

# BRICUP NEWSLETTER

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## Student action

Recent weeks have seen major student protests across the UK. Beginning with a 24-hour occupation at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) on January 13, sit-ins have spread across the country. Occupations have now been held at the LSE, Essex, King's College London, East London, Birmingham, Sussex, Warwick, Manchester Metropolitan, Oxford, Leeds, Cambridge, Sheffield Hallam, Bradford, Nottingham, Queen Mary, Manchester, Strathclyde, Newcastle, Kingston, Goldsmiths Cardiff and Glasgow. Vice chancellors and principals have been brought to the negotiating table and – in the majority of universities – have bowed to at least one of the students' demands. BRICUP is strongly supportive of this wave of actions in support of Palestine and particularly of the call for active support of Palestinian students through scholarships and twinning arrangements. Another common feature has been to urge Universities to divest from companies that are implicated in the arms trade, some of whose products will have been used in the occupation of Palestinian territories and the war on Gaza.

BRICUP wants to help student groups that are active in BDS. We can usually supply speakers for student meetings. Contact us at [studentLinks@bricup.org.uk](mailto:studentLinks@bricup.org.uk)

More about the experience at UEL and Manchester University is featured below.

## Student action at The University of East London.

The occupation at UEL has just ended after students won all their demands: most important, they have forced the management to create six scholarships annually for students from conflict zones, of which three will be for students from Gaza. They say: "Our greatest success has to be the scholarships. Having asked for 5 (in the hope of gaining 2 or 3!) we have gained 6! All including residential and tuition fees - and totally funded by the University! In the first year 3 are guaranteed for students from the Islamic University in Gaza, and this will of course be followed up, depending on the success, for the following years. The remaining three are for students from conflict zones all around the world. This is a real achievement. To think that in a few months we shall have 6 students studying here with us at UEL, who otherwise would be struggling to study in a war zone, is incredible." A full report can be seen at: <http://ueloccupatio n.blogspot. com/>

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## Student action at the University of Manchester

On Wednesday 11th February, an emergency general meeting of the University of Manchester Students Union passed a motion in support of the people of Gaza, which included a resolve to boycott Israel. The meeting, which was attended by over 1000 students, was called in response to the crisis in Gaza. It followed a week-long occupation of University of Manchester buildings by students. The University of Manchester Students Union is the biggest in Western Europe, and is also the first western

Students Union to pass a motion that includes an out and out boycott of Israel.

The policy that was passed compared Israel to apartheid South Africa and supported the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. It called for the Union to divest from Israel, to boycott all companies that support or benefit from the Israeli occupation, and to lobby the University to adopt a similar boycott policy towards Israel. The motion condemned the University for its lack of progress in divesting from arms companies.

Students at Manchester have a long history of solidarity with Palestinians, most notably in their affirmation of the "Palestine: Right to an Education" motion passed in 2007. This motion twinned the Union with the An-Najah University in the occupied West Bank, and committed the Union to campaign for the rights of Palestinian students.

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These events are just a part of a wave of actions and occupations sweeping universities across the country. See this link

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/students-are-revolting-the-spirit-of-68-is-reawakening-1604043.html>

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## **A commentary on the current situation.**

Dear Friends,

It is far from true that the Gaza situation is dramatically improved. Starvation and widespread misery is all that 1.5 million Palestinians are now facing, while the diplomats (without Hamas...) are being dined and wined, and are discussing how to sell Gaza to Abbas. Of course, the only one to pay nothing for the murder and destruction will be the murderers themselves...

I think that the theme emerging over the last few weeks, after the bombing and killing was stopped, is one of very deep change in the international support for Israel. While the leaders of the 'free world' are still going through the same old routines, people elsewhere are being mobilised against Zionism and its madness, including some courageous people in Israel. The emerging consensus is on two points:

1. Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) is now much more widely accepted by individuals and organisations as the only way to change the situation.
2. Israeli War Crimes are a new issue with much interest - the few emerging inquiries could mean that Israeli officers and politicians will be denied their sky holidays! This now becomes an important part of taking them to account for their crimes.

Both those developments are positive - they mean the schedule for the 'South African' model action is being shortened, and that the Israeli version of apartheid is now facing its first real test.

Read about it in my Day by Day Archive at

<http://gaza.haimbresheeth.com/gaza-carnage-archive/day-by-day-archive>

I am continuing with this on a once every two or three day basis, and it seems I am now doomed to work on this for the rest of my life, or until the fall of Zionism, whichever comes first.

Haim Bresheeth

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## **The Israel day of science (and the front page of the INDY!)**

In our March Newsletter we reported the action that BRICUP had taken to persuade the London and Manchester Science Museums to reverse

their decisions to allow the Zionist Federation of Great Britain to use the museums' facilities to host a celebration of Israeli science. The research of seven Israeli universities was to be showcased on March 3rd in Manchester and March 5th in London. BRICUP wrote to the Chairman or Director of each museum and published a letter setting out our objections in the Guardian (see BRICUP Newsletter number 13, February 2009). The Director of the Manchester Museum, Steve Davies, did respond in a letter to the Guardian, claiming that the Museum was apolitical and had only rented out space for workshops for Jewish 6th formers.

The events went ahead but with demonstrations by objectors outside each venue. The BRICUP leaflets emphasised those aspects of Israeli academic activity that would not be on the menu for those workshops: the hundreds of military R&D contracts held by Israeli Universities; the Universities and colleges built on land stolen from the Palestinians; the names of those academic staff who willingly served in the Gaza war; the many University staff who influence the Israeli state policy to continue the theft of Palestinian territory; and, least of all, the bodies of the Palestinians men, women and children killed or maimed by the Israeli onslaught.

The Manchester protesters handed leaflets to many of the students. One group of students soon came out again, complaining that the talk they had gone to was not about biology as expected but about how wonderful the Israeli medical profession is. Another group of students, who were attending the workshop from Manchester City College, took a pile of BRICUP leaflets in and distributed them inside the museum - for which they got thrown out! In a polished PR exercise, the Museum Director, Steve Davies did come out to talk to us and in the end did seem to be listening.

No such gentilities were on offer at the London Science Museum two days later. The only staff on view were the Director of Security and a miscellaneous assortment of heavies from the Community Security Trust and elsewhere. We

discovered that PCS members at the museum had expressed strong opposition to the event, one consequence of which was that security staff had to be hired in from outside.

There was a good turn out, with banners and supporters from PSC, J-BIG and IJAN as well as BRICUP. We were able to cover entrances on all three sides of the massive building – necessary as the organisers tried to sneak the school groups in through the back. At the two venues 3000 copies of the leaflet were handed out to participants, to regular museum users, and to passers-by.

Our public impact was far wider. The London demonstration attracted TV crews from both UK and Middle East companies.



Notably, BRICUP's protest made the front page of the Independent on March 3rd, giving us exposure to a much broader audience than we could otherwise have anticipated.

This has started a series of follow-up articles and letters and the issue was picked up by other newspapers – notably in a thundering Times editorial. But the bloggers who added comments in the Indy were strongly on the side of our protest, and even in the Times were evenly split. The Times they are a-changing.

## **A lesson from Oxford.**

The Oxford UCU branch passed the following motion on February 12<sup>th</sup> 2009.

**DEEPLY REGRETTING** the loss of life and the suffering that has resulted from the renewal of violent conflict in the Middle East;

**RECALLING** that its predecessor, Oxford AUT, passed *nem. con.* on 10 May 2005 a motion affirming its support for the Principle of Universality of Science and Learning, which requires academics to refrain from discrimination on the basis of ‘such factors as citizenship, religion, creed, political stance, ethnic origin, race, colour, language, age or sex’;

**FURTHER RECALLING** that at a meeting on 6 February 2007 Oxford UCU reiterated *nem. con.* its support for this Principle, which is not only a cornerstone of academic freedom but also a contribution towards lessening tension between hostile peoples;

**NOTING** that the University’s Equal Opportunities Policy prohibits discrimination on the grounds of ‘age, colour, disability, ethnic origin, marital status, nationality, national origin, parental status, race, religion or belief, gender, or sexual orientation’;

**NOTING ALSO**, however, that on 28 May 2008 the Annual Congress of UCU passed a motion entitled ‘Palestine and the occupation’ (‘Motion 25’);

**REAFFIRMS** its adherence to the Principle of Universality of Science and Learning;

**REJECTS** attempts to hold all academics of a country responsible for the actions of their government;

**REPUDIATES** Motion 25; and  
**APPLAUDS** the University’s unequivocal assurance that nobody applying for, or appointed

to, a post in the University will suffer discrimination on the grounds of his or her nationality.

Proposed by Michael Yudkin

Seconded by Denis Noble

Passed *nem. con.* (24 votes in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention).

### ***BRICUP’s Comment***

The density of misrepresentations in this document, both of the movement for a boycott of Israeli universities, and of Motion 25 at last year’s UCU Congress, is too great to be handled in a short space. But just for a flavour –

- there is no description of the (rather restricted) terms of Motion 25 itself. It does not represent the end of Western civilization.
- under the PACBI call for boycott which BRICUP accepts (but which is not endorsed by Motion 25) the targets of boycott action are institutional relationships. Individual academics are not in the frame, let alone held ‘responsible’ for the reprehensible actions of the Israeli government.

The passing of this egregious motion raises the question: How many Academic staff members does UCU have in Oxford? Rather more than 25 we imagine! The message to UCU members is **please attend branch meetings**, and vote for the just position on Israel/Palestine that is increasingly taken by the academic community in the UK, a position that rejects the false equation of criticism of Israel with racial discrimination and recognizes the complicity of Israeli Academe in Israeli state policies.

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### **The PACBI Column**

#### **Focus on North America**

As we noted in our last column, the scope and intensity of the reaction of ordinary citizens and civil society institutions the world over to the

Israeli declaration of war of aggression on Gaza were nothing short of a watershed in international public opinion. The tremendous outpouring of solidarity and organized actions centered on BDS continue as we write, giving us much hope that the BDS movement is firmly entrenching itself in the agenda of solidarity movements with Palestine.

We wish to focus here on important developments in North America, one of the most difficult terrains thus far for the BDS movement. The US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, based on the PACBI Call for academic and cultural boycott, has been launched, and its activities and endorsers are growing by the day. [1] Several universities in Canada and the US - as well as many cities across the world, from London to Jerusalem to Johannesburg - are hosting Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) at this time; BDS is high on the agenda of IAW throughout the continent, and news reports coming in confirm very good attendance and much enthusiasm at the events.

The most recent achievement of the BDS movement in Canada was the adoption, by CUPE-Ontario's University Workers Coordinating Committee (OUWCC) at its annual conference on 22 February 2009, of significant steps in the direction of applying effective pressure on Israel and holding it accountable for its colonial and apartheid policies that violate international law and fundamental human rights. A number of the resolutions aimed specifically at challenging and ending business-as-usual with the Israeli academy. The conference voted to "[e]ncourage its member locals to hold public forums to discuss an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions;" to "[a]sk campus representatives to work with locals to investigate both research and investment links between Ontario Universities and the state of Israel's military;" to "[m]obilize campus allies to pressure universities from engaging in acts of cooperation that assist and aid military research at the institutional level with Israeli universities;" to "[w]ork with campus and community allies to pressure Ontario universities to refuse

collaborations, corporate partnerships and investments that would benefit, either directly or indirectly, military research or the Israeli state military;" and to "[r]equest funding and support from CUPE Ontario to conduct an education campaign on the academic boycott, coordinate education sessions and assist in the implementation of resolution 50 as passed in 2006."

This initiative comes at a time when the Canadian government and large segments of the establishment media hold forth with their ubiquitous blind support of Israel. It is in such a government- and media-unfriendly environment that the efforts of Palestine solidarity groups are taking shape. We have already noted the call by 300 Canadian academics and educators urging their government "to implement sanctions against the Israeli government until it ceases its attack against the people of Gaza and fully complies with international law"; the call by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers asking the Canadian government "to adopt a program of boycott, divestment and sanctions until Israel recognizes the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and complies with international law, including the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes as stipulated in UN resolution 194"; and a statement by a group of Quebec university staff declaring support for the appeal by the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUBE) to support a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

It is also noteworthy that for the first time, American and Canadian campus newspapers are opening up to BDS; these newspapers reflect the lively debate about the academic and cultural boycott and divestment movement. The stereotype of the apathetic or self-centered North American university student is being challenged, and we think that the enthusiasm of student groups and their sometimes daring acts - campus "occupations" in the manner of the UK student occupations - is bound to catch on among student bodies across the universities and colleges of Canada and the United States. The latest news

received was of Columbia University students re-launching their divestment campaign against companies implicated in the Israeli occupation. It remains to be said that in the United States (and to some extent in Canada), and due to the historic stranglehold of the Israel lobby and its offshoots over centers of power in government and in civil society, including the universities, BDS gains are constantly under threat. A great deal of courage, perseverance, and vigilance is required to challenge the forces trying to detract from achievements on the ground. Hampshire College, which recently divested from companies that benefit from the Israeli occupation, is a case in point. Harvard professor and Israel-lobby activist Alan Dershowitz has been bullying college trustees to reverse their decision and publicly discredit the student activists who proposed the divestment measure, and it appears that the college is giving in under the pressure. Non-tenured academics are particularly vulnerable in the United States; but even established scholars can be threatened, intimidated, and bullied. The latest case of loss of employment is that of an established scholar, Joel Kovel; a noted critic and scholar of Zionism, Kovel has been informed by Bard College in New York that his contract will not be renewed next year.

PACBI applauds the courage of Canadian and American academics and students who, against all odds and in clear risk to their careers, are taking bold BDS measures and telling the world that even in North America, Israeli impunity and the complicity of its institutions in the system of oppression can no longer be tolerated and must be brought to an end.

PACBI

[1] <http://usacbi.wordpress.com>

## Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

The overdue redesign of our website and the printing of leaflets for the Science museum demonstrations has absorbed much of our reserves and we need funds to support visiting speakers, book rooms for public meetings, print leaflets and pay the whole range of expenses that a busy campaign demands.

You can make a one off donation by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK or by making a bank transfer to BRICUP at

Sort Code 08-92-99

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*Comments and suggestions concerning the Newsletter are always welcome.*

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