

Is Apartheid Only A Crime When Committed Against Blacks?

Written by Bruce A. Dixon, Black Agenda Report
Thursday, 06 December 2012 09:12 -



Most of the world supported the struggle of African Americans against Jim Crow during the Freedom Movement. Most of the progressive black leadership in this country spoke out against the apartheid regime, advocating boycotts, divestment, sanctions against apartheid South Africa. Where are they today on apartheid Israel?

On Tuesday, November 20, Chicago congressman Danny K. Davis addressed a rally, apparently supporting the ongoing Israeli assault on Gaza. I wasn't there and did not hear his remarks. I'm sure he didn't say "Israeli apartheid is fine with me, and so are the blockades and bombings of Gaza." Doubtless he deployed the standard bipartisan phrases about Israel's "right to defend itself", though no such right is accorded Palestinians, and found a way to use the word "peace" in a couple of sentences.

Congressman Davis is no fool. He's well aware of the massive asymmetry of practiced violence and the means to do violence in Israel-Palestine. He knows the Israelis possess US made F-16s and a vast array of American-made and licensed weapons. He voted to give much of it to them. Congressman Davis knows they have attack helicopters, hundreds of tanks, prisons and torture chambers filled to bursting, and nuclear weapons aimed at many capitals in the region, while the Hamas "missiles" are little more than unguided flying garbage cans. Davis knows there are laws disallowing marriages between Israeli Jews and Arabs, and that many roads in Israel-Palestine are for Israeli Jews only, while Palestinians are forced to drive or walk rutted, boulder-strewn paths blocked arbitrary Israeli checkpoints every few kilometers in every direction. He knows that retired archbishop Desmond Tutu is among the South Africans who have pronounced Israel's version of apartheid as more thorough, more brutal and more systematic than what they saw in their home country back in the day.

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Congressman Davis is, like many other members of the Congressional Black Caucus, a smart, well-informed public official, and none of this is new news to him.

Davis was around and politically active in the 1980s, when boycotting, divesting from, and sanctioning the evil South African regime was a front burner issue. As a west side Chicago alderman, he talked up and tried to introduce legislation that would do just that. I recall hearing him talk about it a few times. We had a paramount moral obligation, he would say, to act in solidarity with Africans struggling against oppression and racial injustice in the motherland. After all, a quarter century earlier support of our own people's cause around the world was a vital factor in convincing the US elite to dump Jim Crow. One could have heard those same sentiments from much of the black political class of that time, many of whom are still in office today. But today, neither Congressman Davis or any of his peers have anything to say about boycotting, divesting from, or sanctioning Israel and the corporations who do business there. What happened?

The obvious question now, is why the leaders of black America's political class cannot see and denounce the aggressive militarism, the brutal occupation, and the one-sided violence of Israeli apartheid, and side with its victims, the way they did thirty years ago in South Africa, and the way the rest of the world did in our own case fifty years ago. Is it the rivers of cash which have transformed the landscape of black politics since the late 1990s? Is it the black political class's blind subservience to their First Black President, also well acquainted with the facts of Israeli occupation and apartheid, and thoroughly committed to maintaining and justifying the massive imbalance in violence and the means to perpetrate it?

Whatever its root cause, the current support of the black political class for Israel's maintenance of a colonial settler state constitutes a massive, hypocritical hole in their collective souls. Most of the world backed our own struggle against Jim Crow, and we congratulated ourselves for contributing to the downfall of the old regime in South Africa. And now, when our turn comes round again, when the United States is the only government capable of restraining the vicious Israeli onslaught, just by the threat of its disapproval, its non-renewal of loan guarantees or weapons giveaways or military contracts ---- we are silent.

For African Americans, our hypocrisy goes deeper and further than our leaders. It filters all the way down to ordinary people whose attachment to their First Black President is so uncritical that they decouple their FBP from any responsibility for his policies. Many Obama supporters say they oppose Israeli aggression and wring their hands wishing the president they voted for and hustled others into voting for would do something different. In the eyes of the rest of the world, as Margaret Kimberley points out, they are as guilty of abetting Israeli atrocities as the rabid

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partisans of AIPAC.

What would Congressman Davis --- what would an ordinary black American who voted for Barack Obama, an American who never once even dreamed of threatening to withdraw her support over his support for the brutal Israeli regime tell a child in Gaza today? It's a question that luckily, most will never have to answer. That's a good thing. Because they don't have any good answers.

Bruce A. Dixon is managing editor at Black Agenda Report and a state committee member of the Georgia Green Party. He can be reached at bruce.dixon@blackagendareport.com.