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'As long as you choose to be on that side, I'm going to continue to hate you'

by tammi rossman-benjamin

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"Bringing down Israel will really benefit everyone in the world and everyone in society, particularly workers."

These words were spoken by Lara Kiswani, executive director of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center, at a Nov. 12 panel discussion at U.C. Berkeley organized by the BDS Caucus of UAW 2865, the union for 13,000 University of California graduate student workers. Those grad student-teachers and other workers will be voting on a union resolution to boycott Israel on Dec. 4.

Throughout her talk, Kiswani made crystal clear that the goal of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel is not to legitimately criticize Israeli policy, but rather to bring an end to the Jewish state, and she claimed that UAW 2865 members will be playing an important role in achieving that goal should they approve the BDS resolution in their vote next week:

- "BDS is about isolating Zionism."
- "I think you should boycott any Zionist institution, academic, organization, whether it be from 1967 occupied Palestine or 1948 occupied Palestine, because BDS really should be about shifting the cultural framework and shifting how we see Israel and isolating it and making it feel unwelcome anywhere and everywhere."
- "We have demanded that the world take a stand in isolating Israel everywhere."
- "We're resisting colonialism in Palestine, and colonialism entails all of occupied Palestine from Haifa to Jerusalem to Ramallah."

Make no mistake: Calling for the elimination of the world's only Jewish state is anti-Semitic. Not only do the United States and Canada consider denying Jews the right to self-determination a prime example of anti-Semitism, but the vast majority of Jews around the world experience BDS and other attempts to "bring down Israel" as a deeply anti-Semitic assault on the entire Jewish people.

Not surprisingly, the UAW 2865's upcoming vote to boycott Israel and other campaigns to promote anti-Israel divestment resolutions in U.C. student senates have created a hostile, anti-Semitic environment for many Jewish students who support the Jewish state. One Jewish graduate student who attended the recent UAW 2865 BDS Caucus event had this to say during the Q&A period:

"I'm the voice of dissent in this room ... I am a rank-and-file member of the union. I'm Latina. I'm Jewish, and I'm pro-Israel, and I'm really disturbed because I want to dialogue with people on the other side, and I really just feel a strong sense of hatred coming from the voices and the language. ... I'm just worried that we're creating a microcosm on this, our very own campus, with the kind of hatred that exists in Palestine and in Israel. ... I also have to say, it is very, very hard to listen to this and not think this has something to do with Jewish identity... I feel extremely threatened as a Jew by what you guys are saying ... the way that you are talking is so aggressive and so ... anti-Semitic."

The graduate student's heartfelt remarks were met with the following hate-filled response from Kiswani:

"See, part of the problem with the Palestine question particularly on campus is it always gets framed as this two-sided thing and liberal democracy loves to make it seem like everyone has a right to speak, including the oppressor alongside the oppressed. ... I don't think that this form of liberal democracy really has a place in terms of real struggle. ... Maybe liberal Zionists here on this campus have a hard time understanding what that means. ... As long as you choose to be on that side, I'm going to continue to hate you."

After Kiswani's remarks, the Jewish graduate student left the room in tears.

This is the true face of BDS: It is the face of pure hatred.

Tammi Rossman-Benjamin is a lecturer at U.C. Santa Cruz and co-founder of the Amcha Initiative, a nonprofit that combats anti-Semitism on college campuses. To see a YouTube video of the panel, visit <http://www.bit.ly/bds-caucus>.