

BRICUP NEWSLETTER

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The University and College Union (UCU) votes on links with Israeli Universities.

After an interesting debate at the UCU Congress in May 2008 delegates voted overwhelmingly against an amendment that would have undermined the motion on Palestine. [For the wording of the motions see Newsletter Number 4]. It then voted overwhelmingly to support the motion. Amongst those who spoke in favour of the motion were Jewish members of the union, who condemned the accusations of anti-semitism directed at the union for having this debate, and an Israeli citizen, working in the UK, who registered for Congress the barbarity of the occupation and the complicity of many in Israeli academia. The motion was also seconded by the President of the union who recounted part of her experiences during the PSC-organised tour for British trade unionists of the West Bank.

The debate was, once again, conducted well, and most contributions from both sides were without rancour. Most of the arguments about the motion were rehearsed during the debate over the amendment. Because the accusation is typically made by Israeli apologists that the union spends too much (any) time discussing Palestine, once the key contributions had been made one delegate moved 'that the motion' be put. This was also overwhelmingly carried by the Congress. As one opponent of the motion has declared publicly, the view of Congress on the motion would not have been altered even if the arguments against the motion had been repeated many times over.

The motion committed the union to providing information on the occupation to members, drawn from the testimonies of UCU members who visited Palestine, and the Palestinian colleagues who recently visited the UK to tour campuses on the invitation of the UCU. It also resolved to

initiate an international greylisting investigation into Ariel College which has been designated as a university and constitutes the educational arm of the colonization of the West Bank. The union will now have to pursue these issues through its normal procedures.

Tom Hickey

The PACBI column

Israel flaunts its international obligations, including commitments to the EU.

On April 27th, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad sent a letter to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), protesting against Israel's bid for membership to the global economic body. The OECD, a mostly European body that includes the United States, Canada and Japan, has invited Israel, amongst others, to open membership talks. Mr. Fayyad's letter points out that Israel is in breach of various requirements of the United Nations and other bodies concerning its treatment of the Palestinian population, and thus should not be rewarded by membership in the OECD.

In advance of a June 16th EU Council meeting of foreign ministers in Luxembourg, Fayyad wrote another letter to EU heads of state and other top officials. The letter, dated May 27th, protests a proposed upgrade in the EU-Israel relations, in Fayyad's words "*while Israel continues to systematically violate Palestinian human rights and flaunt its international obligations, including certain of its commitments to the EU.*" This call was indirectly supported by a statement made by the *ad hoc* delegation of the Working Group on Peace in the Middle East of the European Parliament who visited the OPT between May 30th and June 2nd: "...we strongly feel that without serious signs of good faith translated into tangible

improvements on the ground, the time is not yet right to upgrade EU-Israel relations."

Mr. Fayyad's call is an indication of how catastrophic the situation has become; even he is having to lobby the international community, in this case the EU, to place minimal sanctions on his 'partners in peace' so that they will comply with a subset of their basic obligations under international law.

Although certain groups within the EU seem to agree with Mr. Fayyad's soft approach, the EU ought to cut entirely its association agreement with Israel due to the latter's grave and persistent violation of the agreement's human rights clause. In violation of this clause, Israel carries on with its land confiscation and settlement building; restricts the movement of people, goods and services within the West Bank; and runs the biggest prison in the world, the Gaza Strip, only to name a few. Even if the EU's double-standard policy lets Israel off the hook when it comes to international law, one expects the powerful European community to at least respect its own laws and to hold Israel accountable under them. The EU should act on these violations and disengage totally from dealing with Israel until it complies with international law, EU regulations, and fundamental human rights.

PACBI

PSC Workshop on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

Two main ideas prompted the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), supported by the LSE Students Palestine Society and BRICUP, to organise an action-oriented workshop on BDS on May 11th. The first, is the urgent call for BDS from Palestinian civil society, which together with the severity of conditions in Palestine, drives us to respond as strongly as possible. The second is that BDS has been a priority plank of PSC campaigning for a long time but there is a feeling that the many examples of energetic and imaginative work, mostly by individual branches or groups, have not added up to the forceful

collective campaign with the major impact we would hope for.

Some 40 PSC members attended, from 17 branches – including Glasgow, Cambridge, Exeter, Liverpool, York, as well as sister organisations - JBIG (Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods), BRICUP, IMRI (Interfaith Morally Responsible Investment) and the Scottish PSC. The aim was to produce action proposals that were precisely defined, feasible and had identified timings and lead groups. It was a hot programme-packed day, in a remote corner of one of LSE's more archaic buildings, but the energy and spirit was palpable.

A comprehensive Action Plan and Calendar for the year ahead emerged, which we are now committed to carrying through with as wide a network of support as possible. We also aim, wherever this makes sense, to link the areas of action together so that they reinforce each other, and again, add up to more than individual campaigns. In many of the campaigns we will also be working with relevant sister organisations. There will be a follow-up workshop in November (date to be confirmed) in York, to review progress and develop ongoing plans.

In very brief summary, these are the eight Action Areas in the Plan. In all, there will be links with all PSC branches, production of relevant literature and website revamps, and an organisational framework to check on progress and report back - for example to the PSC AGM in December/January.

1. Consumer Action Two workgroups covered Boycotting Israeli Goods (BIG) and the specific case of settlement produce, which is so graphic in its illegality that it can be used as an entry point for persuading the public, and introducing the case for a general boycott. As well as continuing research and lobbying, there will be a BIG re-launch in September, with press and supermarket letters from the 1st, letters to local supermarkets from 7th, and a national week of action from the 20th.

2. Complicit Firms Intensive campaigns directed at Agrexco (agricultural exports), Veolia (Jerusalem tramway), Eden Springs (water from the Golan), and Leviev Diamonds, which have so far mainly been conducted by groups in Brighton, Portsmouth, Scotland and New York, will become national campaigns with tailored lobbying of company HQ, local outlets and clients (including shops, local councils and educational institutions), and some direct actions. There will be seasonal focus on specific Agrexco products (e.g. dates during September for Ramadan).

3. EU Trade Association A coordinating group will intensify protest over the practice of the trade preference regime, research the economic benefits illicitly received by Israel and the cost of Israeli destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, specially to EC-supported projects and aid programme; and work through the year on lobbying MPs & MEPs.

4. Academic Boycott PSC will identify its academic members and encourage them to become BRICUP supporters and undertake silent (personal) boycotting, and - also with students - work on identifying their universities' research and other links with Israel.

5. Cultural and Sporting boycott A group will produce, with BRICUP, a calendar of cultural, and sporting events for action through the year; a clear PSC call for boycott based on the PACBI appeal; a template letter for artists travelling to Israel; and a 'hall of shame and fame' for the website.

6. Pension and investment funds PSC will work with TU officers and members and pension fund managers to get information on the make-up of funds and to call for divestment as appropriate.

7. Faith Group Action There will be work through Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities to support the consumer action, cultural, and divestment campaigns, with specific elements - e.g. calls for pilgrimages that benefit Palestinians.

8. Trade Union Action There will be continuing contact and joint actions with TUs in Palestine,

encouragement of TU twinning, and a discussion of BDS work in the TUs at the PSC AGM,

This programme is intended to strengthen links between PSC and BRICUP. Anyone interested in further information about the Action Plan, or willing to help with specific actions, should contact Zoe Mars at

zoe.mars@palestinecampaign.org

Jenny Najjar and Zoe Mars

EU Ministers decide to upgrade ties with Israel

On June 17th, Haaretz reported that the European Union had decided unanimously to upgrade Israeli ties with the EU in the fields of commerce, academic activity and diplomacy. It appears that the agreement imposes no conditions - such as insisting on the full and prompt payment of taxes due to the Palestinian Authority but withheld by Israel, or the cessation of illegal settlement building or halting the construction of the separation wall on West Bank land, all of which were requested by PA Prime minister Salam Fayyad. [See the PACBI column in this Newsletter]

Earlier, it was reported in the Jerusalem Post (on February 24th 2008) that Israel places great importance on strengthening its ties with Europe. To quote, "the Israeli Foreign Ministry believes it is time to reassess the Jewish State's traditional reliance on 'two pillars' for Israeli survival: a strong IDF and an unbreakable alliance with America. Given the growing importance of the European Union in world events, and in the Middle East particularly, the officials said, a third pillar has become necessary: deepening ties with Europe". The Israeli objectives include: strengthened political cooperation with the EU; integration into the European Single Market; cooperation in Justice [sic]; co-operation in research and industry; cooperation between EU and Israeli Universities with a staff and student exchange programme. Tzipi Livni stated, "The sky is the limit for Israeli-European ties."

The Palestinians were not alone in arguing that the EU should not agree: the Egyptian

Government also asked that this upgrade not be allowed.

The announcement contained no mention of Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement which requires Israel to respect human rights and democratic principles as an essential part of the agreement. Omar Barghouti commented “ [This is] the latest proof, if any is needed, that the EU has completed its conversion into a partner in Israeli colonial and apartheid crimes”.

Of particular concern to BRICUP supporters will be the declared intention to facilitate the granting to Israeli scientists of EU research grants worth ‘tens of millions of Euros’ and the proposed academic exchange programme.

However, it does appear that the details are yet to be worked out, with a deadline at the end of this year. It is important therefore that our protests reach the Foreign Secretary and our MEPs as intensively and as rapidly as possible. The European Parliament may have little power but it does have some: if you would like to be involved in this action please contact David Pegg at dep1@york.ac.uk or Monica Wusteman at mcwusteman@hotmail.com

David Pegg

BRICUP continues to urge prominent artists and others not to accept invitations to perform in Israel until Israel allows the Palestinian people their human rights.

The following is an open letter to Branford Marsalis from the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine

17 June 2008

Dear Branford Marsalis:

Inventive and independent musician that you are, it seems to us that you're constantly exploring aspects of black American experience. And jazz is one of the most triumphant expressions of African-Americans' resistance to forced removal, ruthless suppression, and murderous racism.

Yet you are reportedly going to play a concert in a country whose government and army are even now inflicting similar cruelties on another people. Is it possible that when you agreed to play in Tel Aviv on July 17, you did not think what message this would send to the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, many of whom now live in refugee camps outside their homeland or in exile across the world? They were driven out en masse in 1948 and 1967, and no Israeli government has ever allowed them, their children, or their children's children, to return.

Palestinians may not have been transported in stinking, deathly slave-ships, but they are as unwilling a diaspora as the millions of Africans whose forced labour and intense suffering built the wealth of the 'New World' (and the old one).

We are writing to ask you to reconsider your decision to play in Israel. We are wondering how a musician with your sensitivity will be able to stand on a stage and play reflective, subtle jazz while less than an hour's drive away, a million-and-a-half people in Gaza -- two-thirds of them refugees -- endure yet another night of hunger, darkness and fear because of the iron-clad siege the Israeli government has enforced against them for years.

Perhaps you saw that in May, former archbishop Desmond Tutu described this siege as an 'abomination'. Maybe you read former US president Jimmy Carter's article in the UK paper *The Guardian*, describing what the Israelis are doing to Palestinians in Gaza as 'a terrible human rights crime'. How will you keep the echo of their words out of your head?

When Ken Burns interviewed you for his television series, you said what drew you to jazz is that it's 'about freedom'. Yet you will be playing to an audience whose government and army operate a rigid system of checkpoints that keep several million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza de facto prisoners in their towns and villages. Many in your audience will be young Israelis who are inflicting this misery -- but Palestinian fans of Branford Marsalis from the Occupied West Bank and Gaza will not be

allowed into Israel to hear you. Would you have agreed to play to a white South African audience under apartheid?

If you stand up on that stage in the Tel Aviv opera house you'll be telling the Palestinians their suffering -- the product of colonialism and racism -- doesn't matter. You'll be saying you don't care that Palestinian civil society has issued a strong call to artists to boycott Israel (you can see it on www.pacbi.org). You'll be giving a slap in the face to the Palestinian musicians, artists, filmmakers, writers and poets, who keep hope alive in circumstances meant to suffocate and crush them.

How can you, in all conscience, play Sonny Rollins' 'Freedom Suite' in Tel Aviv?

Please don't go.

Yours sincerely,

Haim Bresheeth and Jonathan Rosenhead

Some recent data from B'TSELEM

B'tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the occupied territories is a valuable source of accurate and detailed information concerning human rights abuses in the West Bnk and Gaza. Their website is at:-

<http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp>

For example, the following are the total fatalities recorded between 29/09/2000 and 31/05/2008. The overall ratio of Palestinian deaths to Israeli deaths now stands at 4.5 Palestinians per Israeli. The website is constantly updated and shows much more detail, including information concerning each person killed.

Palestinians killed by Israeli forces	4785
Palestinians killed by Israeli civilians	45
<u>Total Palestinians killed by Israelis</u>	<u>4830</u>

Israeli civilians killed by Palestinians	721
Israeli forces killed by Palestinians	334
<u>Total Israelis killed by Palestinians</u>	<u>1055</u>

Foreign citizens killed by Palestinians	54
Foreign citizens killed by Israeli forces	10
<u>Total foreign citizens killed</u>	<u>64</u>

Palestinians killed by Palestinians	577
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BRICUP needs your financial support

As the pace of boycott activity increases we need your financial support. We have invested most of our reserves on a substantial, and well overdue, redesign of our website. We need funds to support visiting speakers, book rooms for public meetings, print leaflets and pay the whole range of expenses that an ever busier campaign demands.

You can make a one off donation

- by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK
- by making a bank transfer to BRICUP
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