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Time for artists to defy pro-Israel censorship

The UK's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport boasts of collusion with a foreign ambassador to interfere in the governance of an

independent arts institution.

A small community theatre is pilloried as antisemitic in the national media for querying Israeli embassy funding.

- Behind-the-scenes threats bully a leading London theatre into censoring its own website.

- Sponsors of a Palestinian film festival are individually targeted with demands they withdraw support.

These were some of the instances of limits on artistic freedom exposed during a public discussion at Amnesty International's Human Rights Action Centre on Tuesday October 7, chaired by novelist Kamila Shamsie, a former trustee of Free Word and English PEN.

With two playwrights on the panel and an audience populated by actors, writers and other artists, evidence of false charges of antisemitism being used to threaten artists and arts organisations generated anger and a determination to fight back. "When we defend people against charges of antisemitism we should be angrier at the libellous accusations and keep the main focus where it belongs – on Israel's racism and illegal actions," said playwright Caryl Churchill, who was in the audience.

At the start of the meeting Shamsie read out a letter from the Department of Culture Media and Sport to a member of the public, about Culture Secretary Sajid Javid's stance when the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn came under sustained attack over the summer. The theatre had asked that, while Israeli forces were pounding Gaza and

killing Palestinians in large numbers, the annual UK Jewish Film Festival it was due to host for the eighth time should not take funds from the Israeli Embassy. The Tricycle was subjected to pickets alleging discrimination against British Jews. Javid – a member of Conservative Friends of Israel – publicly rebuked the theatre. Artistic Director Indhu Rubasingham faced racist abuse and calls for her dismissal, even after the Tricycle board had backed down and said it would accept Israeli embassy funding in future.

The Department letter showed that far from defending the theatre's right to choose its funding sources, Javid actively participated in harassing it – seemingly at the behest of the Israeli government. “The Department has kept closely in touch with the Israeli Ambassador during this unfortunate chain of events,” wrote Arts and Broadcasting policy officer Dempster Marples. He said Javid would be attending the gala opening of the festival in its alternative venue “in order to demonstrate his support.”

The letter concluded, without any evident sense of irony: “The Department shall continue to challenge anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice, and to champion freedom of cultural expression at every opportunity.”

Panellist Antony Lerman, a former Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research and a founding member of the Jewish Forum for Justice and Human Rights, condemned the DCMS letter for condoning false antisemitism accusations against the Tricycle Theatre. Lerman told the meeting it was perfectly legitimate for an arts institution to choose to decline funding. “The Tricycle's actions showed no signs of antisemitism of any kind, nor did they represent any form of attack on freedom of expression,” he said. “And yet the official pro-Israel organisations said the Tricycle had banned a Jewish film festival. They fell back on their default position, alleging boycott and equating it with antisemitism.”

Another speaker, playwright Tanika Gupta, said she had been one of hundreds of theatrical colleagues who had rallied to support the Tricycle's Rubasingham. Their letter, published in the Guardian on August 15, said: ‘Punishing a small theatre for standing up for its principles is a big step backwards for anyone concerned with challenging prejudice or promoting freedom of speech. Anyone who truly wants to stand against

antisemitism needs to stand with the Tricycle theatre and challenge those who are accusing it in a disproportionate, unjust and ill-informed way.’ “Antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of race prejudice are on the rise,” said Gupta. “Labelling the Tricycle antisemitic bleeds significance from the term.” This position was well-understood by many leading theatrical figures who expressed their support for the Tricycle behind the scenes. “In future they need to act faster and in public,” said Gupta. “We need to get organised!”

The meeting also heard from writer Rachel Holmes, former head of literature at the South Bank. In a message read out by Shamsie, Holmes explained her disappointment at the decision of the Donmar Warehouse to censor a podcast of an event she programmed concerning Britain and the Middle East at the Donmar in March and April of this year.

To accompany Peter Gill's production of his play Versailles, the Donmar presented a series of events with leading political and cultural commentators exploring the legacy of World War I. Podcasts were to be available on the Warehouse website. However there is no podcast corresponding to the last of the five, Mr Balfour's Letter to Lord Rothschild: How the Great War Remapped the World.

“On 1st April,” said Holmes, “24 hours prior to the discussion taking place, the Donmar Warehouse received its first complaint from a funder claiming that the event was an attack on the state of Israel, an ‘anti-Israel rally’ and antisemitic.”

This was accompanied by threats to withdraw funds and to raise grievances with public funders, including publically funded cultural institutions in which Holmes works and/or sits on the boards. The intimidation worked. Donmar did not post the offending podcast.

Another example was described by audience member Bill McAllister, former Director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts. He said that during his tenure (1977–1990), the ICA was directly threatened with blacklisting by the Board of Deputies of British Jews for hosting the first UK Palestinian Film Festival. The BoD attempted to implement its threat by writing to every sponsor demanding that they should pull out. Attempts at face-to-face discussion collapsed with

the BoD spokesman “flying into a rage,” McAlister said. In this instance the ICA stood firm. But the audience at the panel discussion was left wondering how many more cases of successful bullying and intimidation there have been over the years.

Judith Knight of ArtsAdmin said that institutions should develop clear ethical funding policies and make them public. “Yes, it may mean that we have to cope with less money, but we are less likely to be caught out if we make decisions that enrage powerful interests.”

Equity activist Doug Holton said the question of Zionist interference in the arts must not be “a no-go area” within democratic structures such as unions and guilds representing cultural professionals.

“We need to be ready to confront Zionist racists calling us racists,” Holton said. “Without politics art is mere entertainment. We must defend the arts against political manipulation.”

Les Levidow, of Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods, supported calls for artists to organise against Zionist bullying.

“Throw back the accusation of anti-Semitism as the racist stereotype it is. Do not buy into the lie that all Jews are bound to the State of Israel,” he said.

Jonathan Rosenhead, chair of the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine was encouraged by the way theatres came together in defence of the Tricycle theatre. “Soon people will have to explain why they are NOT boycotting,” said Rosenhead.

Poet Seni Seneviratne argued passionately for artists to try to make a difference in a situation of injustice. “I will take a moral decision on any invitation from an oppressive regime, and in the case of Palestine I’m supporting a boycott call from within, from Palestinians themselves,” she said. “Not to boycott would be crossing a picket line and I am not a scab!”

Dramatist April De Angelis, another member of the panel, pointed out that there were several current and historical instances of boycotts challenging dubious sponsorship of the arts - a process she called “culture-washing”.

She pointed to the stand taken by the Writers Guild of the UK and Actors’ Equity in supporting the boycott campaign targeting Apartheid South Africa in the 1970s and beyond, and noted that today, the Art not Oil coalition “campaigns against sponsorship by criminally negligent corporations.”

Having worked with young Palestinians in play-writing workshops De Angelis had decided to reject Israeli “culture-washing” and join the cultural boycott. “Those kids would not have had access to my work if performed in Israel,” she told the meeting.

The final member of the panel, Ofer Neiman, an active member of the Israeli group Boycott from Within, explained culture-washing in more detail. He quoted a special department in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs describing its own responsibilities as “attaining prominence and high exposure abroad for Israel’s cultural and scientific activity, as an important tool for the promotion of its political interests.”

The term Hasbara (“explaining” in Hebrew) is frequently used to describe the way presenting positive messages about Israel serves to “drown out the growing criticism of its appalling human rights violations,” said Neiman.

He cited Nissim Ben-Shitrit, former deputy director general at the foreign affairs ministry: “We regard culture as a hasbara tool of the highest order, and I do not differentiate between hasbara and culture”.

Efforts to bring about change in the actions of the Israeli government need to be based on the understanding that culture cannot be separated from politics.

Neiman said Israeli dissidents were too few to bring about change by themselves, from within.

“Artists, in the UK and elsewhere, can play an important role in the collective effort to stop the Israeli regime’s crimes, simply by saying no to the use of culture for Israeli state propaganda. Those who do so may face smearing and bullying, but they will find supporters all over the world, including Israeli citizens who will stand with them.”

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi

Israel's Universities: A Pillar of Occupation and Apartheid

Israeli Universities are an intimate part of the Israeli regime, by active choice. While Palestinians are not able to access universities and schools, Israeli universities produce the research, technology, arguments and leaders for maintaining the occupation. (Archbishop Desmond Tutu's statement of support of the 2011 University of Johannesburg's boycott of Ben Gurion University)

As Archbishop Tutu and other South African visitors have observed, and contrary to perceptions and arguments about the "liberal" nature of the Israeli academy, the truth is that Israeli institutions of higher learning are deeply entwined in Israel's regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid against the indigenous Palestinian people.

It is no surprise that virtually every Israeli academic institution came out in support of the Israeli military during the summer onslaught on Gaza, and universities promised faculty and student reserve soldiers actively involved in the massacre in Gaza various perks and [privileges](#) as rewards for their contribution to the state's "security." The list of complicity is too long to recount here. Some prominent examples include:

- [Technion](#), which prides itself on developing many of the weapon systems, particularly drone technologies, which are employed by the Israeli occupation forces in attacking Palestinians in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory;
- Tel Aviv University (TAU), which has not only designed tens of weapons used by the Israeli military in enforcing the occupation and apartheid regime, but houses the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) that takes credit for the development of the so-called [Dahiya Doctrine](#), or doctrine of disproportionate force, that is adopted by the Israeli army, and which [calls for](#) "the destruction of the national [civilian] infrastructure, and intense suffering among the [civilian] population," as means of defeating an otherwise "impossible" to defeat non-statal resistance;

- The Hebrew University, which is [partially built on stolen land](#) and has an army base on its campus.

Some academics may argue, though, that universities in many countries in the west are also involved in the development of weapons and military doctrines for their respective armed forces, but Israeli experts themselves decisively prove that partnership between academia and the military-security establishment is on a different scale altogether.

Prominent TAU Professor Avraham Katzir, for instance, [observes](#) that the relationship between academic institutions and the army in Israel is far more organic and entrenched than in the west. He argues that "each one of us is both an Israeli citizen and working in these [military] fields." Academia and the army, writes Katzir, are "helping one another—something which doesn't happen [elsewhere]; I've been in the US and Europe, and there, there is a disconnect between the [academic] workshops and the army; they hate the army! [With us], I think that we succeed by virtue of the fact that we help one another so much."

Haim Russo, CEO of Israeli drone manufacturer Elbit, went further, [crediting](#) academia with "standing behind this whole vast [military] industry."

On the flip side, the Israeli government relies on academia (and culture) to whitewash its crimes and project itself as a bastion of liberalism and a kind of western outpost in the Middle East – culture and academia are employed, in this context, to rebrand Israel. Academia and culture are to Israel what sports was to South Africa, and this is why it is such a crucial aspect of the overall BDS movement; BDS against Israel, after all, did not start with sports, but rather, with academia and culture. The symbolic and material significance of Israeli academia and culture in maintaining Israel's regime of oppression cannot be overstated.

While there is an increasing number of Israeli faculty who have courageously come out in support of Palestinian rights those numbers are dismal. Worse, however, is that many of these Israeli academics are subject to censorship, intimidation, and a draconian anti-BDS law that legally restricts their academic freedom and freedom of speech by forbidding them from publicly expressing any support for even the most selective boycott of anything Israeli – their

institutions have been silent on this intimidation if not promoting it.

PACBI takes this complicity of Israeli academic and cultural institutions, as well as the importance of these institutions to Israel's image, as a starting point for advocating for the academic and cultural boycott. Crucially, the institutional academic boycott, which was launched by PACBI in 2004, is supported by the Palestinian Council for Higher Education (CHE) and is in line with the CHE's authoritative call for "non-cooperation in the scientific and technical fields between Palestinian and Israeli universities." The PACBI Call is also supported by the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUPE), among other major unions. So we are not talking about supporting a call by a few academics, or even following some abstract civil society. We are talking about a call from faculty in Palestine to faculty around the world, supported by an overwhelming majority of civil society organizations; and a call by the oppressed for their voices, once and for all, to be listened to and heeded.

BDS as Dialogic Act

Finally, for those who say we need more dialogue and exchange of ideas, not less, we say that the boycott is a form of speech, a dialogic act that encourages conversation, connections, dialogue, and exchange based on a set of shared principles of justice, based on an acknowledgement and recognition of the rights and the agency of the oppressed in any such conversation, and anchored in a mission of decolonizing the mind of the oppressor. We seek, in the BDS movement, to move the conversation from the futile, disingenuous and unethical rhetoric of co-existence between oppressor and oppressed to one of co-resistance against oppression. We welcome both individuals and institutions that have recognized full Palestinian rights, including the right of return, and that cease all forms of complicity with the Israeli regime of oppression.

Without recognition of Palestinians as equals who are entitled to their comprehensive rights under international law, dialogue become an unethical fig leaf for ongoing oppression. Palestinians, like all oppressed communities worldwide, are only interested in pursuing ethical dialogue, based on universal rights for all.

On Academic Freedom

As is unambiguously stated in the BDS Movement's [Guidelines for the International](#)

[Academic Boycott of Israel](#), our understanding of academic freedom stems from its UN definition:

Academic freedom includes the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfill their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the state or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction. The enjoyment of academic freedom carries with it obligations, such as the duty to respect the academic freedom of others, to ensure the fair discussion of contrary views, and to treat all without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds. [Emphasis added]

Judith Butler articulates well the balance we try to strike in practice with academic freedom when she calls us to question:

the classically liberal conception of academic freedom with a view that grasps the political realities at stake, and see that our struggles for academic freedom must work in concert with the opposition to state violence, ideological surveillance, and the systematic devastation of everyday life.

With this in mind, we insist that our academic boycott rejects on principle boycotts of individuals based on their identity (such as citizenship, race, gender, or religion) or opinion. We are after the institution not the individual.

The exception that proves the rule is when individual academics forfeit their integrity and allow themselves to be recruited as "academic ambassadors" to defend or whitewash Israeli violations of human rights by presenting Israel's "prettier face," as the [Brand Israel](#) campaign entails. In such instances, we call for boycotting their participation in events, as they become representatives of institutions, not merely affiliated to them.

What is important is that we remain vigilant about protecting academic freedom but not [academic privilege](#). The distinction is important. Israeli academics have the freedom to research and collaborate however they choose. Their institutions should not, however, have the privilege of exceptional treatment by governments and institutions, especially when resources and choices are limited. Awarding a grant, engaging in institutional collaboration, being the recipient of a study abroad, these are privileges, not a

question of freedom. It is academic privileges that are the target of this boycott.

Israel's academic institutions are a pillar in the system of colonial oppression and must therefore be boycotted by every conscientious academic, just as South Africa's apartheid universities were isolated.

Hasbara and The Lancet

You read about the Lancet affair in last month's Newsletter. It concerned the publication in The Lancet of an outspoken open letter critical of Israeli actions during the recent Gaza war. This letter was followed by a flood of demands that the Editor, Richard Horton be sacked and the open letter withdrawn. You may also have read that the Editor apologised. This is not the case, although some of the recent developments in the affair are disturbing. In this article we will try to unpick what has been going on

Over several years, Richard Horton, editor of the medical journal The Lancet, has published a series of important articles on health issues in Palestine. Horton was also instrumental in creating the Lancet-Palestine Health Alliance LPHA which, in its own words, is a "productive network of Palestinian, regional, and international researchers, committed to the highest scientific standards in describing, analysing, and evaluating the health and health care of Palestinian people, contributing to the international scientific literature, and developing local evidence-based policy and practice." The contribution of the LPHA in the brief period of its operation is already impressive. As it reports, it has grown to meet "the challenge, opportunity, and support needed for Palestinian researchers to produce and present research findings at a high level." Its "aim of presenting and publishing research findings is being achieved—faster and in greater numbers than anyone expected." The number of young researchers augurs well for the future [and] there is an increasing number of academic and service partners within the oPt [occupied Palestinian territories]. Peer review and capacity building within the oPt have been key features of these changes, helping to increase the number of high-quality studies describing and explaining the health and health care of Palestinian people." The LPHA has overcome many obstacles created by the Israeli authorities including, obviously, mounting pressure on Richard Horton himself. As

Derek Summerfield pointed out in BRICUP's last [Newsletter \(#80](#), October 2014), medical journals that publish pieces describing the appalling consequences of the Israeli occupation have long been the target of Zionist attack, however secure the evidence on which their claims are based.: see [Newsletter \(#23](#), December 2009) for an example that we described in this Newsletter.

In July 2014, The Lancet published a [strongly worded article](#) authored by Paola Manduca, Iain Chalmers, Derek Summerfield, Mads Gilbert, Swee Ang and signed by 19 others which expressed strong criticism of the latest Israeli military assault on Gaza whose victims have been overwhelmingly civilians and include many children. The writers noted that Israel has blockaded Gaza since 2006 and that Gaza's dwellings and infrastructure, already damaged by earlier Israeli assaults, have been thoroughly devastated by the latest assault. As they pointed out, civilians, ordered to leave their homes, had nowhere safe to go. Thousands of private homes were destroyed and either Israel's so-called smart weapons were not so smart or Israeli forces deliberately degraded living conditions by destroying non-military targets. Despite the fact that this utterly one-sided assault could be directly witnessed from Israel, very few Israeli academics were prepared to sign an appeal to stop the military action.

None of observations in the Manduca letter was surprising or new: they are all well-known and have been authenticated many times over. But evidently the letter became the subject of a massive campaign directed at The Lancet and Richard Horton, its editor. Precise details of the complaints have not been disclosed but certainly they included demands for the removal of the letter from the Lancet website and the sacking of Horton. The critics' common assertion was that The Lancet should not publish political material.

Certainly there are topics that would be inappropriate in a medical journal, but the causes of death or of injury requiring medical attention, or the psychological consequences of unremitting stress and anxiety are as much a part of medicine as any other cause of injury or ill-health. The Lancet should not be reluctant to publish medical information just because it happens to have political implications: much of medicine has.

During recent months, Richard Horton has been the subject of extraordinary pressure, threats and bullying, and following an Israeli invitation to visit medical centres in Haifa a [statement](#) has

been published in his name, “because of the intense interest that the editorial leadership of [The Lancet](#) has attracted, focusing on issues of medical professional responsibility and accountability for the tragic loss of life and human suffering of Gaza civilians including children”. According to the same largely uncorroborated report, Horton in Haifa was shown “an inspiring model of partnership between Jews and Arabs” He is alleged to have acknowledged that “what was written in the Manduca letter does not describe the full reality” and he regretted that its publication had resulted in “an extreme polarisation of already divided positions”. He is further alleged to accept that Manduca and the other authors of the letter should have disclosed their interests and that while political determinants of health are real enough, editors should be vigilant about how they are discussed. He apparently concluded that the correct action now is to foster peaceful coexistence by working with both Palestinians and Israelis.

It is very difficult to reconcile Horton’s recent statement with, for example, his 2009 paper, “[The Occupied Palestinian territory: peace, justice and health](#).” The Lancet’s work in collaboration with Palestinian academics and the LPHA initiative has been highly respected, widely admired and hugely effective. It was undertaken because it enabled needed help to be given to the Palestinian people in a way that did not undermine their resistance to the occupation. On the other hand, collaboration with Israeli institutions complicit in the Israeli occupation of the oPT, which Horton now apparently proposes, would be in flagrant conflict with the call for non-violent boycott by the [BDS National Committee](#) (BNC) as set out in the [PACBI BDS guidelines](#). The claim that Horton has declared [The Lancet](#) opposed to “all forms of boycott” reinforces this direct rejection of the BNC call.

Richard Horton has apparently described his visit as a “turning point for me and my relationship with this region”. Perhaps. But it is fervently to be hoped that the highly effective partnership between [The Lancet](#) and Palestine will continue to develop in its present very positive way. Some, particularly Gerald Steinberg of [NGO Monitor](#), have seen Horton’s statement as a capitulation, but we note that the Manduca letter has not been removed from the website and there have been no apologies. Moreover the authors of the Manduca letter have responded robustly to charges of hidden bias, as recorded in BRICUP [Newsletter](#)

[#80](#), pointing out that they had no competing interests to declare - except their first-hand knowledge of the situation in the oPT - and repeating a catalogue of recent military horrors committed by Israel in Gaza. They will not withdraw their letter. In fact, we do not know exactly what Horton said during and immediately after his visit to Haifa: reporting is mainly through Israeli sources. For the details, consult the excellent review of the whole episode published in the MEM by [Ben White](#).

It may be that Richard Horton has now espoused actions that conflict with the BNC call for boycott. Yet the support for boycott is growing day by day. Horton has defined two possible routes for the future: either to entrench existing divisions or to nurture collaborations with Israel. But as readers of the BRICUP Newsletter will be aware, there is also a third way: to respect the BNC call and to continue to support the Palestinian people in their resistance to occupation.

David Pegg and Colin Green

Connecting the Dots: New Developments in BDS Organizing and the HP Boycott Campaign.

A report from California

On the heels of several BDS successes, including the promotion of the cultural boycott by US Pulitzer prize author Junot Diaz, and the widening support in the US for the academic boycott following the 2013 American Studies Association (ASA) resolution, there is a growing sense that the tide is turning. Perhaps. In any event, we can certainly be heartened by the number of new steps being taken in the long march to dismantle Israeli apartheid, if not settler-colonialism - even here in the belly of the beast in the US.

Most encouraging perhaps is the way that a new generation of activists is connecting the dots, linking different struggles for social justice. The most notable recent examples in the US are the Palestine-Ferguson rallies organized around the country and the Block the Boat mobilizations in Oakland and Long Beach. It is precisely this kind of cross-struggle coalition building that most excited those who attended a recent national

organizing conference sponsored by the US Campaign to End Israeli Occupation.

In a similar vein, even as more and more academics are organizing boycott campaigns in their professional organizations - most notably anthropologists, historians and Middle East studies scholars - the US Academic and Cultural Boycott (USACBI) Organizing Collective just held a workshop session for ASA conferees on building the boycott movement beyond the academy.

A newly launched Hewlett-Packard (HP) consumer boycott campaign is another example of this exciting development in Palestinian solidarity work in the US. Unlike the campaign against HP in the UK, until now US groups have focused primarily on HP shareholder resolutions and appeals to pension funds to divest from the company. Taking a different tack, the new cross-struggle coalition is taking its message directly to consumers outside retail outlets.

At the October 25th launch outside the “Little Tokyo” Office Depot store, activists from a range of social movement groups excoriated Hewlett Packard (HP) for its complicity in Israeli apartheid and in the US prison-industrial complex, deportations of immigrants and widespread surveillance of civilian populations. Surrounded by banners and giant mockups of the blue and green apartheid passbooks - the HP biometric i.d. cards issued to Israelis and Palestinians - they were busy leafleting cars and pedestrians when they weren’t participating in a short rousing rally and street theater. [A 24 minute video of the launch event can be viewed at www.hpboycott.org]

Coalition member Ahlam Muhtaseb from Al-Awda practically moved people to tears as she recounted her recent experience in Palestine. Although her 3 year old son is a US citizen and could go visit family members in Jerusalem, as a native of al-Khalil (Hebron), her green passbook (i.d. card) prevented her from taking him there. On a less somber note, the group responded with cheers when Hamid Khan of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition talked about HP’s role in the “Israelification” of the LAPD.

Hamzah Baig of the prisoner rights group, Critical Resistance, and Jaime Cruz of the National Chicano Moratorium Committee further connected the HP dots, noting how the corporation is not only complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights, but how it services the US prison-industrial complex and Homeland Security/ICE’s deportation of immigrants from Central America. Other coalition member from Jewish Voice for Peace, Code Pink and the Israel Divestment campaign focused on their BDS work.

Although a satirical skit and a short dramatic reading on the issue of family separation highlighted HP’s role in Israeli apartheid, the fact that HP is a major supplier of equipment to the Israeli military was not lost on the crowd. In other words, even if HP stopped supplying its Basel system for the checkpoints in the oPt, it would remain culpable in servicing Israeli settler colonialism and its concomitant system of apartheid.

Demanding that HP be held accountable, our message to consumers is that they can refuse to be a party to the violation of basic human and civil rights in both Palestine and the US. Just like in the grape boycott in the 1960s and 1970s, we are urging people to use their consumer power and refuse to purchase HP equipment, especially denying HP one of its major sources of revenues, ink cartridges. We will be carrying this message all around Southern California during the approaching holiday shopping season, starting with the consumer frenzy known as “Black Friday” the day after “Thanksgiving.”

As people stand in long lines readying to rush into stores for electronic “deals,” we will be delivering our message loud and clear: **END ISRAELI APARTHEID! BOYCOTT HP!**

Sherna Berger Gluck

The HP Boycott Coalition [www.hpboycott.org]

Gluck is a founding member of USACBI, and the co-author with BRICUP’s Haim Bresheeth of “On the Fallacy of Engaging with the Israeli Academy,” *Counterpunch*, Sept. 20, 2013: www.counterpunch.org/2013/09/20/on-the-fallacy-of-engaging-with-the-israeli-academy/

A Brief Survey of Student BDS activity in the UK

During the build-up to Parliament's decision to recognise Palestine as a state, a motion which passed by 274 votes to 12, I spoke to a number of students attending a BDS conference in Sheffield about their efforts to promote awareness of the Palestinian issue. Although the decision does not oblige Her Majesty's Government to do anything with regard to the ex-British territory, students from a number of universities across the country have taken the issue into their own hands by advancing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS).

First it is necessary to note that the National Union of Students, which represents 600 student unions from across the country, passed a motion at its annual conference in August in support of the BDS movement. "NUS does not employ or work with companies identified as facilitating Israel's military capacity, human rights abuses or illegal settlement activity", a NUS spokesperson said.

Sheffield University has been notably successful in mobilising students to speak up for Palestine. It is the first member of the Russell Group to officially endorse the BDS campaign and the actions of its students reflect this. Veolia, a firm that maintains the rail connection between Jerusalem and settlements built upon once-Palestinian land, was forced from Sheffield's campus in May last year. It is a company that has been condemned by Professor Richard Falk, UN Special Rapporteur of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories, who urged Islington Council not to use the company "due to its active involvement in Israel's grave violations of international law". But, momentum did not stall after Sheffield's first breakthrough. The expression of Sheffield's campus of discontent towards Veolia shaped the decision of the university's accommodation manager, who "decided not to renew a waste management contract with Veolia Environmental Services". University policy was consequently amended to ensure that no future contracts were awarded to companies affiliated with ethically questionable practices.

At the University of Kent, a successful campaign with a ratio of 4:1 resulted in the cessation of Kent Union's investment in G4S, a company that provides "the most modern security technology to

ensure that Israeli prisons and crossing points are managed efficiently", according to a report G4S published in 2014. Take form that what you will. Students in Southampton have also been successful in campaigning to annul their university's contract societies across the country that is raising money to pay for a student from Gaza to study at with G4S. Furthermore, the university's Students for Palestine Society is one of several their institution for a year.

Although campaigners at King's College London and the University of Leeds were successful in receiving a majority vote on their petitions to disassociate their campuses with G4S, contracts were not torn up. Both universities required a minimum number of overall votes to be cast in order for student opinion to be turned into university policy. In neither case was this threshold reached.

Promoting awareness of the Palestinian issue is not only being carried out by students. In the football world, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) rejected the Israeli Football Association's request to host the 2020 European Championships in Jerusalem in support of Palestine. Six Nobel peace laureates also called for a military boycott to be imposed on Israel during its Operation Protective Edge in July. Stephen Hawking has also acted in support of the academic boycott on Israel by refusing to attend the Israeli Presidential Conference in 2013. Numerous musicians have refused to perform in Israel in recent years. Elvis Costello, Brian Eno, Roger Walters (Pink Floyd), The Pixies and Carlos Santana are but a few artists that have cancelled concerts or shows as a result of the actions of the Israeli government.

Efforts are evidently being made to ensure that a defeatist shroud of silence doesn't fall over the Palestinian issue. This affirms the historic strategy of overcoming barriers to civil unity, for history tells us that struggles are incessant until a just conclusion is arrived at. How close we are to witnessing a resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is up for speculation. What we do not have to speculate over is the momentum of the BDS campaign and the success of pro-Palestinian student activism. Evidence for this is spread out before us.

Jon Gibson

A Close Call for BDS at the University of Sydney.

The National Council of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has narrowly missed an opportunity to add its weight to the growing support for BDS in unions around Australia. At its meeting in Melbourne on October 2-4, a motion endorsing the PACBI boycott and committing the union to initiate discussion of BDS among its membership was lost by only a handful of votes. Various reports of the count indicate a split of roughly 62 to 54, with some 6 abstentions.

Facing the united opposition of the NTEU Executive, the ability of pro-BDS councillors to achieve this result shows how significantly the ground has shifted around the issue of Palestine solidarity. This debate marks the first time the issue has reached the floor of National Council since 2011. Since then a handful of branches, including ours at Sydney University, have seen discussion of BDS, but the majority have not. Many councillors confronted the question of BDS for the first time, and BDS proponents gained considerable support among this unaligned majority. Of those won to the pro-BDS position, a number subsequently expressed a desire to take the issue back to their branch.

The debate at National Council confirms a point that Sydney Staff for BDS has been making all along: that although disagreement exists within the union on this question, resolving it need not be divisive. Councillors report that the opposing motions on Israel-Palestine were discussed in a frank but collegial fashion, and there is no reason to believe that a more inclusive debate among the membership would be conducted any differently.

Opponents of BDS at the National Council sought to portray it as an issue beyond the purview of the union's work, an abstract proposition lacking concrete proposals for implementation. This is hardly an argument against it: even as a symbolic move, adopting a pro-BDS policy would be a significant gesture in support of the Palestinians. But the truth is that BDS is far from symbolic, and there are many ways in which the union can take action in support of the boycott call. After all, winning the union to BDS is only the first step in a long campaign to force Australian universities to cut ties with Israel. The NTEU can, and should, lend moral and material support to

such a campaign, as it has done in the case of a series of recent boycott and divestment campaigns, including Greenpeace's call for universities to divest from fossil fuel companies, and the push by refugee activists for UniSuper to divest from Transfield.

Clearly Israel's mid-year assault on Gaza has given fresh impetus to this campaign. It would be a grave mistake, though, for the NTEU to wait for the next bloody pogrom before taking a further step towards BDS. Can there be any doubt now that consensus is forming around the need for an institutional boycott of Israel? Surely it is only a matter of time before our union joins this consensus. Those arguing against BDS at the National Council stated that BDS is inconsistent with the Education International position on Israel-Palestine, which the NTEU has previously endorsed. Yet such appeals to the authority of a remote Educational International bureaucracy will ring increasingly hollow as events in the Middle East expose the ineffectiveness of Education International's "balanced" policy.

In light of the close vote, and the growing support for BDS it represents, the NTEU leadership would be well advised to take the matter in hand, and not seek to stifle debate on BDS. A process of union-wide discussion and voting on BDS in the lead-up to National Council 2015 is the best way to proceed. Whether or not the union's leadership takes such steps, BDS supporters in the NTEU have an opportunity to capitalise on this success at National Council, and spread the campaign at the local level. Such work is essential if a pro-BDS policy in the NTEU is to have any teeth: experience shows that top-down resolutions on an issue such as this will remain a dead letter if a body of active support has not been cultivated at the grassroots.

There is momentum around this issue that has not existed for some time, and good reason to believe that 2015 will be a year of BDS breakthroughs on campus in Australia.

This statement was made by Sydney Staff for BDS (<http://sydneystaff4bds.org>) and communicated to the BRICUP Newsletter by David Brophy (david.brophy@sydney.edu.au)

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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