

A Plague On Both Their Boycotts!

Thought for the Day

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Broadcast from Jerusalem on Radio Scotland, 18 July 2011

It's easier now *to see ourselves as others see us* than Burns could have imagined, thanks to international travel! So here I am, stuck in a windowless cubicle surrounded by maybe 1000 buttons that the wee boy in me can hardly resist pressing, while the view from the rest of the BBC's 15th floor office in Jerusalem stretches from the Mediterranean to the mountains of Jordan.

... or maybe much further, because the media here have wound themselves up about a silly season story from bonny Scotland – not the hullabaloo over the so-called “flytilla” – no, I'm talking about a boycott of that most emblematic of Scottish products – “whiskey” (spelled with an 'e')!

The pretext seems to be that, back in 2009, some local authorities voted to boycott Israeli goods. Presumably they still recognised their obligations to their own citizens, because it was never put into effect – a good thing in my view, not least because we all rely on Israeli technology, particularly in our computers, mobile phones, medicines, and surgery! That may be why it took two years for anyone to notice, but when they did, it provoked a blizzard of calls for a counter-boycott.

Now, as far as I know, there are no distillers of whiskey-with-an-e in Scotland – but when it comes to boycotts, I'm often bemused by their irrationality as well as their ignorance: we're opposed to boycotts on principle, they say, so let's boycott the boycotters!

Meanwhile, back here, the big story is legislation based on the same perverse argument, to make boycott supporters liable for damages. This has been roundly condemned in the Israeli media, not only because it threatens freedom of speech, but because it coincides with a consumer boycott of cottage cheese – yes, cottage cheese!

Well, different lives have different necessities! One former Glaswegian wants to exempt Islay malts, presumably because of their wonderful aroma of wet sheep! And of course every boycott begets its self-serving exemptions. It's enough to make you forget the News of World, and believe what you read in the papers!

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