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BDS

The Activism of Angela Davis

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Five decades ago, a brilliant young African-American professor of philosophy and Communist, Angela Davis was the United States' most prominent political prisoner, on trial for her life in a notorious frameup murder trial as a supporter of the Black Panther Party. She won that case with brilliant legal defense, and the help of a mass outcry of international and Black community support.

Times change. When the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) was intimidated into cancelling the 2019 Fred Shuttlesworth award it had announced for her, the charges hurled at Angela Davis weren't that "she's a lifelong revolutionary and a communist," or "she supported the Panthers," or "she wants prison abolition!" — all of which are true — but that "she's antisemitic," which is absolutely 100% false.

Angela Davis, especially in recent years, is outspoken in support of Palestinian rights and freedom. That's why she, like many other supporters of the Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions (BDS) campaign opposing Israel's system of discriminatory laws and daily atrocities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, are smeared with the "antisemitic" label. Congressional representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, the first two Muslim women elected to the U.S. Congress, are of course also recent targets of this assault.

The BCRI cancelled Davis' award when it received a letter of "concern and disappointment" from the local Holocaust Education Center. But another sign of changing times is that the cowardice of BCRI's leadership blew up in their face.

The Birmingham mayor and city council came to her defense, as did a huge outpouring from civil rights, Palestinian and Jewish voices and organizations, including more than 350 scholars and Civil Rights veterans who issued an Open Letter in support of Angela Davis and Palestinian rights. After a quick turnaround the award was reoffered.

Once upon a time, the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and pro-Palestinian advocacy were supposed to remain separate, and the liberal wing of the "pro-Israel" lobby worked overtime to keep it that way. No longer. Struggles for freedom, self-determination and human rights can't win in separation from each other. Great respect to Angela Davis for helping spread that message!

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