BRICUP Newsletter 74

BRICUP

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www.bricup.org.uk

bricup@bricup.org.uk

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Spring in the step of BDS, as a worried Israel plans pushback.

The first quarter of 2014 has been an interesting time for the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) campaign, with a number of promising developments - particularly in Europe - and indications that the Israeli government is taking the 'threat' posed by boycott initiatives more seriously than before.

One significant development has been a rash of decisions by European pension funds to divest from or blacklist Israeli banks and corporations on the grounds of those entities' complicity in violations of international law. The first came In early January, when it was announced that Dutch pension fund giant PGGM had withdrawn its investments from Israel's five largest banks because of their involvement in West Bank settlements. Israeli newspaper *Haaretz noted* at the time that the decision would be "liable to damage the banks' image, and could lead other business concerns in Europe to follow suit". Significantly, the €131 billion fund cut ties with Israeli entities that are not strictly settlement-based enterprises because of the realisation "it would be impossible to create a firewall between its investments in Israeli banks and the banks' activities in the territories".

Other similar announcements followed.

A Norwegian finance ministry-run \$810 billion oil fund divested from Israeli firms Africa Israel Investments and its subsidiary Danya Cebus, due to their involvement in settlement construction.

Denmark's largest bank, Danske Bank, blacklisted Bank Hapoalim because of settlement complicity, while Scandinavian investors Nordea Investment Management and DNB Asset Management announced they are reviewing their own holdings in Israeli banks.

In mid-February, a leading <u>Dutch association of investors</u> issued a report claiming that many of Israel's pension funds, insurance companies and banks "fail to adequately apply guidelines on international law and human rights" with respect to investments linked to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Then at the end of the month came the news that Luxembourg state pension fund FDC had <u>excluded nine major Israeli banks and companies</u>, as well as US company Motorola, on account of their involvement in violations of international law. Five major banks, Elbit Systems,

and Africa Israel Investments were among those blacklisted.

A second development of note was success with regards to public awareness of BDS, with Scarlett Johansson's role as Oxfam global ambassador ending as a result of the actress' contract with SodaStream. While pro-Israel groups spun Johansson's preference for a lucrative contract with the Israeli company as a 'failure' for BDS campaigners, this assessment simply showed their lack of understanding about the nature of the battle they face The story gave BDS campaigners the opportunity to promote their message in ways not seen since Stephen Hawking refused an invitation to Shimon Peres' conference. Many were sceptical or even scornful of the claim that SodaStream's employment of Palestinians could mitigate the plant's location in an illegal settlement. The Financial Times called Johansson's defence "naive", while The Economist noted that "Israeli financial institutions" and "infrastructure companies" are unable to "separate themselves from activities" in the occupied territories. Furthermore, the narrative of the controversy from the general public's point of view was 'Hollywood actress forced to choose between Israeli company and internationally-respected development charity'. In other words, it was Israel vs. human rights - and no matter what Johansson herself picked, that constituted a blow to 'brand Israel'. Shortly after Johansson and Oxfam parted ways, Omar Barghouti of the Palestinian Boycott National Committee published an op-ed in *The New York Times* on 'Why Israel Fears the Boycott'.

Thirdly, there have been reports this year showing that a boycott of settlement-based businesses is already having an impact, with the income of Israeli farmers in the occupied Jordan Valley falling by 14%, or around \$29 million. David Elhayani, head of the settlers' Jordan Valley Regional Council, described "the damage" as "enormous". Meanwhile, lawmakers are taking steps to provide financial compensation to businesses in the occupied territories harmed by international boycotts, and in mid-January, an Israeli television report on the boycott campaign featured a leading Tel Aviv-based attorney who said that

Israeli businesses were turning to him in increasing numbers because of cancelled contracts, conflicts with international boards, lost investments and all kinds of other boycott-style pressures stemming from international opposition to Israel's presence in the West Bank and settlement policies

In January, the EU's Ambassador to Israel warned of a "price to pay" in the case of the failure of peace talks, and subsequently, **EU** officials confirmed that measures such as the labelling of settlement products and the issuing of guidance to businesses on settlement trade are prepared and ready to be implemented. Germany, meanwhile, conditioned grants for high-tech and science research "on the inclusion of a territorial clause stating that Israeli entities located in West Bank settlements or East Jerusalem will not be eligible for funding". Finally, the pushback against the American Studies Association vote for boycott showed signs of backfiring, with efforts to legislate against academic boycott condemned by critics of BDS as an attack on academic freedom. The Modern Language Association conference in January meanwhile hosted a panel discussion on BDS, one of the bestattended sessions of the gathering, prompting anger from the likes of the Anti-Defamation League and other boycott opponents. In February, 138 Irish academics pledged their support for the academic boycott call. In respect to these developments, note that chair of Israel's Council for Higher Education's planning and budget committee Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg recently described the country's scientists as "ambassadors for Israel" and "an army...facing attempts to boycott us".

Alongside these developments, the first two months of 2014 also witnessed an uptick in the amount of discussion of boycott and divestment initiatives in the Israeli media and amongst leading politicians. After having initially been ignored, "boycott concerns", in the words of the Associated Press, have now "become central to Israel's public discourse". A contributing factor was high-profile comments made by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who in early February noted what he called "an increasing de-legitimization" campaign and "talk of boycotts", especially in the event of the failure to deliver a negotiated settlement. A month later, President Obama warned that should peace talks fail, the U.S. would have limited ability to protect it from "international fallout."

Justice Minister and chief negotiator Tzipi Livni has frequently referred to a boycott of Israel, warning of South Africa-style isolation and attacking construction in more isolated West Bank settlements as contributing towards an "international boycott". This week, Labor party leader MK Herzog lamented that the boycott movement "is turning into a strategic threat". From the other side of the Israeli political spectrum, Jewish Home hardliner MK Ayelet Shaked described "the cultural and academic

BDS campaign" as "the greatest threat faced by [Israel]", while Deputy FM Ze'ev Elkin labelled BDS one of Israel's "most serious strategic threats". A significant proportion of the noise about BDS in Israel over recent months has been focused on potential economic damage. Israel's Finance Minister Yair Lapid made waves when he warned of an economic crisis that will "hit each [Israeli] in the pocket" should peace talks break down and boycotts increase. Lapid also referred to "an unsettling list of organizations already joining the BDS movement against Israel", and, referencing Apartheid South Africa, warned "that the tipping point could come unexpectedly". President Shimon Peres has proclaimed "the danger of an economic boycott" to be "far more palpable than a security threat", given how Israel "live[s] on exports". MK Moshe Gafni offered a similar message: "a decision has to be made about priorities: Judea & Samaria [West Bank] or joining the world economy". Even the bullish and defiant Economics Minister Naftali Bennett has spoken of the need to reduce dependence on Europe when it comes to trade, due to the concerns over boycott. Alongside the politicians, a number of leading Israeli business figures - such as the 'Breaking the Impasse' group have also warned about the potential impact of boycott, and have thus urged the political leadership to secure a peace deal that would thwart such a possibility. Similar fears are being echoed by those within pro-Israel lobby groups in the West - see, for example, a warning by Mick Davis of the UK's Jewish Leadership Council of the threat posed by "BDS and other punitive measures", if "current talks falter".

This is the context then for plans being mooted by the Israeli government to intensify efforts to combat BDS campaigns. Just this week, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu repeatedly referred to BDS in his speech at AIPAC – and as *Haaretz* correspondent Barak Ravid pointed out, "the more [he] elaborated on the issue [of BDS], the more he revealed just how worried he is". The Financial Times, reporting Netanyahu's condemnation of BDS campaigners as anti-Semites, said his comments "marked one of the clearest signs yet that the movement is making an impact at the highest level of his government." In early February, against a backdrop of reported divisions between the Strategic Affairs Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs about how best to respond to BDS campaigns, Netanyahu convened a closed-doors meeting of senior ministers to "seriously discuss boycott for the first time". Meeting participants were presented with a proposal by Yossi Kuperwasser, Director of the

Ministry for Strategic Affairs. <u>Ideas under discussion</u> apparently included propaganda initiatives, lawsuits in Western courts, promoting anti-boycott legislation in "friendly capitals", using spies to "dig up intelligence linking [BDS] supporters...to <u>terrorists</u>", and boosting intelligence about pro-BDS organisations through the combined resources of the Israel Defense Forces' intelligence department along with the Shin Bet and Mossad (representatives of the latter two organisations attended the meeting).

In parallel to these steps, FM Lieberman announced on 3 February that "a new interministerial team" had been established "to fight efforts to boycott Israel and products manufactured beyond the Green Line". The state has also been defending the anti-boycott law in front of the High Court, on the grounds that "freedom of expression in Israel is not absolute". Until recently, Israel and its lobbyists have been caught between trying to downplay BDS campaigns as ineffectual and useless, while simultaneously condemning boycott strategies and mobilising to oppose them. It would appear that there is now sufficient momentum behind boycott and divestment campaigns that many in the Israeli government and in West-based lobby groups now prefer to have an open, direct confrontation. It is, in other words, a sign of desperation.

Ben White

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The PACBI Column

An open letter from PACBI to the Rolling Stones.

Boycott Apartheid, again!

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), a member of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in Palestine, has learned that you reportedly plan to perform in Israel on 10 June 2014 [1]. We are writing to urge you to refrain from playing in apartheid Israel and not to condone Israel's violations of international law and human rights against the Palestinian people. We wrote you previously, in 2007 [2], after hearing of similar

plans, and back then you did not play in Israel. We hope you will heed our call once again.

Since 2007, Israel has intensified its construction of illegal colonies in the occupied Palestinian territory. It continues to bomb and kill Palestinian civilians in Gaza and maintains its medieval siege of 1.8 million Palestinians there. Its wall, condemned as illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004, is still standing and expanding, separating Palestinians from their livelihoods, schools and farms. Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestinian communities in the Nagab (Negev), East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley was condemned by a ranking UN official as constituting a strategy of exclusion and discrimination [3]. Its policy of home demolitions, uprooting trees and denial of freedom of movement have intensified in recent months. It still maintains more than 50 racist laws [4] that are condemned by international and local human rights organizations. Even the U.S. Department of State has censured Israel's system of "institutional, legal and societal" discrimination against Palestinian citizens of the state. [5]

Why would you accept to perform in a country that is so deeply involved in war crimes and human rights violations? Performing in Israel at this time is morally equivalent to performing in South Africa during the apartheid era. We all remember how leading Rolling Stones musicians played a prominent role in enforcing a cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa in the 1980's, and participated in recording the timeless song, Sun City, which had a singular influence on raising public awareness about apartheid and its injustices. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights Prof. John Dugard, and South African government minister Ronnie Kasrils have repeatedly declared, Israel has created a worse system of apartheid than anything that ever existed in South Africa.

Just days ago, a special solidarity conference convened by the South African parliament, attended by major parties, trade unions and civil society networks, issued the Cape Town Declaration, regarding Israel as guilty of the crime of apartheid and endorsing BDS against it until it meets its obligations under international law. [6]

In this spirit, PACBI and the broader BDS movement, representing the absolute majority of Palestinian civil society, appeal to you to cancel your June 2014 performance in Tel Aviv.

Israel uses arts and culture to whitewash its violations of international law and human rights.

In December 2008 and January 2009, Israel waged a war of aggression against Gaza that left 1,400 Palestinians, predominantly civilians, dead [9], and led the UN Goldstone Report to declare that Israel had committed war crimes [10]. In the wake of this assault and to salvage its deteriorating image, Israel has redoubled its effort to "brand" itself as an enlightened liberal democracy [11]. Arts and culture play a unique role in this branding campaign [12], as the presence of internationally acclaimed artists from the West is meant to affirm Israel's membership in the West's privileged club of "cultured," liberal democracies. But it should not be business as usual with a state that routinely violates international law and basic human rights.

Your performance would serve this Israeli campaign to rebrand itself and will be used as a publicity tool by the Israeli government.

Numerous distinguished cultural figures and public intellectuals have joined the call for BDS.

Today, many international artists, intellectuals, and cultural workers have been rejecting Israel's cynical use of the arts to whitewash its apartheid and colonial policies. Among those who have supported the BDS movement are distinguished artists, writers, public intellectuals and anti-racist activists such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, John Berger, Arundhati Roy, Judith Butler, Naomi Klein, Ken Loach, Alice Walker, Angela Davis and Mira Nair.

World-renowned artists, among them Roger Waters, Bono, Snoop Dogg, Jean Luc Godard, Elvis Costello, Gil Scott Heron, Carlos Santana, Devendra Banhart, Faithless, Zakir Hussain, Stevie Wonder, Mike Leigh, Coldplay, Jello Biafra and the Guantanamo school of Medicine, Mireille Mathieu, Oumou Sangaré, Cassandra Wilson, Cat Power, Lenny Kravitz, Carlo Mombelli, and Stanley Jordan have also cancelled their performances in Israel over its human rights record. Maxi Jazz had this to say as he maintained his principled position not to entertain apartheid,

While human beings are being willfully denied not just their rights but their needs for their children and grandparents and themselves, I feel deeply that I should not be sending even tacit signals that [performing in Israel] is either 'normal' or 'ok'. It's neither and I cannot support it. It grieves me that it

has come to this and I pray everyday for human beings to begin caring for each other, firm in the wisdom that we are all we have. [13]

Significantly, you may have already heard of the boycott spreading to the academic realm, with four associations now coming out publicly in support of academic boycott [14]. The movement is spreading and the taboo to speak out against Israel is breaking. People in all quarters are no longer afraid to speak out, and we hope you will stand with them.

Please say no to performing in Israel.

Today, Palestinian civil society groups are calling on artists to shun Tel Aviv in the same way that South African activists called on artists to boycott Sun City. All we are asking is for you to refrain from crossing a picket line called by Palestinian society, endorsed by international organizations, and increasingly supported by progressive-Israelis [15]. Palestinian civil society is asking this of you as the most essential contribution to our struggle to achieve peace and justice.

PACBI

Notes:-

- [1] http://www.thejc.com/news/world-news/115514/date-rolling-stones-israel-concert-revealed
- [2] http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=489
- [3] http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/02/12/un-report-accuses-israel-of-pushing-palestinians-from-jerusalem-west-bank/
- [4] http://adalah.org/eng/Israeli-Discriminatory-Law-Database
- [5] http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154463.htm
- [6] http://mediareviewnet.com/2014/02/the-cape-town-declaration/
- [7] http://mondoweiss.net/2013/01/contraceptive-injections-ethiopian.html
- [8] http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israeli-mk-i-didn-t-mean-to-shame-holocaust-by-calling-african-migrants-a-cancer-1.432809

[9]

http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGMDE1502 12009

[10]

 $\label{lem:http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.asp} $$x?NewsID=91\&LangID=E$$

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 $http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/13/truth_and_advertising$

- $\hbox{[12] http://mondoweiss.net/2009/03/ny-times-offers-the-rationale-for-the-cultural-boycott-of-israel.html}$
- [13] http://www.wallofsilence.org/news.html

[14] These associations are the Association for Humanist Sociology (AHS), Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS), American Studies Association (ASA), and Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA).

[15] http://boycottisrael.info/

Campus divestment: a proposal.

Where did this appear?

'It is disingenuous to romanticise settlement enterprises. The occupation imprisons thousands of the Palestinians' young men, gives their land and water to settlers, demolishes their houses and partitions the remaining territory with scores of checkpoints and segregated roads. There are almost no basic foundations for an economy. The way to create Palestinian jobs is to end the occupation and let Palestinians build those foundations – not to build "bridges to peace" on other people's land without their permission.'

The answer is a Financial Times editorial (31/1/2014) critical of Scarlett Johansson's defence of Sodastream. As the Economist puts it (8/2/2014), 'Derided as the scheming of crackpots, the campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, widely known as BDS, is turning mainstream.' As the whole world honoured the passing of Nelson Mandela, you would not have thought that thirty years earlier British Anti-Apartheid consisted of a mere 8,000 crackpots.

As part of BDS, a campaign for divestment on campus, even if it does not succeed in achieving divestment, will create community, raise consciousness, transform passivity into activity, and create publicity. BDS creates a virtuous cycle: publicity for BDS (thank you, Scarlett Johansson), gives the numerous opponents of the occupation a simple position around which to unite and act. The campus divestment campaign in the USA has raised consciousness and created publicity: it has been duly and helpfully denounced by the pro-Israel lobby, which has created more publicity.

It does not take much time and effort to organise a campus divestment campaign. Firstly, obtain a list of the companies that the University invests in or uses as service providers. In Exeter this was achieved by a simple request to the finance office, but there is also if needed the Freedom of Information Act. Secondly, compare it with a list of companies which (directly or indirectly) support the occupation. There is a section on Universities in the excellent <u>Targeting Israeli Apartheid handbook</u>

Thirdly, decide which categories you will target: for

instance, it is relatively easy to gain support for divestment from companies with (direct or indirect) links with settlements, and from companies selling repressive equipment to Israel.

Fourthly, gather signatures from students and staff (easily done) to request the University to divest from the targeted companies, and put it with arguments to whichever body has the responsibility to monitor investment (whether Ethics Committee, Finance Subcommittee, etc.).

A warning from experience: at Exeter our request was turned down by the Ethics Committee, on the grounds that the target companies did not breach the University ethical code for investment. Every University should have such an ethical code. I am currently ensuring that in our ethical code (a) illegal occupation joins tobacco and alcohol as grounds for divestment (difficult to argue against that), and (b) any proportion of a company's holdings (not just e.g. 'a significant proportion') invested (directly or indirectly) in illegal occupation requires divestment from that company (it would be no defence to say 'but we only spend 3% of our funds on manufacturing torture equipment').

We should perhaps have a national forum to share our experiences in this campaign.

Richard Seaford

Academics for Palestine in Ireland launch campaign

On the back of the vote by the Teachers Union of Ireland, Academics for Palestine in Ireland (AfP)have now launched a campaign called *Academia Against Apartheid*. Members have signed the following statement, pledging to boycott academic institutions and individuals who are involved actively or passively in Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territories. The text of the boycott pledge reads:

"In response to the call from Palestinian civil society for an institutional academic boycott of Israel, we pledge not to engage in any professional association with Israeli academic, research and state institutions and with those representing these institutions, until such time as Israel complies with international law and universal principles of human rights."

138 Irish academics have signed the pledge: the <u>full list</u> of signatories can be viewed here.

At a press conference on February 21st 2014, AfP announced that Irish academic researchers had

collaborated in EU-funded projects with Israeli counterparts who make drones, develop high-tech weapons and engage in "counter-terror" activities with Mossad. In all, Irish universities have collaborated with Israel in 257 projects to date, seven of them listed as "security" and 13 as "aerospace". This information on Irish-Israeli research links was gathered by the examination of publicly available EU documents by members of AfP. The chair of the group, Jim Roche, said that the daily discrimination inflicted on Palestinian academics was enough to justify such a boycott, but added, "The revelations of Irish academia's collaboration with companies closely linked to Israel's military-industrial complex are truly shocking. [...] What is surprising is that a non-European country, Israel, actually receives more research and development funding from the EU than many European countries do. It is not just Israeli universities that have access to this funding, but Israeli security and military companies – and they are often the lead partner in a research consortium. Some Irish universities may be effectively contributing to the denial of Palestinian human rights and academic freedom by collaborating with these Israeli security companies in EU-funded FP7 and Horizon 2020 programmes paid for by European, including Irish, taxpayers."

The Irish signatories were joined in the Press Conference by two members of BRICUP, the Palestinian Dr Ghada Karmi of the University of Exeter and the Israeli Professor Haim Bresheeth of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.. Both academics called for civil society to create awareness of the oppression of Palestinians by the state of Israel, and to join the boycott until Israel observes international law in this regard. Dr Ghada Karmi emphasised that the international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) does not target Israeli individuals but institutions. Far from being a threat to academic freedom, she said at the launch, BDS affirms its importance for Palestinians. She said "Israel's welldocumented repression of Palestinian academic life and victimisation of Palestinian teachers and students is a scandal to be denounced by all those who claim to care about academic freedom." Prof Haim Bresheeth, an Israeli film-maker and scholar, said. "It puts a special responsibility on international civil society, and BDS is its main tool to resolve the conflict in a just and peaceful way."

Reported by the editor

Zionist pressure and free speech

Following Zionist pressure, the Jewish Museum in New York has scrapped an event that included a planned talk by Judith Butler. Professor Butler was set to speak about the late existentialist artist, Franz Kafka. But, according to reports, "supporters of Israel" took issue with the museum's decision to invite the controversial literary studies professor, given her critical views on Israel and her support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement. In an official statement the Museum said, "While her political views were not a factor in her participation, the debates about her politics have become a distraction making it impossible to present the conversation about Kafka as intended." Judith Butler said that she regretted having to scrap the talk. "I cancelled the event," she said, "I was very much looking forward to the discussion of Kafka in The Jewish Museum, and to affirm the value of Kafka's literary work in that setting,"

Haaretz had an interesting take on these events; Chemi Shalev, writing on February 25th, said "muzzling of pro-BDS speakers only makes them stronger [...] By closing the door on BDS supporters - and, more importantly, by chucking them out after they've already gained entry - these self-anointed guardians of the gate are providing their enemies with the kind of free publicity, automatic sympathy and sexy allure that money just can't buy". Quoting Tyrion Lannister he wrote, "When you tear out a man's tongue, you are not proving him a liar, you're only telling the world that you fear what he might say." Quite so.

Reported by the editor

Fighting fund for academic boycott.

Associate Professor Jake Lynch, Director of Sydney University's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPACS), has been taken to the <u>Federal Court of Australia</u> in a legal action brought by Shurat HaDin, the Israel Law Centre, alleging racial discrimination due to his support of the Palestinian call for academic boycott of Israel.

The claim is that Associate Professor Lynch is backing racist and discriminatory policies through their support for the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. These accusations are unfounded and intimidatory. They are intended to stifle free

speech. Jake wrote an account of this attack in BRICUP Newsletter 70, November 2013

The Federal Court Case against Associate Professor Jake Lynch has already cost Jake some tens of thousands of dollars – which he has had to raise for himself – and may cost more as court deliberations continue.

This is a litigious case that threatens our right to democratic dissent in Australia.

We call on our supporters to **MAKE A DONATION** to support Associate Professor Jake Lynch's fight for our democratic rights.

You can donate via PayPal with your credit card or PayPal account. You do not need a PayPal account or to register with PayPal in order to make your contribution. Thank you.







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

Letters to the Editor

Please note that we do have a "Letters to the Editor" facility. We urge you to use it. It provides an opportunity for valuable input from our supporters and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the debate and development of the campaign. Please send letters to arrive on or before the first day of each month for consideration for that month's newsletter. Aim not to exceed 250 words if possible. Letters and comments should also be sent to newsletter@bricup.org.uk

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

Arranging meetings and lobbying activities are expensive. 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.

Please do consider making a donation .

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