

BRICUP Newsletter 107

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

February 2017

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The Dog That Failed Even to Whimper

Jonathan Rosenhead

Many readers of the Newsletter will already be aware of the ground-breaking Al-Jazeera English series The Lobby, broadcast on 4 consecutive

nights from January 11th. Some will not – and in this they will be in the good company of the vast majority of the UK's population. It got a front-page splash in the Daily Mail (of all places), but this was not followed up by the sort of in depth coverage elsewhere that its explosive contents deserved.

However that silence is not the one this article's title refers to. This silence is analogous in its essentials to that of the dog in the Sherlock Holmes story The Silver Blaze. The crux of the plot is the disappearance one night of a famous race horse, and the violent death of his trainer. The dog slept in the stables where this happened. The celebrated dialogue runs like this:

Gregory (Scotland Yard detective): "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

Holmes: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

Gregory: "The dog did nothing in the night-time."

Holmes: "That was the curious incident."

The dog that signally failed to bark, not for one night, or over the last month, but for year after year is the entire British mainstream media – print, radio, television. What is the story that they missed and why did they miss it?

The set up

The Lobby is still viewable at <http://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby/> , and if you haven't seen it you should. It makes gripping viewing.

The programmes depend on 'Robin', whose face we never see. He created a cover story as an aspiring Labour party activist with strong Israeli

sympathies, and for 6 months managed to penetrate the shadowy world where Israeli embassy officials set up sham organisations to support Israel, mingle with very willing activists (both Labour and Conservative) and make funds available to them. And all the while Robin wears a concealed camera.

We have known about ‘The Israel Lobby’ in the US, and its most notable unit AIPAC, for years. Mearsheimer and Walt wrote a celebrated book with that title. The Lobby however is about the UK’s own Israel Lobby. To UK activists its existence has been known, in principle, for years. There has been circumstantial evidence galore - the inside track which Israel so evidently makes use of, the lavish funding of pro-Israel organisations, the sabotage of pro-Palestinian events. So we ‘knew’. But now we really know.

It is worth pointing up here the reason why the activity revealed in The Lobby is taking place at all - the growing world-wide success of the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. This is now seen by Israel as the principal strategic threat to its continuing domination over the Palestinian people. The frenetic and multi-headed activity of Israel’s friends, supporters and proxies revealed in these programmes is, paradoxically, a measure of BDS’s success. Israel can no longer afford to rely just on discreet words in sympathetic ears; it is mobilising on many levels. In the process, they run a greater risk of their slips showing.

For supporters of academic boycott, such as BRICUP, and of BDS as a whole, the revelations of The Lobby are both an education, and a motivator.

The plot

There is so much material in these programmes that I can only be selective. But I’ll give a fairly detailed rundown of what is in the first programme, and then get more selective.

In Episode 1 we see Robin swanning around in the milieu of Labour Friends of Israel, the Israel Britain Alliance (a Zionist Federation Project), BICOM, Sussex Friends of Israel, Jewish Labour Movement. He is under the wing of Shai Masot of the Israeli Embassy, an unimpressive but gregarious character, anxious to be popular. He is quite deeply embedded – claiming for example to know all 200 London-based members of the Young Fabians. And in fact he did organise a trip to Israel for the Young Fabians in 2015. As Masot

says in conversation: “Delegation to Israel – always a good start”.

The revelations come thick and fast. We meet a couple of NUS Vice-Presidents plotting against their President Malia Bouattia, who supports Palestine. (The Chair of Labour Students is in on the plot.) One of them, not I think Jewish, had been taken on an expenses-paid Union of Jewish Students trip to Israel. The Israeli Embassy actually funds UJS itself! A University College London pro-Israel student activist has set up the Pinsker Centre which channels funds from AIPAC to appropriate causes.

We eavesdrop on the summer barbecue of the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM). We meet Ella Rose, who has been President of UJS, and has just been appointed Director of JLM. As she herself says, her CV didn’t have the most Labour Party experience among the candidates. But hey, what does that matter if you are applying from a staff position within the Israeli Embassy? (Later, unknowingly on camera, Rose boasts that with her martial arts training – from Israel – she could easily ‘take’ anti-racist campaigner Jackie Walker.)

And then Masot invites Robin to chair the Young Labour Friends of Israel. It doesn’t exist – Robin’s job is to set it up. He is invited to apply for a job at the Embassy, first by Masot and then by its Head of Civil Affairs, who says his job would be to research the UK’s BDS movement.

What we get is a picture of a heady swirling mix of right-wing politics, ambition, wads of Israeli and US money, fake and shadow organisations, and over-weening self-confidence. Stirring the mix is an Israeli diplomat who isn’t even a diplomat.

Later episodes

We are really spoilt for choice. Episode 2 shows the famous JLM training session (on antisemitism!) at the Labour Party conference in Liverpool. This was the session at which Jackie Walker was set up, and secretly filmed so that an edited version of her interventions could present her in a bad light. It worked – she was ousted as vice-Chair of Momentum and suspended from Labour Party membership.

Shai Masot is on the scene at the conference, sometimes in convoy with Regev, or sitting hugger-mugger with him and the Chair of JLM Jeremy Newmark at a private meeting with pro-Israel supporters. (Regev says that people on the

left are very opposed to Israel “and probably antisemitic”.)

We share the delight of Joan Ryan MP, Chair of Labour Friends of Israel, when Masot tells her he has more than £1 million from Israel needed to fund trips to Israel by influential Labour MPs. We share her fury when a conference delegate persistently asks her how a 2-state solution can work – persistently because her interlocuter is dissatisfied with the non-answers she is getting. Ryan then persuades herself that the questioner has indulged in an antisemitic trope (about Jews working for banks – which we can see is Ryan’s own subconscious interpolation of material that wasn’t said). Ryan makes a complaint; the delegate is suspended from party membership.

Of course it isn’t only happening in and around the Labour Party. Masot seems to be best buddies with Maria Strizzolo, the young chief of staff to MP Robert Halfon, a Minister in the Government, and deputy chair of the Conservative Party at the time the recording happened. Simultaneously she is also a Westminster-based civil servant. Their highly indiscreet conversation is recorded as ever by Robin’s attentive camera. They talk about setting up a ‘City Friends of Israel’ for young finance professionals, with AIPAC’s assistance.

The crunch point, politically, is when she and Masot discuss the possibility of ‘taking down’ some non-compliant Tory MPs. As Strizzolo says “If you look hard enough, I’m sure there is something that they are trying to hide”. The one name that they put in the frame for this treatment is Sir Alan Duncan – certainly well known for showing more sympathy for the Palestinian predicament than most of his colleagues. But he was, and is, Deputy Foreign Minister! This small indiscretion has lost Maria Strizzolo both her jobs, and got Masot sent back to Israel in disgrace. The Foreign Affairs Select Committee is now investigating “How UK policy is influenced by other states and interested parties”.

Strategic Affairs

So that’s all right then? Well, not really. This is the tip of a rather large iceberg. Craig Murray has [ferreted out](#) of a reluctant Foreign Office the fact that Masot was supposed to be a member of the embassy’s ‘technical and administrative staff’, a grade well below the diplomatic salt. But as we see in the series, Masot is Ambassador Regev’s chosen travelling companion to the Labour Party conference – not really a technical and administrative duty. Evidently this is not all above board.

In fact Murray has examined the register of Israeli Embassy employees, and believes he has discovered what he calls ‘a large nest of Israeli spies’. It is, he says, “simply impossible” that the FCO would normally grant seventeen technical and administrative visas to support sixteen diplomats, when six of those sixteen are already support staff. So it seems that we have quite a bunch of supernumerary staff at the Embassy, up to something, and connived at by the UK government.

There is certainly some circumstantial evidence for this reading in Masot’s own biography, in so far as it is known. Until quite recently he was a major in the IDF. London was his first ‘diplomatic’ assignment, it was temporary, and he was not a regular member of the diplomatic service. The very credible suggestion has been made that his placement in London was the responsibility not of Israel’s Foreign Ministry but of its Ministry of Strategic Affairs. The MSA was set up in 2010 to counter Israel’s perceived ‘strategic threats’, principally the international BDS campaign. In the last year or two it has been on a [spending spree](#) for new ‘talent’, quite affordable from its \$50 million budget. The new employees are “mostly former officers from Israel’s intelligence community”. All this fits Masot’s profile rather well. And then there is the fact that when the Minister of Strategic Affairs Gilad Erdan visited London last September, Masot was [among the Israeli officials he met](#).

No wonder, then, that Israel removed Masot from the UK at something approaching the speed of light, and that the FCO in an unseemly rush pronounced the matter satisfactorily closed. We must hope that the Foreign Affairs Select Committee will not so easily be deflected from its task.

The second scandal

In fact the fiasco of Masot’s incompetent machinations is only one, and perhaps the lesser, of two scandals. The other scandal is how this can have been going on, evidently for years, yet no British news organisation with the resources to do so thought it worth investigating. Why do we have to rely on Al-Jazeera to cleanse our stable? It is that overwhelming silence that shouts complicity.

There is one honourable exception to this charge sheet. In 2009 the respected right-wing journalist Peter Osborne made a television programme Inside Britain's Israel Lobby for the Dispatches series. He concentrated then on the Conservative Friends

of Israel (barely touched on in The Lobby), which the programme makers describe as "beyond doubt the most well- connected and probably the best funded of all Westminster lobbying groups". (The full text is [available](#) on line.)

Osborne is interviewed for comment on the Al-Jazeera programme, and is almost incandescent with indignation about the revelations of Israeli interference with UK political processes. But some of that rage should surely be diverted and redirected at our own media. In the USA the operations of big oil and the gun lobby in distorting the political agenda are well known and visible. This relative transparency doesn't just happen – it needs an alert, vigilant media with the courage and freedom of its convictions.

The British media is a watch dog that hasn't barked. It is as appropriate to ask why that is so, and perhaps more useful, than to fulminate about the iniquity of Israel's ruthless pursuit of what it perceives to be its interests. Are the watchdog's teeth rotten beyond repair? Is it muzzled? What are the mechanisms that have maintained this complaisant silence in the presence of a blatant affront to open democracy?

Postscript

We left Conan Doyle's dog in the stables waiting for Sherlock to sort out the mystery of its silence. But nowadays the government has adopted a problematic 'definition' of antisemitism, and the Anti-Antisemitic Tropes patrols are out in force. So I won't draw any possible analogy. You'll just have to read the story yourself.

Hundreds of Belgian academics and artists urge their government to end participation in joint EU funded project with Israeli National Police

Press release from the Belgian Campaign for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (BACBI),

In Belgium, 482 professors and researchers, and more than 190 artists, have written an open letter calling on their authorities to withdraw from participating in a European Union funded research project called LAW TRAIN in which Belgium and Spain cooperate with the Israeli National Police.

The Horizon2020 project LAW TRAIN, that develops technology to unify methodology for police questioning, encounters growing

opposition. It is coordinated from Israel and includes as partners the Israeli Ministry of Public Security/Israeli National Police, the Federal Public Service of Justice of Belgium and the Ministry of Interior of Spain/Guardia Civil.

In August last year the Ministry of Justice of Portugal/Judiciary Police has withdrawn from the project after pressure from civil society marking the first time a government withdrew from an EU funded project following civil society pressure in support of Palestinian rights. Belgium civil society aims to achieve the same.

Palestinian and European civil society and MEPs have raised several questions regarding the LAW TRAIN project, the implications of the participation of the Israeli military, police and homeland security sector in EU funding programs (FP7, Horizon2020).

The signatories of this open letter highlight that Israeli methods are tested on Palestinians. Israel's illegal detention of Palestinian political prisoners, and the systematic abuse and torture perpetrated by Israeli security forces during interrogations, is well documented. And in 2016 alone, Israelis interrogated at least 7,000 Palestinians, including over 400 children.

Herman De Ley from Belgian Campaign for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (BACBI), said: *'We are deeply worried because of the partnership of our Ministry of Justice in Law-Train. The project, in our view, contributes to legitimize and normalize the daily violations of international law by Israel's police forces therefore we urge our authorities to withdraw from the project'*

For more information, go to

<http://www.eccpalestine.org/hundreds-of-belgian-academics-and-artists-urge-their-government-to-end-participation-in-joint-eu-funded-project-with-israeli-national-police/>

BDS Campaign grows on the Manchester University Campus

Editor

In December last year the Senate of the Manchester University Student Union, the largest student union in the UK, passed a motion in

support of Boycott Divestment and Sanctions against Israel. The motion, put forward by the Recognise Refugee Rights Society, Action Palestine, and the BDS Campaigns Committee working in coalition, won support from 60 percent of the SU Senate, indicating strong student support for BDS on campus. For the draft motion go to

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FrDt1ygwbc_dCFDdSoinNVuDWUvb9ZqpDg54A9W0dKml/e_dit?usp=sharing)

This success is now being built on with an ongoing campaign aimed at generating campus wide support for BDS against the state of Israel. The letter below is now gathering signatures. For more information contact newsletter@bricup.org.uk.

The Letter

We are students, alumni, academics, university staff and members of the University community who believe that everyone is entitled to the rights set out in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and as people opposed to all forms of oppression including anti-semitism, Islamophobia and the ongoing oppression of the Palestinians. We are writing to ask that the University of Manchester takes measures to ensure it does not invest in companies that aid and assist Israeli violations of international law and the human rights of the Palestinian people. We ask the university to immediately:

Divest from companies that participate in and profit from Israel's violations of international law.

Pledge to boycott the products of Hewlett-Packard both for its involvement in the prison-industrial system and ICE.

Pledge to boycott the security firm G4S.

Dissolve their partnership with Technion University at the earliest opportunity.

Renew their partnership with An-Najah University based in the West Bank, Palestine

Provide a certain number of annual scholarships for students from An-Najah University to study in the University of Manchester.

The UN has documented how Israel

systematically violates international law, including the legal prohibitions against the deliberate killing of Palestinian civilians and the settlement of its own civilians in occupied territory, both of which are war crimes. Palestinians have been oppressed for nearly 70 years and continue to be robbed of their human rights. There are currently 7000 Political Prisoners in Israeli prisons including 340 children prisoners (ADDAMEER Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association). Their policy allows them to detain prisoners without charge, clearly demonstrating that Israel is not a liberal democracy.

We are responding to the Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions(BDS) against Israel because of the failed peace process between Israel and Palestine and the continuation of the colonisation, ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, the disregard of International Law and The Universal Principles of Human Rights until it complies with International Law and The Universal Principles of Human Rights. This is a call for justice and equality and the University's support in upholding these core values that are in line with the University's guiding principles and values which state "We will be guided in all of our activities by the motto 'Cognito, Sapientia, Humanitas', "Knowledge, Wisdom, Humanity", "We will be an accessible institution, committed to advancing equality and diversity".

Israel is occupying and colonising Palestinian land, discriminating against Palestinian citizens of Israel and denying Palestinian refugees the right to return to their homes. The BDS call urges action to pressure Israel to comply with international law.

An ethical change in the investment policy from the University will ensure it acts within its guiding principles and values which states "We will be an ethical organisation with exemplary policies and procedures which will lead to the highest standards in all our activities"(University of Manchester's strategic plan 2020). As members of the university community, we believe that the university has an ethical obligation to uphold human rights and to hold true to their guiding principles and values by ensuring that it is not invested in Israeli violations of international law and human rights. Examples of companies that are complicit with Israeli violations of international law in these ways have been publicised by the UN, Human Rights Watch and

the EIRIS foundation, a leading England and Wales charity working in the area of responsible investment.

We ask the university to integrate these measures into its investment policy and to implement divestment of any shares in complicit companies within 3 years. Given that companies who have been shown to participate in Israeli violations of international law such as G4S, Veolia and Sodastream have lost contracts and share price value and suffered damage to their reputation as a result. Divesting from companies that participate in violations of international law is a necessary step for the university to take to meet its fiduciary duty.

Furthermore, we are also particularly concerned that one of the most basic human rights; the right to an education is restricted in Palestine by Israel. Israel restricts this right by deliberately targeting Palestinian universities, preventing Palestinian students from traveling to study overseas and detaining and deporting visiting academics.

Technion University “conducts research and development into military technology that Israel relies on to sustain its occupation of Palestinian land”(Technion Nation). We oppose any research partnership with The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology who design military, surveillance, and security equipment, which directly contribute to violations of international humanitarian law.

The renewal of the partnership and scholarship scheme with An-Najah University is a necessary step to show our support for the right to education and to abide by the university’s key strategies as outlined in The Strategic Plan 2020, “We will build on our successful programmes to deliver, enhance and evaluate real impact, including: Equity and Merit Scholarships, which assist talented but economically disadvantaged students from some of the world’s poorest countries”. Unfortunately Palestine has an extremely damaged and restricted economy with a quarter of the Palestinian population living in poverty.

We urge you to take these steps in support of human rights and the principles of equality and the right to education. We look forward to a prompt reply to our letter.

Ludi Simpson, Honorary Professor of Population Studies, University of Manchester, Dr Nick

Thoburn, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Manchester, Mona Baker, Professor of Translation Studies, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester
Mr Mohannad Ammori, Alumni of Medicine, University of Manchester, Dee Reynolds, Professor of French, University of Manchester, Tim Jacoby, Professor, School of Environment, Education and Development, University of Manchester, Dr Paul Kelemen, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Manchester, Deej Malik-Johnson, BME Officer, University of Manchester, Laura Allmann, Trans Officer, University of Manchester, Sara Khan, BME Officer, University of Manchester, Erica Burman, Professor of Education, University of Manchester, Dalia Mostafa, Lecturer, University of Manchester, Professor Rayaz A Malik, Honorary Professor of Medicine, University of Manchester, Doctor Jenny Hughes, Lecturer in Drama, University of Manchester, Sarah Newport, PhD, Student/Seminar tutor, University of Manchester, Michelle Obeid, Lecturer In Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, Clare Soloman, Agency Worker, University of Manchester, Stef Jansen, senior lecturer in social anthropology, University of Manchester, Tal Wasty, Lecturer, Division of Medical Education, University of Manchester, Independent Jewish Voices, Canada.

What we can legally do against the anti-BDS campaign

Salma Karmi-Ayyoub:

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Activists need a solid legal strategy to resist states succumbing to Israeli pressure and imposing BDS bans. In mid-December the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), a campaigning organisation in Britain supporting Palestinian issues, filed a claim in England's High Court challenging regulations issued by the British government prohibiting local government pension schemes from pursuing boycotts, divestment or sanctions (BDS) against foreign nations as part of their investment policies.

It is clear to most observers that these regulations are intended to prevent boycotts of Israel, although they do not state this explicitly. PSC has argued that the regulations prohibit freedom of expression, are so unclear as to be unlawful, are

contrary to European Union law governing pensions, and that central government has abused its powers to regulate pensions to achieve other, unrelated objectives.

The government must formally respond to PSC's claims and then the court will decide whether to grant permission for a hearing of the case. In fact, the pensions regulations are the latest in a series of measures taken by governments in Europe and North America to counter BDS, after Israel created a special task force with a budget of around \$25.5m in June 2015, to fight the movement worldwide.

In February 2016, the British government issued guidance prohibiting policies in public procurement, reportedly after lobbying by the Israeli embassy in London. Meanwhile, the United States has issued a plethora of anti-BDS laws prohibiting state investment in entities that boycott Israel. France has also used existing hate speech laws to prosecute activists encouraging BDS, and Canada, which signed a "memorandum of understanding" with Israel in 2015 to combat BDS, has threatened to use hate speech laws against activists. Pro-Israeli NGOs in the United Kingdom and the US have promoted legal cases against organisations supporting boycotts of Israel, often claiming that BDS constitutes a form of anti-Jewish discrimination.

The right to freedom of expression

There is clearly a concerted, official pro-Israeli campaign to crush BDS. In response, the movement and its supporters have emphasised that BDS advocacy is protected by the right to freedom of expression, just as the campaign against apartheid South Africa was, and a letter signed by some 200 legal experts on December 9, 2016 has affirmed this principle.

Indeed, the right to free speech is an important legal foundation for the movement, which protects advocacy in support of its aims and the rights of persons to engage in boycotts of Israel. Thus, court cases against BDS have been successfully defended by asserting the right to freedom of expression.

In Scotland in 2010, for example, a protest which disrupted a recital of the Jerusalem String Quartet was held to constitute a legitimate exercise in freedom of expression.

In England in 2013 the University and College Union successfully countered a Jewish member's claim of racial harassment when a debate for an academic boycott was held to be part of the right to free speech. In 2016, a pro-Israel NGO's case against three pro-BDS city councils in Britain was also dismissed on similar grounds.

This is not a complete answer to the threats facing the BDS movement however since, firstly, governments determined to pursue a political agenda to stop its activities may simply violate the right to freedom of expression. An example was the use of the criminal law in France to prosecute 12 activists for calling for a boycott of Israeli goods when such activism should have been protected by the right to free speech.

Laws by state legislatures in the US to divest state funds from entities that support BDS - effectively thereby imposing a penalty for the "wrong" political opinion - may also violate constitutional rights to freedom of expression. Secondly, even when anti-BDS measures that violate free speech can be overturned by courts, they often still have a "chilling effect" on BDS advocacy, for fighting them embroils campaigners in lengthy litigation which drains their emotional and financial resources.

Indeed, the mere threat of legal action can prevent organisations supporting BDS. For instance, in 2015 the board of the GreenStar Natural Foods Market cooperative in the US reportedly refused to allow its members to vote on boycotting Israeli goods since it feared that approving the boycott could lead to litigation.

Finally, the right to freedom of expression does not give BDS comprehensive protection. For example, if public bodies in Britain were to implement a blanket boycott of Israeli suppliers in public procurement, they might be considered to be in breach of free trade rules prohibiting discrimination on grounds of nationality, and would not be able to invoke a right to free speech to defend their actions.

The need for a legal strategy

Although BDS advocacy is solidly based on the right to freedom of expression, which should continue to be asserted, it is not sufficient on its own to defend the movement. A broader legal strategy is needed here, which should include the following measures.

Firstly, significant resources need to be allocated to provide legal assistance to campaigners and organisations subject to anti-BDS legislation or legal action by pro-Israel groups to help them to defend themselves.

Secondly, initiatives are needed to design and implement BDS policies in ways that do not violate existing laws - particularly where blanket boycotts could breach regulations prohibiting discrimination on the basis of nationality.

And thirdly, the law should be used to make the case proactively for BDS, rather than simply defend it from attack.

For example, one of the goals of BDS is to persuade governments to ban trade with Israeli settlements, since all states, except Israel, consider settlements illegal. There are good legal arguments that trading with settlements is, in itself, illegal and should therefore be prohibited. Although the BDS movement has put forward some good arguments in this respect, these could be developed further and promoted more actively. But in the end, and irrespective of how the movement chooses to fight the campaign against it, the fact remains that BDS has the moral high ground: Its goals are rooted in international law and the achievement of human rights by peaceful means, whereas the campaign against it is fighting to eradicate a non-violent movement with humanitarian aims.

BDS activists should take courage from this fact and use all legal means to assert their right to engage in BDS advocacy and resist the measures trying to suppress them.

Salma is a barrister and legal consultant for Al Haq, the Palestinian human rights organization . She is also a BRICUP member .
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/01/legally-anti-bds-campaign-170104113152120.html>

Anti-antisemitism is the new black

Jonathan Rosenhead

What do you have to do to risk losing your job at a prestigious German university? Not much, to judge by what has been happening to Eleonora Roldán Mendívil at the Otto Suhr Institute of Political Science of the Free University of Berlin.

Roldán Mendívil is a graduate student who also conducts some seminars at the Institute. For the winter semester of 2016/7 she has been teaching a seminar on ‘Racism in Capitalism’. She had submitted proposals to teach two seminars in the coming summer semester, and at the beginning of the year was notified that one of these, a critical introduction to intersectionality theory, had been accepted. And then, suddenly, it wasn’t. In fact on January 17th the management informed her that, until further notice, she wouldn’t be given any further courses to teach.

The affair started on Christmas Day when a rather notorious rightwing blogger Andreas Boas, also known as Andreas Boldt, posted up an article attacking her. Boas/Boldt idolises everything about Israel. (His children, aged 5 to 13, have been taught to sing the Jewish prayer ‘Adon Olam’ and the Israeli national anthem.) On a recent trip to Israel he was euphoric about actually meeting his hero the retired Israeli general Doron Almog. This was the Almog who in 2008, for his exploits in Gaza, narrowly avoided arrest at Heathrow on war crimes charges; tipped off, he refused to disembark from his plane.

Boas’ blog started to make waves when it was reprinted in its entirety in the German Jewish monthly *Jüdische Rundschau*. That in turn was [picked up by the Jerusalem Post](#) – and their reporter was assured by the Free University on January 10th that “The professor will not receive teaching assignments at the Otto Suhr Institute until the accusations are clarified.” And a week later this news was officially communicated to the accused herself. The Free University has commissioned a report into the accusations from a prominent German academic, Wolfgang Benz, who researches antisemitism.

It seems that the insinuations of antisemitic motivations made in the Boas blog were taken up by a militantly pro-Israeli student group on the Free University campus. The students in her ‘Racism in Capitalism’ course, however, have organised a petition in her support.

Strangely the accusations against her have nothing to do with her teaching. (She says that she does not mention Israel in her course.) They seem to stem principally from two (non-academic) blogs that Roldán Mendívil wrote in March 2014 and March 2015. The nub of the attack is that in her blogs she described the treatment of the Palestinians as racist, and their oppression as colonial. Additional ‘evidence’ cited in the Boas

attack is that she was a signatory to an Anti-Gaza war open letter in 2014, and more recently sang in a rap video! All of this will be looked into by Professor Benz.

In a subsequent interview Roldán Mendivil has taken a calm but firm position about the allegations that this is antisemitic. She says her criticisms, based on objective political analysis, were not even particularly harsh.

In the interview she says

“I am primarily concerned with Marxist theory, as well as with anti-racist and anti-patriarchal theories and struggles. For me, however, my scientific activity is not limited to reading and writing. As intellectuals, we have a social mission. So it is also a question of engaging ourselves in practice for the things we have dealt with scientifically, which in turn give us the responsibility and the certainty of being able to take up political positions as well.

Leading members of 6 national societies advocating academic boycott have written to the University and Institute authorities protesting this whole process. (It is reproduced below.) At the time of writing no response has been received.

This is not a storm in a provincial teacup. This is Berlin, the Free University, one of the main sites of the German student movement of 1968, one of the most prominent and prestigious universities in Germany. The Otto Suhr Institute is the biggest political science centre in Germany.

In Germany as in the UK antisemitism is being weaponised against critics of Israel. Perversely the more antisemitism the supporters of Israel discover (even if they have to invent it) the more they like it. Sounds like any other country you know?

Letter to-

Prof. Dr. Peter-André Alt, President of the Free University of Berlin
Prof. Dr. Tanja Börzel, Director of the Otto-Suhr-Institut, Free University of Berlin
Prof. Dr. Bernd Ladwig, ad hoc Director of the Otto-Suhr-Institut, Free University of Berlin
Members of the Board of the Otto-Suhr-Institut, Free University of Berlin

Dear Colleagues,

We have heard with dismay of the decision taken by the Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science of the Freie Universität Berlin to suspend the follow-up teaching contract of Eleonora Roldán Mendivil, and to initiate an investigation of alleged

antisemitic content in material that she has published. The precise allegations against her have not been made public, but seem to relate to material posted on a website notorious for its links to far right European politicians. The provenance of these claims should itself give pause to any academic institution, a main part of whose remit should be to protect academic freedom in research and teaching. This website does not present any specific evidence to corroborate its allegations, other than the young scholar's impertinence in applying a settler colonial analysis to the state of Israel. This analysis was in any case outside her course 'Racism in Capitalism', in which (see her recent interview) she also made no statements at all on Israel. The theoretical analysis of the role of racism within capitalism is a legitimate academic topic, as is the analysis of Israel within a colonialist perspective. Indeed an international conference on settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine took place at the University of Exeter in October 2015. According to the International Court of Justice's 2004 Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Israeli settlements in Palestine violate International Law. This position of the Court was based, inter alia, on numerous resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly, to which resolution 2334 of the Security Council has very recently been added. Were the Otto Suhr Institute to accept the rationale underlying the allegations made against Roldán Mendivil it would place itself in blatant opposition to International Law. These allegations against Roldán Mendivil are indeed, sadly, entirely consistent with the ongoing campaign on an international scale to suppress criticism of Israel by elastically extending the definition of antisemitism so as to make many criticisms of Israel prima facie evidence of antisemitic motivation. That Israel's population (within its internationally recognised borders) is predominantly Jewish does not make the state of Israel into a "collective Jew". Israel is a state, and as such it is appropriate to analyse critically its

formation and its policies, and to examine the links between

*these policies and Israel's foundational Zionist project, as indeed Hannah Arendt pointed out in her seminal work *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). Roldán Mendivil is not a senior academic, but the same standards should apply to all members of a community of scholars. It is unbecoming of a previously respected institution to react to unsubstantiated and evidently politically motivated attacks by the suspension of her teaching. This sort of reaction will throw a chill across freedom of academic thought and expression far more widely than this one individual case. We urge you to rethink your decision, to reinstate her, and to refuse to employ political tests of her writings and teaching.*

Yours sincerely

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Notices

BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.

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Email them to: newsletter@bricup.org.uk

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