

## Israel's Rivers of Blood

Has the fulfillment of the Zionist dream to be like all the other nations been so utterly distorted, that incitement against powerless minorities has become a politically astute response to the real problems of illegal immigration?

By Adrian Daniels | May 28, 2012 | 1:05 PM

*"We must be made, literally made, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre."*

These words were not spoken at last Wednesday night's anti-immigration rally in south Tel Aviv, but in Birmingham, England in 1968. They formed part of the now infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech by the soon-to-be-shunned Conservative Party MP Enoch Powell, and have since been adopted enthusiastically by Britain's neo-Nazi National Front movement.

For an immigrant from England like me, it seems almost impossible to believe that in the Jewish State, sentiments like these, together with another British National Front slogan, "Send them back", have been recently adopted by mainstream Israeli politicians eager to whip up popular support.

Can it be that this message in Israel in 2012 has such popular appeal? Has the fulfillment of the Zionist dream to be like all the other nations been so utterly distorted, that incitement against powerless minorities has become a politically astute response to the real problems of illegal immigration?

There is no doubt that mass illegal immigration into Israel over the last 5 years is a major problem. It has created significant social issues which affect particularly the weakest segments of our society. Those who defend the rights of all African immigrants without affording the same consideration to Israelis, whose lives have been turned inside out by its consequences, are as much to blame as our cheap populist MKs who willfully ignore the complexities of reality. Realistic integrated policies must be adopted to staunch the flow, preserve the quality of life of local communities, determine a deportation policy that distinguishes between economic migrants and refugees fleeing persecution and ensure the wellbeing of the migrants while they are here, in a manner that does not encourage further immigration. These are complicated issues.

I could almost dismiss the vicious incitement of MKs Regev, Danon, and Ben Ari and the resulting riots last Wednesday night, as a passing fad utilized by those wishing to feed off localized pockets of desperation, but for the fact that on the morning of the same Wednesday, I attended a panel discussion at the Annual Conference of the Israel Bar Association and heard the same sloganeering received with rapturous approval.

In the opulent surroundings of one of Eilat's luxury hotels, far from the decay and poverty of South Tel Aviv, I heard Likud MK Danny Danon tell the audience of lawyers that the illegal African migrants were all infiltrators, that most were Muslims and that they would inevitably become our enemies and must all be sent back.

I expected that in a room filled with people whose professional training requires them to examine every word presented to them, to require evidence before accepting assertions as fact, that most would have been - at least - suspicious of Danon's demagoguery.

Danon did not present us with numbers of illegal migrants. His figures were based on the fact that on the previous night 60 African migrants (so he told us) were caught on the border with Egypt. From this fact he extrapolated, walking us through the arithmetic (1800/month, 24,000/year) that between 20,000-24,000 Africans enter Israel illegally each year, far outweighing the number of olim. I have no idea if that number is correct, but I would have thought that as leader of the "lobby for dealing with the problem of infiltrators" his statistics might have been a little more researched.

He told us that they were all economic migrants who had each paid several thousand dollars to middlemen for flights to Egypt, and who were then driven across the Sinai to the border. Whether 5%, 10% or even 20% of them are real refugees fleeing persecution, we were not told. He said only that the "bleeding-heart liberals" who opposed the deportation of 500 South Sudanese earlier this year had convinced the court that these people were in danger, when, in reality, he told us, South Sudan is no more "dangerous" than Israel. He failed to tell us why the judges of the High Court of Justice had found sufficient doubt regarding their safety that it postponed the deportation of the South Sudanese until the issue was clarified.

Even Danon's calls to "deport them all" and "refuse them all employment" – did not result in a single practical policy proposal. It was all slogans and take-home sound-bites. Had Danon's words been received on advisement or even by apathy, I would have been angered at his cheap rhetoric, but I would not have left the meeting truly despondent about our future as a liberal democratic state. However, his words were cheered by the vast majority of the audience of 200 or so lawyers. Other panelists who tried to point out the complexities and difficulties were booed and heckled relentlessly ("There are 60 of them a day!").

If all those cheering Danon shared his view, one would have thought that they might, at least, have shown Danon himself some degree of hostility, given his government's complete failure to deal with the immigrant issue.

But in the ecstasy of sharing a new common enemy whose elimination must and can be achieved immediately, such a view would have been small-minded. If this is how easily such a simple and flawed message is accepted by an audience of professional cynics, then what hope is there for the rest of us?

Ironically, Danon and his supporters cloak their views with a blanket justification of maintaining the Jewish character of the State. There is nothing Jewish about mindless collective persecution of a migrant minority.

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