

BRICUP Newsletter 73

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The Academic Boycott of apartheid South Africa

When I recently acted as an external examiner for a South African university, I was shocked to be asked to complete a form designating my “nationality/race” as “white”, “black”, “coloured” or “Indian”. The university informed me that these admitted “relics” were now being used to practise affirmative action, but I have serious doubts as to their current appropriateness. The labels were introduced after the South African general election of 1948, when the policy of apartheid formally began. There were sub-divisions of the national/racial categories: I recall that in my student days in the 70s an African student once teased me by informing me that as a non-Afrikaner I would only

be a “second-class white”. The parallels with modern Israel are quite striking, with racial and religious categories being used to designate nationality on citizens’ passports (there is no such thing as Israeli nationality)¹, and even some Jewish citizens being considered less equal than others².

As the world remembers Nelson Mandela and his “long walk to freedom”, it seems a fitting time to reflect on the contribution that academic boycott made to his people’s struggle against apartheid. Our current boycott of apartheid Israel draws on what was learnt from the South African BDS campaign, but it also has some significant differences. In what follows I will focus on the policies of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) in the UK.

Although the foundations of apartheid – notably the pass laws, disenfranchisement of non-whites and segregation of residential areas – had been laid under British colonial rule, it was introduced as a formal legal framework in 1948, leading to the introduction of identity cards and forms of “petty apartheid” such as the prohibition of mixed marriages and whites-only beaches. Ethnic cleansing on a major scale can be said to have begun in 1960, with some 3.5 million non-white citizens being forcibly “resettled”. From 1970 non-white political representation was abolished, and “black” South Africans had their citizenship transferred to the ten “homelands” or bantustans, which were never recognised by any UN member state apart from (you guessed it) Israel.

South Africa became a republic and withdrew from the Commonwealth on 31st May 1961. Shortly afterwards, the UN began to take various initiatives to show international disapproval of the regime, such as resolutions condemning the Sharpeville

massacre, the Soweto massacre, the homelands policy and apartheid in general. Over the following quarter of a century, this disapproval morphed into a somewhat piecemeal policy of boycotts, divestment and sanctions, with varying degrees of enforcement and effectiveness.

In 1962, the UN General Assembly requested that its members sever political, fiscal and transportation ties with South Africa. The UN Security Council called for a voluntary arms embargo in 1963: this was adopted by the USA and Britain in 1964 and was made mandatory in 1977. In 1968, the General Assembly proposed ending all cultural, educational and sporting connections with South Africa. In fact, however, the segregated nature of South African sport had provoked the beginnings of an international sporting boycott as early as 1956 when the International Table Tennis Federation had severed its ties with the all-white South African Table Tennis Union. By the late 1980s the USA, the UK and 23 other nations had passed laws placing various trade sanctions on South Africa. Meanwhile a divestment movement had gained momentum around the world, with individual cities and provinces implementing various laws and local regulations forbidding registered corporations under their jurisdiction from doing business with South African firms, factories, or banks.

None of this would have happened without the ANC and other resistance organisations pursuing both armed and unarmed struggles from within. Various forms of protests, strikes and uprisings took place from the 1950s onwards; the government retaliated by, among other things, imprisoning and “banning” leading opposition figures. A typical banning order would restrict an individual to a particular magisterial district, require them to report regularly to the police, prevent them from associating with more than one person at any time (including family members), and prevent them from visiting various public places and educational institutions. Additionally, nothing the banned person said or wrote could be quoted in the press or used for publication. There was no mechanism for appealing against a banning order.

While the ANC had first issued a call for academic boycott as far back as 1958,³ it was the banning orders against academics Jack Simons and Eddie Roux in 1965 which finally provoked 496 university professors and lecturers from 34 British universities into issuing their Declaration that “we shall not apply for or accept academic posts in South African universities which practise racial discrimination”.

The banning of academics and the censorship of academic work – in other words, a perceived attack on academic freedom – were likewise major factors leading the AUT to adopt a policy of academic boycott. Its first boycott policy was apparently passed around 1973, but the crucial turning point came in May 1980 when AUT Council passed resolution 29, which stated: “Council reaffirms its total opposition to the policies of apartheid and of censorship of academic work, books, literature, etc., and believes that the most effective action is the maintenance of a total boycott on any form of contact with South African universities and with South African Academics.”

As with the sporting boycott, the UN finally caught up with the initiatives from civil society. It was not until December 1980 that the General Assembly passed its resolution “Cultural, Academic and other boycotts of South Africa”, requesting all states “to take steps to prevent all cultural, academic, sports, and other exchanges with the racist regime of South Africa” and “to cease any cultural and academic collaboration with South Africa, including the exchange of scientists, students and academic personalities, as well as cooperation on research programmes”, while calling on academic and cultural institutions to “terminate all links” with SA.

In March 1988 AUT Council set out the basis for the academic boycott and its guidance to members in a paper entitled “South Africa: an AUT Policy Statement”. This is quite a remarkable document, worth quoting extensively because of the lessons we can learn from it in today’s struggle against Israeli apartheid. Its rationale for the academic boycott is as follows:

“For those of us outside South Africa, including the vast majority of AUT members, who abhor apartheid, there are few effective weapons available in the fight to improve the position of the black majority in South Africa. However, there is widespread agreement among organisations such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth and the UN itself that a policy of total cultural boycott is most likely to succeed in effecting change within South Africa. Most important of all perhaps is the support for such a boycott among those inside South Africa involved in the struggle for freedom, notably the ANC. For those of us in the universities, the academic boycott called for by Council in May 1980 is the

expression of that general boycott. Because of the importance and prestige attached to academic exchange and other academic contact, not just by university but by the Government in South Africa as well, AUT's policy of academic boycott is capable of having a significant impact on opinion in South Africa."

The document then addresses the thorny issue of academic freedom, but in a way which would seem to turn today's arguments around Israeli universities on their head:

"Therefore, while we should acknowledge and applaud the stand taken by some universities and some white academics in opposing apartheid and discrimination within South African universities and where possible adopt a flexible attitude, we must at the same time make clear the importance of maintaining the policy of total academic boycott, even though this means that the academic freedom of some white academics in South Africa is threatened by the reaction of their Government to their efforts to demonstrate their opposition and that of their universities to apartheid. Some will argue that academic freedom is indivisible but the academics concerned will be the first to recognise that freedom of expression and right to access educational opportunity for the black majority must come first."

The academics of the oppressor nation are indeed seen here as being at risk of having their academic freedom curtailed by the boycott – but only because of their government's draconian reaction to their solidarity with the oppressed academics of the "other" group. In the case of Israeli academics, this kind of solidarity has taken a long time to manifest itself, and in the meantime most of the hoo-ha about academic freedom has centred around the perceived loss of it for Israeli academics who have shown no solidarity whatsoever with their Palestinian colleagues and have done nothing to challenge their own government. The mantra "academic freedom is indivisible" is put here into the mouths of white liberal academics and their advocates and then trumped by the greater rights to "freedom of expression and right to access educational opportunity" for the oppressed group. No time at all is wasted on the supposed academic freedom of people who do *not* support the liberation struggle of non-white South Africans. BRICUP's recent

deliberations around academic freedom for Israelis look pretty tame in comparison with this.

The document goes on to acknowledge that the AUT's boycott policy is "controversial" and that its members deserve guidance and support in implementing it. There will be borderline cases where judgement calls must be made:

"Can we distinguish between undergraduates who are not officially sponsored by the South African Government and postgraduates who may be supported, indirectly perhaps, by Government funds? Again, members may be faced with deciding whether to visit South Africa to make a hard-hitting speech attacking apartheid. Given that the visit will probably be reported for Government propaganda purposes while the speech may not, the advice in general is likely to be: 'don't go'."

Here again, it is clear that the AUT boycott of South Africa took a much harder line than the current boycott of Israel: it targeted individuals, even students, rather than just institutions. But the advice to those tempted to visit the apartheid state and attempt to win hearts and minds there can be quoted verbatim to those well-intentioned but naïve academics minded to visit Israel today.

The document concludes by musing, "Until change in South Africa has become irreversible – and at the present rate of progress it seems likely that it will take many years for that to happen – it will be necessary to continue and to develop the boycott and other strands of AUT policy." Given that this policy was adopted in 1988, we can see with hindsight that it was unduly pessimistic. Mandela was released from prison in 1990 and the last remaining apartheid laws were repealed the same year, with democratic general elections held in 1994. In December 1993 the AUT lifted the academic boycott of South Africa, and in 1995 it lifted all remaining aspects of the boycott. Once a critical mass has been reached, political change can come more quickly than anyone dared to hope.

Summary: a comparison of the academic boycott of SA and the academic boycott of Israel

Similarities

- Boycott policy triggered by attacks on academic freedom by the apartheid state. Banning orders and censorship in SA led to the AUT motion in 1980; closure of Birzeit University led to AUT calling for a moratorium on European funding of Israeli cultural and research institutions in 2002.
- Organisations within South Africa, notably the ANC, called for the academic boycott. While the PLO (sadly) does not currently correspond to the ANC, other Palestinian civil society organisations, notably PACBI, have stepped into the role of articulating Palestinian political demands and promoting BDS. Like the ANC, PACBI gives advice to international BDS supporters on where to draw the line in difficult cases.
- “The importance and prestige attached to academic exchange and other academic contact, not just by universities but by the Government” means that academic boycott is likely to be effective.
- Opposition to apartheid by some individual academics: increasing numbers of Israeli academics are speaking out, though often only against the settlements and in an attempt to “save Israel from itself”.
- “The academic boycott, although it has become the most widely publicised component of AUT policy on South Africa, represents only one aspect of wider AUT policy which aims not just at putting pressure on the Government of South Africa, but also at improving and extending the educational opportunities offered to black South Africans.” Just as one common demand was scholarships for black SA students to study in the UK, so today it is common to call for scholarships for students from Palestine at the same time as advocating BDS.
- AUT supported a policy of disinvestment of university funds in South Africa; today there are a range of campus divestment campaigns from Israel, mainly student-led, and to date there have been some successes, notably in the case of Kings College and Ahava.

Differences

- AUT 1980 policy was “a total boycott on any form of contact with South African universities and with South African Academics” i.e. individuals as well as institutions; the boycott of Israel only extends to institutions. Any attempt today to extend the boycott to individuals could well fall foul of the Equality Act, whose predecessor the Race Relations Act was only passed in 1976 and to my knowledge was never invoked in an attempt to undermine the boycott of SA.
- UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth and the UN agreed that a policy of total cultural boycott was most likely to succeed in effecting change within South Africa. In the case of Israel, the Commonwealth does not apply and we should not hold our breath waiting for support from the UN or Europe, although UNESCO may offer some hope now that Palestine is a member.
- Opposition to apartheid by some universities – this was the case with SA but no university anywhere apart from occupied Palestine has yet made such a stand with regard to Israel (and certainly no Israeli university).
- The AUT policy suggested “we might try to put pressure on universities to adopt a policy of cutting all academic links with South Africa to show their disapproval of apartheid.” This is rather a distant ambition in the case of Israel.
- “In line with TUC policy but requiring consultation with other campus unions and NUS would be a commitment to ban all South African goods from the campus.” This is also a worthy but ambitious BDS aim in the case of Israel.

Sue Blackwell

¹ <http://972mag.com/denying-israeli-nationality-only-perpetuates-discrimination/81597/>

² <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/apr/01/middle-east-israel-mizrahi>

³ Hilary Rose, 2004, "Building the Academic boycott in Britain

"<http://www.cie.ugent.be/Palestina/palestina174.htm>

The PACBI column

Moving forward Together: PACBI Pauses to thank its Partners

The month of January has seen a burst of energy on the academic and cultural front of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement with worldwide and mainstream media attention. BDS news has been covered in the Washington Post, Financial Times, Bloomberg, New York Times, CNN, and other media where BDS advocates have previously been ignored or censored. The world is beginning to understand that Israel cannot be treated with exception while it continues to violate international law, and that criticism and resistance against Israel's regime of occupation, colonialism and apartheid cannot be silenced. We have indeed arrived at a tipping point where the taboo of standing up to the Israeli system of oppression is being shattered.

On the academic front, after four associations in the USA have now come out in support of academic boycott, these being the Association for Humanist Sociology (AHS), Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS), American Studies Association (ASA), and Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), the unfounded veneer of academic freedom that supporters of Israel have used to challenge boycotts is peeling away. Scholars who have led the charge against BDS have been exposed for mixing academic privilege with academic freedom and using the idea of "academic freedom" with double standards to shutdown criticism of Israel.

New York University was quick to speak out against the ASA for its adoption of the academic boycott of Israel, which targets institutions, not individuals, yet it has thus far said nothing as Israel has denied a Palestinian the right to travel to attend an academic event on its campus in New York.

And the New York State legislature is debating a bill to boycott (defund) academic associations that pass resolutions in support of boycotting Israel, all in the name of being opposed to boycotts and wanting to protect academic freedom. The hypocrisy is out in the open for all to see. A New York Times editorial was the latest to attack the New York State bill saying that it would "trample on academic freedoms and chill free speech and dissent."

In early January, on the cultural front, Hollywood actress Scarlett Johansson, at the time an Oxfam

Global Ambassador, announced that she had agreed to serve as the media face of SodaStream. SodaStream, as is by now clear to everyone, operates out of an Israeli settlement in Occupied Jerusalem, which is illegal under international law. Johansson's move mobilized conscientious people around the world who called on her to drop SodaStream or, alternatively, on Oxfam to drop her. This episode highlighted the intersections of cultural and economic boycott, and the roles and responsibilities of cultural figures in the political/public sphere. Oxfam subsequently distanced itself from Johansson's support for illegal settlements and said that her role with settlement profiteer SodaStream was "incompatible" with the charity's human rights principles. As a result, Johansson decided to quit her position with Oxfam and keep the lucrative SodaStream contract instead. The message was sent to people around the world that one can continue to support Israel's violations of international law and breaches of Palestinian rights, but one can no longer get away with this with impunity.

Although Oxfam does not take a stand on BDS, it recognized that its credibility was on the line should it continue to do business as usual with Johansson. More importantly, with the mounting pressure on SodaStream and a blow to its image, the company's stock plummeted further.

BDS diehard sceptics are advised to think long and hard about the significance of these boycott successes. Years ago, and especially at the height of the Oslo years' so-called "peace negotiations," when dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians was popular under the illusion that it may lead to ending the occupation, Israel could get away with its crimes and intensify its colonization and ethnic cleansing in the occupied Palestinian territory. During those years, supporters of Israel's regime of oppression could continue their complicity with Israel and its complicit institutions without tarnishing their image. In fact, one could even be proud of such relations and gain legitimacy from them. What the Johansson episode shows is that those times are long gone and the isolation of Israel is gathering steam.

At PACBI, we want to reiterate to all our partners around the world our deepest respect and gratitude for all what they have done, sometimes at great personal cost, to further our struggle for freedom, justice and equality. We remain surprised and humbled by what we have accomplished together in a relatively short time. Together we move forward and learn from each other.

Everyday new people are being won over as supporters, and they ask us for ways to contribute. We call on these dedicated and conscientious people to contact their local Palestine solidarity chapters and our partner organizations, or to start their own if none are active. PACBI is here to ensure that the collective position agreed upon by Palestinian civil society is maintained, but the movement's leaders are to be found in every community where you will find a BDS campaign. Our decentralization, that is based on upholding the three rights of the BDS Call while being as creative and context-sensitive as possible in local targeting and campaigning, is our strength. This is how we, collectively, have achieved our most significant successes over the years, and this is how we will continue to work into the future.

The Palestinian struggle against occupation, apartheid, and colonialism is fed and nourished mainly from within, from the collective Palestinian will to resist against all odds, but we cannot do it alone. People around the world continue to inspire us, to show us we are not alone, and that we are not screaming in the dark. Their struggle to end their institutions' and states' complicity in Israel's oppression is essential in this struggle for rights. Our call is being answered. Our South Africa Moment is arriving.

PACBI

Obituary: Roger Lloyd Pack

Roger Lloyd Pack, who has died of cancer aged 69, was a man of many roles and varied talents, a politically committed artist and a good friend of Palestine. As an actor and performer, he excelled in both popular comedy and classic drama. He first achieved popular fame in the 1980s through the TV series *Only Fools and Horses*, in which he played the simple-minded street-sweeper *Trigger*. He also appeared in numerous TV plays and films including *Made in Dagenham* (2010), about the famous Ford women sewing-machinists' strike of 1968.

But from the beginning of his career, he established himself as a stage actor with a very broad range, a performer who successfully mastered complex Shakesperean roles. In the mid-1970s, he was a member of the radical *Joint Stock Theatre Company*. In the 1980s, he appeared in Alan Bennett's *Kafka's Dick* and J.B. Priestley's *When We Are Married*. Recently, he had performed the very different roles of The Duke of Buckingham, the

ruthless, scheming sidekick in *Richard III*, and that of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the fool outmanoeuvred by Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, in Mark Rylance's all-male productions at the Globe Theatre.

As a man with strong political beliefs, Roger disdained the celebrity culture of the contemporary media. He would frequently be approached for his autograph and addressed as Trigger to which he responded by signing his name and saying quietly "actually, my name is Roger." Moreover, he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. He gave unstinting support to radical causes and movements such as *Stop the War Coalition* and the *People's Assembly*, addressing one anti-war demonstration from the rostrum at Trafalgar Square. He was a consistent supporter of the *Campaign to Free Vanunu*, the Israeli nuclear technician kidnapped and jailed by the Israeli state for revealing the truth about Israel's nuclear weapons. And as a staunch supporter of the cause of Palestinian freedom, Roger publicly supported the call by BRICUP (British Committee for the Universities of Palestine) for a boycott of the visit by the Habimah National Theatre of Israel in 2012. He put his head on the chopping-block in a radio debate with Maureen Lipman and by signing BRICUP's Guardian letter calling for Habimah to be boycotted. More recently, he supported the *No Glory* campaign against the government's attempt to glorify World War One. In 2010, he took part in the big demonstrations against Camden Council's decision to implement the Coalition government's cuts. He was also a dedicated supporter of the local campaigns to save the Whittington Hospital and Highgate Library and went on numerous marches.

Roger was a man much loved and respected by his many friends, colleagues and comrades. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a person of greater humanity, generosity and commitment. He was also a keen Tottenham Hotspur fan. The worlds of theatre and radical politics, his family and friends, have suffered an immeasurable loss.

Sabby Sagall

Another straw in the wind.

As some of you know, M.J. Rosenberg was once a lobbyist for AIPAC and remains a staunch defender of a Jewish state within the 1967 frontiers. But as he has repeatedly pointed out this winter, AIPAC has suffered two major defeats, the first in attempting to drive Congress into supporting military action in Syria, and more recently in attempting to drive the Senate to adopt a bill on additional sanctions that would destroy the international agreement with Iran. In fact, these actions are more than defeats: they have seriously backfired on the lobby itself. For the first time in its history, the lobby is being exposed to public scrutiny, and its spell over US policy-making in the Middle East is declining. Given that BDS can never fully succeed so long as the US lends its full support to Israel, this is an important development.

Robert Boyce

Although not directly related to BDS, readers may be interested to read this careful analysis and statement by Peter Tatchell

Tourism in Israel

“As a general rule, tourists should boycott countries with severe human rights abuses. We shouldn’t holiday there. Tourism aids tyrannical regimes, giving them a financial boost and international credibility. That’s why Burmese human rights groups urged tourists to stay away during the era of military dictatorship.

“LGBT holiday-makers have a double dilemma. What if a country has a good record on LGBT rights but commits other human rights abuses? I am not a hypocrite. I support universal human rights, not just LGBT rights. I therefore believe that the totality of a country’s human rights stance should be taken into consideration. Israel is a good example of this dilemma and I cited it when I spoke at the GSN Travel Show.

“On most LGBT issues, Israel has very good policies. But it doesn’t allow same-sex marriage and it refuses asylum to Palestinian LGBT refugees who flee homophobic and transphobic persecution in the West Bank and Gaza. It also treats African refugees, some of whom are LGBT, very poorly.

“Nevertheless, Israel’s overall record on LGBT rights is progressive. It is the best country in the Middle East to be LGBT; with policies far more enlightened than the harsh homophobia – and lack of democracy in most nearby Arab states. The big problem is that Israel’s gay rights gains have been achieved by a state founded on the dispossession of the Palestinian people. Around 700,000 were forced out or fled when the state of Israel was founded in 1948. This dispossession is still continuing today, with land seizures, house confiscations, demolitions and new Jewish settlements on the West Bank that are swallowing ever-more Palestinian land. The whole Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories seized in the 1967 war is illegal under international law.

“The LGBT community would be wrong to ignore these Israeli human rights abuses against the Palestinian people, many of whom are LGBT. We should not judge Israel exclusively in terms of its pro-gay rights legislation. All human rights issues need to be taken into consideration when making a judgement call. **That’s why I have refused offers of expenses-paid trips to Israel and to Tel Aviv Pride.** No matter how progressive Israel is for LGBT people, I don’t feel able to ignore its mistreatment of the Palestinian people.

“I support a tourist boycott of Israel, based on its human rights failings towards the people of Palestine. I also support a similar tourist boycott of many other countries with poor human rights records, such as Russia, Iran, China, Pakistan, Uganda, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Nigeria. It is wrong for some people to single out Israel for special, unique sanctions. All states with severe human rights abuses should be avoided. It is a positive way that we can show our solidarity with victims of oppression”

Further information is available from :

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Senate bill to punish the punish the academic boycott

The Electronic Intifada reported on February 7th that a new US bill to punish academic boycott was inspired by the Israeli ambassador to the USA.

Only weeks after Ambassador [Michael Oren](#), Israel's former envoy to the United States, suggested it, members of the United States Congress have introduced a bill to punish American universities if their members support the [academic boycott](#) of Israeli institutions.

The so-called "[Protect Academic Freedom Act](#)" would deny federal funding to any institution that participates in a boycott of Israeli universities or scholars or even whose departments issue statements in support of a boycott.

The proposed law defines "an institution of higher education to be participating in a boycott" if "the institution, **any significant part of the institution**, or any organization significantly funded by the institution adopts a policy or resolution, **issues a statement**, or otherwise formally establishes the restriction of discourse, cooperation, exchange, or any other involvement with academic institutions or scholars on the basis of the connection of such institutions or such scholars to the state of Israel."

The bill was introduced in the US House of Representatives by members from Illinois who specifically cite the [December vote](#) by the [American Studies Association \(ASA\)](#) to support the academic boycott of Israeli I institutions as motivation. That democratic vote of the ASA was covered in detail by this Newsletter.

Note however that the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee has issued an [action alert warning that the bill is unconstitutional](#) and violates First Amendment rights.

This material is from Ali Abunimah writing in the Electronic Intifada on Friday February 7th 2014.

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 .

One-off donations may be made 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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More details can be obtained at the same address. Like all organisations, while we welcome one-off donations, we can plan our work much better if people pledge regular payments by standing order.

You can [download a standing order form](#) here.