives alike roundly admonished Donald Trump in 2017, when he blamed "both sides" for violence at a Charlottesville, Va., protest over the removal of a Confederate statue.

"President Trump's remarks yesterday were reprehensible," Service Employees International Union President Mary Kay Henry wrote in a statement. "He doubled down on blaming 'both sides' for the hatred, bigotry and violence" rather than stand up to "the white supremacists and their racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic and anti-LGBTQ views."

Six years later, Ms. Henry and others on the left are equivocating and blaming both sides for Hamas's terrorist war against Israel. "The violence in Israel and Palestine is unconscionable," Ms. Henry tweeted on Oct. 10. "@SEIU stands with all who are suffering, while strongly condemning anti-Semitism, Islamophobia & hate in all forms."

Mr. Trump's opponents accused him of empowering neo-Nazis, but Hamas's jihad against Israel has exposed that the fiercest anti-Semites are on the left. Perhaps that's because left-wing activists view Israel's economic prosperity and Gaza's poverty through an anticapitalist lens, which holds that all wealth is generated from exploitation.

Consider statements by lower-level SEIU leaders expressing solidarity with Hamas and its cause.

"The apartheid state of Israel is continuing to break international law & wage horrific crimes against humanity. We unwaveringly stand with the families & children of Palestine," an SEIU Starbucks Workers United affiliate in Chicago tweeted. A union affiliate in upstate New York added: "The labor movement must support liberation for all and fight all forms of oppression."

“Freeing Palestine was never going to be flowers and baby animals. What the [expletive] did you expect?” another Starbucks Workers United activist tweeted, blaming the U.S. for being “complicit in oncoming destruction and ethnic cleansing” of Gazans by Israel.

“Our bosses, our government want us to think [Hamas] are enemies of working class people, but they are not,” Kooper Caraway, executive director of the SEIU Connecticut State Council, exclaimed at an anti-Israel rally in New Haven, Conn. “Our enemies are the CEOs,” and “our comrades are in Gaza,” he added before denouncing capitalism, “colonialism” and “occupation.”

Young liberals increasingly view these disparate systems as synonymous. They evidently believe that Israel’s relative affluence derives from its exploitation of poor Palestinians. They forget—or never learned—that during its first few decades modern Israel was socialist and poor.

Beginning in the 1980s, thanks in part to advocacy from future Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, free-market reforms unleashed economic prosperity. The nation’s per capita income is now more than 10 times that of the West Bank and Gaza. These reforms included tax cuts, privatization and financial deregulation to boost private investment.

“In the mid-1980s, Yitzhak Shamir’s Likud government, with Benjamin ‘Bibi’ Netanyahu as its United Nations ambassador, did cut taxes—increasing the rewards of work and investment by some 30 percent, dramatically boosting economic growth, and reducing inflation,” investor George Gilder wrote in a 2009 piece for *City Journal*, “Silicon Israel.”

“As prime minister in the 1990s, Netanyahu also ushered in dramatic deregulation, along with tax cuts that brought in floods of new revenue,” Mr. Gilder writes. Israel used this surge of revenue to create incentives for startup businesses and to develop public works such as water-desalination plants, which have supported a growing population despite Israel’s lack of natural resources.

During the 2000s, Israel legalized investment banks, international private-equity funds and performance fees for hedge funds. “Eliminated were double taxes not merely on investments in Israel but also on international investment activities by Israelis,” Mr. Gilder adds. This unleashed private capital and business development.

Between 1991 and 2000, the nation’s annual venture-capital investment surged to \$3.3 billion from \$58 million. “By 1998, Israel had 140 scientists and engineers per 10,000 in its labor force, becoming the world leader in these terms, followed by the United States with 80, and Germany with 55,” Israeli-Canadian economist Reuven Brenner writes in a 2019 article for *Law & Liberty*.

Often referred to as “startup nation,” Israel now leads the world in venture capital per capita. While it still has relatively high individual income taxes and heavy business regulation, its social-welfare spending is lower as a percentage of gross domestic product than that of the U.S. and most European countries. Israel also spends more of its GDP on defense than any other developed country, a necessity in a hostile neighborhood.

Compared with the rest of the Middle East, Israel is a free-market mecca. That’s not the only reason Israelis have grown wealthy while Palestinians and neighboring Arabs remain impoverished. Soviet emigres also provided a burst of human capital, and Israeli schools place a high emphasis on meritocracy.

Yet union and progressive activists are so blinded by their disdain for capitalism that they can't bring themselves to acknowledge the role of economic freedom in creating Israel's prosperity. Instead, they spin an intellectually bankrupt narrative about colonialism. Their obsession with grievance and ideology leads them to rationalize the worst of humanity.

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