

BRICUP Newsletter 100

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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Prize Fight

Jonathan Rosenhead

In the May issue of the Newsletter we broke the news that the eminent British historian Professor Catharine Hall had decided not to accept the award of the Dan David Prize. ([See Newsletter 99.](#)) Subsequently Professor David Shulman of the Hebrew University announced that he was giving the cash he received as the winner of the Israel Prize to an activist group that campaigns against the Israeli government's policy towards Palestinians. It does seem that Israel's various ways of congratulating itself on its academic standing via prizes and the associated ceremonies are running into trouble.

There are evident differences between the two cases. Catherine Hall has not made any statement about the political or other reasons behind her decision. However despite this silence her decision to withdraw has once again, as did Stephen Hawking's reversal in 2013 of his decision to attend a conference in Israel, highlighted the problematic view among UK academics about involvement with Israel and its universities.

The Dan David Prizes carry an extraordinary cash bonus – around £300, 000 per prize winner. The Israel Prize carries far less: 75,000 shekels, or around £13,000. However it is regarded as the State of Israel's highest honour. The organisation to which he donated his prize money is Ta'ayush, an Israeli group that assists Palestinian residents of the South Hebron Hills who are under a constant campaign of harassment from illegal settlers, and from the IDF.

Professor Shulman is a staff member of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The prize committee's citation stated that Shulman is a "brilliant and groundbreaking researcher of the religion, literature, and culture of southern India". He is also a man of principle – he has been working with Ta'ayush since 2002. The organisation describes itself as "a grassroots movement of Arabs and Jews working to break down the walls of racism and segregation by constructing a true Arab-Jewish partnership. During the second intifada they organized convoys of food and medical supplies to besieged Palestinians; they routinely break the law to provide assistance to Palestinian communities under threat of harassment from settlers or security forces. For example, when settlers uprooted olive trees on disputed land Ta'ayush

activists came with hundreds of replacement saplings to replace them.

Ahead of the Prize ceremony Professor Shulman released a [video](#) showing how the group works, and also the extreme violence of settler thugs against the Bedouin population of the South Hebron Hills, in which he announced. In this way he got national, indeed international, exposure for the group. This opportunity, along with the cash infusion to Ta'ayush, was the reason he accepted the prize. But it was not an easy decision. The Prize was awarded on Independence Day in front of the State's highest officials: the President, the Speaker of the Knesset, the President of the Supreme Court. Shulman had to receive the cheque from Benjamin Netanyahu, and shake his hand – and for good measure that of the Education Minister Naftali Bennett.

He was eventually convinced he should accept the Prize, Shulman said, "after many talks with my family, friends and activists in Ta'ayush, because at a time when we and other human rights organizations are being boycotted, delegitimized and cast as pariahs, we mustn't give up and we mustn't relinquish the entire state and its important symbols to the radical right."

Professor David Shulman received the Israel Prize on 7 May 2016. Professor Hall didn't receive the Dan David Prize on May 22. Not glittering prize days for Israel.

There is a fuller [account](#) in AL Monitor.

Free Speech on Israel

Mike Cushman

There has been a fusillade of abuse and intimidation launched against Palestinian Rights and BDS activists in the UK. This is clearly a co-ordinated attack, orchestrated from Israel but with enthusiastic support from local Zionist organisations such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the self-styled campaign against antisemitism. It coincides with the arrival of arch hasbaraist Mark Regev in London as Israel's ambassador.

The campaign however is not only about defending Israel from legitimate criticism, it is allied with the continuing efforts by Blairites in the Labour Party to undermine Jeremy Corbyn following his election as Party leader by an overwhelming majority of party members. Their

animus against Corbyn is both for his socialist agenda at home and his internationalist outlook, including long-standing support for Palestinian rights.

These two streams come together in the [Jewish Labour Movement](#) (JLM) an affiliate of the British Labour Party and is both Blairite and Zionist. The JLM is not only affiliated to the British Labour Party it is also an affiliate of the Israel Labor Party and the World Labor Zionist Organization, itself a part a part of the World Zionist Organisation (WZO). The ILP in its periods of office has been an enthusiastic promoter of the settlement programme and has always had close links with the Israeli military. WZO has played a large role in [channelling funding to the illegal settlements](#) .

Israel's defenders, even those who agree on little else, in the Labour Party [have come together](#) to malign and exclude all those who do not look to Tel Aviv for guidance or wisdom.

Much hasbara activity has been directed to accusing Israel's critics of 'delegitimising' the state of Israel. This has been a notable failure as people across the globe have noted that it is the actions of Israel's government and military that delegitimise Israel not its critics. The thrust of the attack has turned to accusing all critics of Israel of being antisemites which has been more resonant in many countries, notably France which has gone further than other democracies in making support for Human Rights in Palestine illegal. The attack is now being ramped up in Britain and a succession of Labour Party members, including many Jews, have been suspended and are [being investigated for 'antisemitism'](#). At the same time Malia Bouattia, the first Muslim elected to the presidency of the National Union of Students, [has come under fire](#) for the same alleged offence and right-wing students are trying to undermine the Union by encouraging individual university unions to disaffiliate, fortunately with very limited success.

Supporters of Palestine have organised to confront this savage attack. A group of mainly Jewish activists, including several leading BRICUP members, has come together under the banner of [Free Speech on Israel](#). Their [website](#), [facebook page](#) and [twitter](#) feed have attracted much interest and is providing a rallying point for those fighting against this McCarthyite witch hunt. FSOI are preparing a major submission to the [Shami Chakrabarti Inquiry](#) set up by the Labour Party to inquire into antisemitism and

other forms of racism including islamophobia, within the party. [Chakrabarti](#) has a distinguished background as the leader of Human Rights organisation, Liberty. Other members of the inquiry team are David Feldman, director of the [Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism](#) who has proved himself to be an open-minded and critical Zionist, so much so that his appointment was [roundly condemned by the Zionist establishment](#). The other member is Janet Royall, a Labour peer who conducted an enquiry into the Oxford University Labour Club, accused of being antisemitic for supporting [Israel Apartheid Week](#), one of the early skirmishes in the current entanglement. [Baroness Royall's report](#), despite finding that the institutional antisemitism alleged to be virulent in OULC was absent recommended that the JLM be given the task of training all Labour Party organisations in antisemitism. It is to be hoped that the Chakrabarti Inquiry will find that such highly partisan group has no legitimacy to carry out such a task.

One of the key instigators of the attack on OULC had previously worked at BICOM a major UK hasbara conduit and after making his allegations was [himself expelled from the party](#) for nominating a candidate from a rival party in a local election. Students at Oxford have accused him of making [bogus charges of antisemitism](#), allegations found to be totally unfounded when investigated by the university authorities.

Previous attempts, [including some of the same actors](#), to slander BDS campaigners have ended in ignominious failure. Most startlingly was in the case where the University and Colleges Union was sued for antisemitism. A [special issue of the BRICUP newsletter](#) was devoted to the Employment Tribunal's contemptuous dismissal of the flimsy and fallacious accusations and their poor opinion of the witnesses called to bolster the falsehoods.

Free Speech on Israel encourages supporters to [register as friends of FSOI](#) so they can encourage supporters to engage in joint action in their Labour Party, Union or locality.

[Free Speech on Israel provides speakers](#) to local, regional and national bodies on the difference between antisemitism and anti-Zionism and how to organise the fight back against this witch hunt.

Report from UCU Congress

Sue Blackwell (personal capacity)

No UCU Congress would be complete without at least a couple of motions on Israel/Palestine and a set-piece row with the right wing of the union about them. This year's Congress (held in Liverpool from 31st May to 3rd June) was no exception.

Motion no. 9 began by noting various recent developments such as the Prevent strategy, legal and other threats against BDS supporters, and "Government guidance deterring Local Authority boycotts of unethical companies". It went on to call for two somewhat surprising things: (i) reaffirming the union's support for BDS, including the academic boycott; and (ii) requiring union officers "to uphold Congress decisions when acting in their UCU capacity, and to resile from such external positions as create conflicts of interest."

Point (i) was surprising because it is normally an unwritten rule of union activists that you should never call for a vote reaffirming existing policy in case you lose it. Point (ii) was entirely opaque: even if delegates knew what the word "resile" meant, what on earth was it all about?

The answer, it turned out, was that our General Secretary had recently headed a TUC delegation to Israel in her role as its spokesperson on international issues. In the course of this, she had met with the Histadrut, in breach of UCU policy to boycott this Zionist so-called union with its history of excluding Arab workers, helping to build the settlements and generally supporting the occupation of Palestine. The motion was a polite and oblique way of reminding all UCU officers that Congress is our decision-making body and they are supposed to uphold its decisions. Predictably, the National Executive Committee put in two amendments which tried to remove both this requirement and the part which reaffirmed commitment to the academic boycott.

A lot of BRICUP leaflets were handed out in the morning as delegates arrived, informing them about this motion and also about Omar Barghouti's travel ban and the administrative detention of physicist Prof. Imad Al-Barghouti. I am confident that a copy reached the General

Secretary. Meanwhile Liverpool Friends of Palestine did a great job staffing a stall throughout Congress with copious amounts of information about Palestine as well as Palestinian products for sale.

When it came to the debate, motion 9 was proposed by Mark Abel (Uni of Brighton branch), who spoke very clearly and persuasively about UCU's history of supporting BDS over many years of debate, and how the NEC was now trying to take our policy backwards. The speeches from right-wing members of the Executive proposing the amendments were predictable and disingenuous, claiming that removing the key wording was constructive! The speakers on our side of the debate were much more eloquent. Karen Evans, a left member of the NEC, summed up the situation: "we have had to fight for our positions against legal challenges and a great deal of criticism. The proposed amendments try to unravel our position at a time when the BDS movement is under attack in several countries."

The outcome: both amendments were convincingly defeated and the motion was overwhelmingly carried unamended. Of course the Chair then drew delegates' attention to the text printed in the Agenda stating that UCU's legal advice meant the motion was null and void because it would be unlawful for the union to "call for or support" academic and cultural boycott. My view, shared by other UCU members, is that this is a wilfully misleading interpretation of the legal advice which can and should be challenged.

Meanwhile the requisite 10 branches endorsed an Emergency Motion on Prof. Imad Barghouti and Omar, which was debated on the Friday morning. In my speech proposing the motion I made it clear that both Imad and Omar are being victimised for supporting the academic boycott of Israel, but that UCU colleagues did not have to support the boycott personally in order to be able to vote for the motion.

This was carried unopposed. So our General Secretary should shortly be writing to the Israeli Embassy and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office about Imad and Omar; and UCU HQ should be circulating the text of the Samidoun call to all members and urging them to act on it.

Interestingly enough, this text ends with a call to support the academic boycott:

<http://samidoun.net/2016/04/prominent-palestinian-astrophysicist-imad-barghouti-detained-by-israeli-occupation-forces/>

I have now received a message from Imad's lawyer saying that he was about to meet with his client and would convey our message of solidarity to him. I have also had a message from Samidoun thanking UCU for its continued support.

UCU motions can make a difference: Congress 2008 passed a resolution deploring the failure of the Histadrut to pay the (then) approximately 2.5 million Euros owed to the PGFTU since 1995, representing 50% of the official organisational dues of Palestinian workers working in Israel, under the terms of the Oslo Accords of 1993. Shortly afterwards, the Histadrut released some of the PGFTU's money. Which goes to show that you don't have to meet with the Histadrut or any other representative of the Israeli state in order to influence its behaviour.

Notes

Link to motion 9: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/sfc-o-16#9>

Link to emergency motion L2:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/sfc-o-16#L2>

Sue Blackwell

(delegate to Congress, personal capacity)

Academics urge boycott of a genocide conference in Israel

By [Rami Younis](#)

Nearly 270 academics from 19 countries are calling for the boycott of the fifth Global Conference on Genocide, set to take place on June 26-29 at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In a letter sent to the International Network of Genocide Scholars (INoGS) on May 3, the academics pointed to the hypocrisy of having the conference in Israel at a time when Israel's actions are "increasingly being viewed through lenses of ethnic cleansing and genocide linked to settler colonialism."

According to the signatories, there are serious allegations that Israel “committed crimes against humanity” [during the 2014 Gaza war](#). One of the signatories, John Docker, who has written extensively in the fields of genocide and massacre studies claims that such a conference cannot take place in Israel at a time when genocide studies is “actively seeking opportunities to be complicit in Israel’s flouting of international law.”

INoGS has yet to respond to the letter, and the conference is set to proceed as planned. The organizers did not respond to requests by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), an organization that includes Palestinian academics from Gaza who claim that they bore witness to massacres during [the summer of 2014](#). Academics from the U.K., US, South Africa, Brazil, and other countries have previously signed various petitions calling to boycott Israeli academia, and specifically Hebrew University, for its complicity in the violations of Palestinian rights.

On Sunday it was revealed that famed British historian Catherine Hall had [refused to accept a prestigious award and \\$330,000 from Tel Aviv University](#), also due to its complicity in the occupation. According to a statement published Friday by the British Committee for Universities of Palestine (BRICUP), which supports BDS, Hall withdrew from the prize “after many discussions with those who are deeply involved with the politics of Israel-Palestine.”

This article was first published in Hebrew on Local Call. This version consists of extracts from the English version published in +072 Mag on May 23, 2016

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Boycott at the Listowel writers’ week festival

Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign

A vast number of people expressed concern and dismay when they learned that the Listowel writers’ week festival had accepted funding from the Foreign Ministry of Apartheid Israel: they had announced that Israeli author Savyon Liebrecht, was “kindly supported by the Embassy of Israel in Ireland.” The festival organizers responded to the opposition by stating on their Facebook page that “No monetary exchange has taken place between Listowel writers’ week and the Embassy of Israel in Ireland. The Embassy’s support is in the form of supporting the author’s travel to Ireland”. However, this form of support is still a violation

of the [cultural boycott guidelines](#) issued by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). The Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) wrote to the organisers, informing them of the Palestinian cultural boycott call and explaining its rationale - how Israel abuses cultural sponsorship to whitewash its crimes against Palestinian people, and why the moral imperative was to refuse to accept such funding. It was emphasized that, in 2005, in response to decades of occupation, oppression and colonization, a [call was issued by a broad spectrum](#) of over 170 Palestinian civil society organisations for a campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against the Israeli state “until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people’s inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law”. Israel is in constant breach of multiple international laws and 2016 marks the 68th year of its ongoing colonisation of Palestine and oppression of the indigenous people. The Palestinian people are subjected to occupation, apartheid, siege, internment, and war crimes by the Israeli state; among its numerous crimes, in the past 15 years Israeli occupation forces have killed over 2,000 Palestinian children, wounded 13,000 and jailed 12,000.

In its response the festival organisers announced that they will honor their commitment to bring over the Israeli writer Savyon Liebrecht to speak about her work, but they will reject Israel Embassy funding – a move that is in line with the cultural boycott guidelines which do not seek to boycott individuals but Israeli state institutions.

In 2004, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) – which includes the Palestinian Writers’ Federation and the Palestinian League of Artists – had issued a call [specifically asking for cultural boycotts of the Israel state](#) and its institutions. PACBI [issued guidelines for this boycott](#) and these guidelines include asking artists, cultural foundations and promotions companies to refuse any sponsorship, funding or payment-in-kind (including funding for artists to travel abroad) offered by the Israeli state. The Director-General of Israeli Foreign Ministry, Nissim Ben-Shitrit is quite frank about the overtly political and diplomatic role such state funding of cultural tours plays, [saying that Israel sees](#) “culture as a hasbara [propaganda] tool of the first rank, and [does] not differentiate between hasbara and culture”. The festival’s courageous and

principled decision came after the organizers understood that acceptance of any such funding would be in breach of the Palestinian civil society call for a cultural boycott of Israel

The original extensive article, on which this summary is based, was [originally published](#) on the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign's website.

Notices

BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.

We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings. All such requests and any comments or suggestions concerning this Newsletter are welcome.

Email them to: newsletter@bricup.org.uk

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