

Bernie Sanders and the Company He Keeps

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Bernie Sanders and Linda Sarsour

Bernie Sanders has let it be known that he won't be attending the AIPAC meeting this year because of the "bigotry" displayed by that organization. In fact, he has never attended a meeting of AIPAC, has no real idea of what that organization does, cannot possibly have read their literature, if he thinks there is an ounce of "bigotry" in the works and days of that Samaritan group that has the audacity of hoping to correct misinformation and disinformation about the tiny Jewish state, a state that would like – what an outrageous demand! – to exist in reasonable security. Bernie is convinced of AIPAC's malevolence, and of his own righteousness in denouncing it. He doesn't need to find out for himself. He has such reliable sources as Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Linda Sarsour – why

would they lie? – to keep him posted on the malign bigotry of AIPAC.

When he announced that he would not be going to AIPAC's conference, Ilhan Omar was full of praise. "Thank you Bernie Sanders for standing up for Palestinian human rights," tweeted Omar, whose own comments about the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) stoked controversy and divisions within the House Democratic caucus last year

"All candidates should follow Bernie's example and #SkipAIPAC!" added Omar, who has endorsed and is campaigning for Sanders. Omar has also tried to blacken AIPAC's name, suggesting that it bribed politicians to support Israel. Omar apparently did not know that AIPAC makes no political donations. For Omar, the only conceivable reason for a politician to support Israel is if they are being paid to do so. She apparently fails to realize that tens of millions of Americans – not only, and not even mainly, Jews – admire Israel, understand its moral significance, as well as its importance as an unshakeable ally, that shares American values. For Omar any support for Israel is bought and paid for – "it's all about the benjamins, baby!"

Linda Sarsour was equally enthusiastic about Sander's brusque dismissal of AIPAC, made by her soul brother, Bernie Sanders, whom she has endorsed. and for whom she has appeared as a surrogate at rallies. Sarsour is, like Omar, a supporter of the anti-Israel boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement that many people consider as antisemitic. But Bernie apparently does not mind accepting support from those who admire that vicious antisemite Louis Farrakhan, promote the BDS movement, and disseminate the oldest of antisemitic tropes. For Sanders finds "bigotry" only among supporters, never among the detractors, of Israel.

Sarsour tweeted in response to Sanders' remark that he would not be attending the AIPAC meeting that "You can support the

Palestinian & Israeli people without supporting leaders or organizations that oppose the freedom & liberation of the Palestinian people,” Sarsour tweeted. “Thank you Bernie Sanders. #SkipAIPAC” Sarsour, as many have been chagrined to discover, has a long history of antisemitic remarks, such as her infamous description of Israel as being “built on the idea that Jews are supreme to everyone else.” This is a venerable and baseless antisemitic charge. Few have seen fit to answer her back as they should: “Linda, it is the Qur’an that endorses Muslim supremacism, for it tells Muslims that they are ‘the best of peoples’ and non-Muslims ‘the most vile of created beings.’ What could be a clearer endorsement of Muslim supremacism than those two Qur’anic verses? Or what of the more than 100 Qur’anic verses that command Muslims to fight, to kill, to smite at the necks of, to strike terror in the hearts of, non-Muslims?”

Sarsour is a stout defender and admirer of Louis Farrakhan, whose demented antisemitism surpasses even her own. And she hates any criticism of Islam. Some may remember how she reacted to the ex-Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a relentless islamocritic. With her usual delicacy and tact, Sarsour tweeted that Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who had herself been the victim of female genital mutilation as a child, was “asking for an a\$\$ whippin,” adding: “I wish I could take their vaginas away—they don’t deserve to be women.” Eventually, Sarsour (along with Tamika Mallory) was removed from her leadership position in the Women’s March after many of its supporters protested that her involvement with the organization represented a tacit endorsement of antisemitism. She may now be persona non grata for the Women’s March, but she remains, despite her many outrageous remarks, in good standing with Senator Bernie Sanders.

And then there is Rashida Tlaib, the Palestinian-American Congresswoman who, like Ilhan Omar and Linda Sarsour, is an endorser and enthusiastic supporter of Bernie Sanders. She has

made a series of antisemitic tweets about Israel. Perhaps the most disturbing was her retweeting of a tweet by Hanan Ashrawi, a top Palestinian official, who was quote-tweeting an account, @realSeifBitar, that accused Israeli settlers of kidnapping, assaulting and throwing into a well an eight-year-old child. "The heart just shatters," Ashrawi said.

In fact, the boy, Qais Abu Ramila, appears to have drowned accidentally in a reservoir of rainwater in eastern Jerusalem. Israeli first responders found him on Saturday and tried to revive him.

Tlaib removed her retweet, but said nothing publicly. Never apologize, never explain, is her motto. Even after Ashrawi eventually apologized for "retweeting something that's not fully verified" [PalSpeak for "is a flat-out lie"], Tlaib did not retweet the retraction.

This isn't Tlaib's only link to individuals trafficking in blood libels.

Before her planned trip to Israel was canceled due to Israel's refusal to admit the organizers, we learned that the "Palestinian organization that had organized Reps. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar's planned delegation to Jerusalem and the West Bank once claimed that Jews put Christian blood in matzah." This is the oldest antisemitic of blood libels.

Omar, Tlaib's fellow "Squad" member, has her own checkered past with spreading anti-Semitic content, having done so on more than one occasion.

When she portrayed American supporters of Israel as having been bought off by Jews, a full-blown scandal erupted. Even Democrats such as Nancy Pelosi and Chelsea Clinton weighed in, chiding the congresswoman for trafficking in antisemitic tropes. Yet she got away with it. The Democrat-controlled House of Representatives tried (and failed) to pass a resolution condemning antisemitism. (It instead passed an

extremely watered-down version, decrying “all hate” more generally instead.)

No wonder that in 2019, in the Wiesenthal Center’s list of the top ten antisemites and antisemitic incidents,, Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib and Iihan Omar shared spot number five for their “slander of Israel and Jews.” The Center wrote that Tlaib “launched her career in the US House of Representatives by slandering colleagues who supported a resolution seeking to weaken the anti-Israel, Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement when she tweeted, ‘They forgot what country they represent.’” Tlaib also reportedly falsified history, declaring that she had “warm feelings about the way Palestinians ‘provided’ a homeland for Holocaust survivors... ‘I love the way my ancestors provided that...’”

Of course, the “Palestinians” (who had not yet been invented as a separate people) did not “provide a homeland for Holocaust survivors.” The Land of Israel, which Arabs had occupied, was never theirs to provide. The “homeland” was “provided” not just to Holocaust survivors, but to other Jews, by 3000 years of history connecting the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland. Nor did the “Palestinians” welcome the Holocaust survivors, as Tlaib claims, but did everything they could to make sure that they would be met by murderous violence.

The Wiesenthal Center said that Omar similarly invoked the dual loyalty canard by declaring that “I want to talk about the political influence in this country that says it is okay to push for allegiance to a foreign country.” Omar “echoed a pernicious antisemitic theme about ‘Jewish money’ invoked by Hitler and other antisemites,” stating that “it’s all about the Benjamins, baby.” She also wrote on Twitter that US politicians are controlled by AIPAC.

Bernie Sanders is every sitcom’s idea of the lovable, avuncular, getting-on-in-years Jewish man, who’s retained that

recognizable winning Brooklyn accent, a kindly fellow full of Yiddishkeit, and folk wisdom, whose shtick is a special house blend of much-diluted Bolshevism and the Borscht Belt. But perhaps he's not quite so lovable, to those who know how maddeningly unjust he has been to Israel, and to members of AIPAC, who wish Israel well. We should judge him by the company he keeps: Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Linda Sarsour. That's enough. That's more than enough.

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