

Two Cheers for the March for Israel



by Bruce Bawer

Until I stumbled across a live online feed a few minutes after it started, I wasn't aware that a "March for Israel," largely involving young Jews who'd traveled from all over the U.S. and Canada, was [going to be held on Tuesday afternoon](#) in Washington, D.C., with the Capitol building as a glorious backdrop. Of course I couldn't turn it off.

But from that first moment, I was puzzled. For one thing, judging [from what I saw on-screen](#), it didn't look at all like a march. It was more like a rally, or perhaps a show or concert, with a stage and a lectern and people getting up, one after the other, to speak or sing.

For another thing, when I tuned in, somebody was warbling "Let It Be" – the Beatles tune that, as far as I've ever been able to make sense of it, preaches fatalism. Is this, I wondered,

the message the organizers of this event want to send to the world?

I looked online to see who'd put this gathering together. [Answer](#): among other groups, the Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

You can't accuse them of having their heads turned by star power. During the opening half hour, several high-school students told us at excessive length about their pro-Israel activities. We heard from two young – and rather self-important – online “influencers.” An Israeli band played a song that seemed to go on for 20 minutes. Every now and then the crowd chanted about the Gaza hostages: “Bring them home!” *Please*, I wanted to tell them, *leave the chants to the mindless Left*.

Just when I was wondering where the Jewish celebrities were, a woman stepped up to the podium and identified herself as Tovah Feldshuh. I happen to know who she is – she's a veteran actress with a highly respectable résumé. I see online that she's 74. But (like many other participants) she wasn't given a proper introduction, and I suspect that most of the people present had no clue who she was.

Oh well. At least she knew how to address an audience and had some smart things to say. “If you remain silent,” she told the crowd, “you are complicit.” And she [quoted Golda Meir](#) (whom she's played on Broadway): “Some people love you. And some people love you and show up.” Good line.

Then came, of all people, [CNN lefty Van Jones](#). He said he was there because Jews stood with blacks during the civil-rights movement. But he was quick to add that he doesn't support all of Israel's policies: “I'm a peace guy... Let's end all the horror and all the heartbreak in the Holy Land.” Was this a call for ceasefire? The crowd, which started shouting “NO

CEASEFIRE,” certainly read it that way.

What a contrast to [Natan Sharansky](#), the legendary Soviet refusenik turned Likud politician. “There is only one outcome in this battle: victory,” he told the crowd. And he pointed out that there are other battles aside from the one in Gaza: “In Harvard. In Yale. In Columbia.” Yep.

He was followed by a young Jewish woman whose family fled Iran after the Islamic revolution, and another whose family escaped from “behind an Iron Curtain of hate” in Syria. The latter’s words about America – “this extraordinary country that has brought us a freedom that our ancestors could never have dreamed of” – were stirring.

Israel’s president, Isaac Herzog, addressed the crowd by satellite. Why, I wondered, not Benjamin Netanyahu? We were informed that the ambassadors of a half-dozen or so countries, including North Macedonia and Guatemala, were present. Where, I wondered, were the representatives of Britain, France, Germany, Japan?

Then we heard from [Deborah Lipstadt](#), Biden’s anti-Semitism czar. She waxed passionate about her love of Israel. This is the woman who, as Daniel Greenfield [noted](#) earlier this year, condemned Netanyahu for being too tough on terrorism, castigated Viktor Orban for opposing mass Muslim immigration into Europe, and [defended](#) the Council on American-Islamic Relations as – get this – a voice against anti-Semitism.

To invite such a woman to the stage of a “March for Israel” was an insult to everyone who *schlepped* so far to attend this event.

Alas, Lipstadt was mere prelude. Also appearing were two senators (one from each party) and two House members (ditto). And who was the House Democrat? Hold onto your kippas. He was none other than Hakeem Jeffries, who years ago famously [defended](#) his rabidly anti-Semitic uncle, CUNY

professor Leonard Jeffries, and, yes, Louis Farrakhan.

Then there was a Muslim woman who proclaimed passionately that Hamas' actions against Israel are a betrayal of her beloved faith. Um, no.

While all this was going on, I looked up a couple of news articles about this event. I discovered that one of the planned speakers was Rochelle L. Ford, a "Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Expert." Really? Either she didn't show up, or somehow I missed her.

Who selected these people?

Where was somebody with a world-class sense of showmanship or oratorical genius? Where was – I don't know – Steven Spielberg? Woody Allen? Mel Brooks? Billy Joel? Paul Simon? I just finished [reading Barbra Streisand's memoir](#), in which she repeatedly mentions her love of Israel. Did they invite her? Of course I wouldn't expect the organizers of an event like this to invite a dyed-in-the-wool conservative Jewish writer like David Horowitz or Podhoretz *père* or *fils*. But what about, say, David Mamet?

Well, at least there was [Debra Messing](#) of *Will & Grace*. I didn't know she was Jewish, but everyone knows she's way, way out on the far extremes of the left. Which made it all the more impressive – stunning, even – that she refused to play the usual Hollywood moral-equivalency games. "This is terrorism," she said bluntly, calling the present conflict "a war Israel did not start and did not want, but a war Israel will win." Good for her.

Good, in fact, for everyone who showed up. But after several weekends of rabid pro-Hamas demonstrations around the world, this pro-Israel effort – never mind the jerky camerawork, lousy sound quality, and all-around technical incompetence – seemed pathetically lame, low-energy, and too often, I'm sorry to say, just plain uninspiring.

Yes, it was eminently civilized, while the Hamas enthusiasts have been barbaric. At the *Times of Israel*, I can now [read](#) that 300,000 people were in attendance, making it “the largest pro-Israel gathering in US history.” [Pictures](#) at the *Washington Post* and elsewhere show that the participants filled the Mall.

But you’d never have known any of this from the coverage of the onstage activity that I watched. Not once did the cameras cut away to the crowd.

A key fact. Jews make up a tiny percentage of America’s population but are an extraordinarily disproportionate part of the reason why America is still the planet’s military, economic, and cultural superpower. The purpose of an event like this should have been to demonstrate this remarkable fact. Instead, the March for Israel came off – on-screen, at least – as a rag-tag, bush-league response to the dozens of mind-blowing displays of ardent anti-Jewish hate that we’ve seen in cities around the world since Oct. 7.

And while I admire everyone who dared to show up in Washington on Tuesday, what I saw on that stage just wasn’t nearly enough.

There are over 6 million Jews in the U.S. and Canada. Somehow, amid all the savage exhibitions of support for terrorism by supposedly civilized people, the Jews who refuse to accept another Holocaust need to figure out a way to make their presence known, their voices heard, and their message – “never again!” – unmistakable.

Effectively. Forcefully. Powerfully.

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