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Members of BRICUP took part in an unprecedented European delegation in April to assess the impact of the occupation and other Israeli policies on the functioning of Palestine's universities. The report has just been issued, and is available to read at

<http://www.bricup.org.uk/2015DelegationReport.pdf>.

The findings of the delegation are stark, and are expressed succinctly:

The delegation was unable to visit all of Palestine's institutions of higher education, and in particular it was prevented from visiting Gaza's universities by the Israeli blockade. However, it found a consistent pattern across all the universities that it visited, and by their systemic nature it is reasonable to assume that this pattern applies to all of them.

This pattern was of a coherent and multi-faceted policy of Israeli interference with the normal functioning of academic life. This interference inhibits free movement of staff and students; reduces academic effectiveness and productivity by the usurpation of staff time through mobility restrictions and imposed bureaucratic obstacles; prevents effective collaboration and sharing of intellectual resources between Palestinian universities; obstructs international visits to Palestinian universities; substantially prevents the employment of teaching staff

from abroad; interrupts the supply of equipment, materials and books; and subjects staff and students to repeated humiliations and indignity.

The deliberate interference by organs of the Israeli state with the everyday lives of Palestinians, especially in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza, is well known. Not so well documented until now have been the specific ways in which Israel obstructs the normal functioning of Palestinian universities. The Delegation report supplies this lack with an authoritative and first-hand account of the odds against which Palestinian universities have to struggle. The revealed picture of deliberate undermining of Palestinian universities is particularly grotesque in the context of the routine assertions by Israel's academic establishment that Academic Boycott infringes their academic freedom (which it does not)! Where are their condemnations of the extraordinary handicaps and impositions on the Palestinian academics whom they should see as colleagues?

I was a member of the delegation, which consisted of eight academics from five European countries. It took place under the auspices of EPACBI (the European Platform for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel), and was organised with great effectiveness by BRICUP's Secretary Robert Boyce. Over eight days we visited seven Palestinian universities and academies. In each of them we met with the President (or acting President), and senior staff. In many of them we met with numbers of other staff members, and also students. The accounts we received were entirely consistent with each other, and in aggregate, although all the delegation members were familiar with the general situation in Palestine, quite shocking.

I would recommend readers of this article to read the Report. It is in fact the accumulation and massing together of the multiple restrictions which constitutes the revelation. Here I can only choose a few examples of a consistent and ruthless pettiness that, overall, combines into a massive interference with Palestine's academy:

- Responding to the deliberately imposed uncertainties of travel, the

only guarantee of timely arrival at class for many students is to purchase or rent accommodation near their university. This is an effective tax on many students whose parental homes would, without the checkpoints, be within easy range.

- The unpredictable delays at Israeli checkpoints prevent early starts or late finishes to academic activities. The result is that the academic day for most Palestinian universities does not begin before 9 or 10 am and stops at 5 or even 4 pm. There is no evening campus life for students.
- The president of Bethlehem University reported a fourth year student's response to the question, 'what is the strongest impression you will take from your years here?', as follows: 'the daily anxiety coming up to the checkpoint and worrying about what would happen. Will I be waved through? Will the soldiers come onto the bus? Will I be made to get out of the bus? Will I be stood for hours in the sun? Will I be interrogated? Will I be strip-searched?'
- Palestine is a small country whose educational system is an essential element of its national coherence. Poor in resources, its universities have historically shared expertise. But an academic visiting a neighbouring university to give a one-hour lecture must allow a whole day to complete the round trip journey. As a result visits or exchanges of this kind are now uncommon. The practical effect is to isolate the universities from one another and diminish the quality of academic life.
- Palestinian academics wishing to travel to international conferences are frequently held up at the Allenby Bridge (the only way out for those not resident in Jerusalem or Israel) for periods as long as eight hours. This means that they must make an allowance of an extra day at each end of the trip. Refusals of permission to

leave, always without explanation, are not uncommon.

- Anyone from abroad stating on arrival to Israel that they are taking up a post at a Palestinian university will be refused entry. The only possibility of being admitted is to enter as a tourist. The necessity of misrepresenting their status in the OPT leaves them constantly vulnerable to expulsion. The three-month limit on visas makes teaching a full semester problematic. The teaching programme is often thrown into disarray by these Israeli exclusions, with teachers unable to complete their courses, or prevented at the last minute from taking up their posts.
- Israeli authorities refused entry permits for five of the 75 foreign participants at a recent international conference in Palestine. Permission for three or four others, including keynote speakers, was only granted on the last day of the conference!
- In the same month that we were there the South African Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande and three prominent South African academics intending to attend an event at Birzeit University were refused entry to Israel.

Under these circumstances staff and student time and energy for academic work are seriously eroded. Universities are increasingly isolated from each other, and from international academic currents. With no end in sight it would be foolish to pretend that some staff are not seriously demotivated by their endless struggle against the odds. The saving grace is the vibrant cultural and academic traditions of the Palestinian people, for which they are known throughout the Middle East.

The report identifies ways in which sympathetic individuals and organisations can assist Palestine's universities in combatting the scandal of Israel's attempted academicide. BRICUP will be discussing how to take these forward. We will be coordinating these actions with our European colleagues in EPACBI.

I will end with one heartening story. Early last December Imad al-Barghouthi, a professor of astrophysics at Al-Quds University, was attempting to travel to a congress of the Arab Association of Astronomy and Space Sciences at Sharjah University in the United Arab Emirates. He was arrested at the exit checkpoint and held in administrative detention without indictment or trial. (The delegation heard estimates that there are some 40 academics from the West Bank and 60 from Gaza among the nearly five hundred currently held in this way.)

BRICUP and our French colleagues in AURDIP took up the case when we heard of it in January, writing to the European Commission and informing the media. As a result the journal *Nature* featured his case, based on information we provided them with. The day after it was published Professor al-Barghouthi was released. And he was there to greet us with open arms when we visited Al-Quds.

European Coordination Forum

Jonathan Rosenhead
Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi

The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) held only its second conference for BDS activists across Europe on June 12-14 in London. The previous event was a far more modest affair some three years ago. This one marked the approach of the 10th anniversary of the general BDS call. But it was an occasion not for nostalgia or commemoration but for strategic thinking.

Around 60 people attended, some as individuals but most representing more than 30 different organisations from 18 European countries. British organisations represented included BRICUP and Artists for Palestine UK, Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods, Boycott Israel Network, the UK-Palestine Mental Health Network, and also the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

Academic boycott did not feature greatly during the meeting. It was however reported that the growing support within Gaza for BDS included in particular a call from student campaigners for an international academic boycott of Israel. A workshop on cultural boycott was led by Naomi

Wimborne-Idrissi of BRICUP and APUK alongside a representative of Ireland PSC.

Workshop sessions looked in depth at other specific areas of boycott:

- Tackling Corporate Complicity – the cases of G4S and Mekorot
- Imposing a two-way military embargo on Israel
- Divestment from Israeli Apartheid
- BDS goes local – Apartheid Free Zones and local municipality campaigning
- Challenging Israeli exports – campaigning on retail and Israeli agricultural companies

Rafeef Ziadeh, a member of the BNC executive committee, was one of the lead speakers. She pointed out that the first 10 years of BDS had brought us to a situation where the basic argument, that BDS is a legitimate tactic, is now widely accepted. There was however still a need to build understanding of its three demands -

- Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and dismantling the Wall;
- Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
- Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

BDS must aim to build new coalitions built on reciprocity and mutual respect. Integrating BDS more into the mainstream, however must not involve stripping out the politics to make it more acceptable. The aim must rather be to bring in people who can share our own platform.

One outcome of the meeting was a decision to have two Forum workshops/meetings each year, one of which would be a thematic one, for example: military embargo, or corporate divestment. Another was the decision to establish a dedicated email list for which each group would appoint a small number of representatives. This would be a channel for regular reporting and discussion of organisational activities and initiatives, rather than a space for generalised news or comment on current events.

The BDS Debate at the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

John Chalcraft

The British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) has just become the first professional academic association outside of the United States to commit to fostering a debate about the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement for Palestinian rights (BDS). The motion was passed on 24 June 2015 after a debate at the society's Annual General Meeting, held during the society's Annual Conference at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

While UK-based academics and BRICUP members organizing principally through the Universities and College Union (UCU) have played an important role in the BDS movement since 2004, UK- and Ireland-based scholars whose research and teaching specialises in the Middle East and North Africa itself have traditionally done less at the collective level. Thanks in good measure to the support and advice of BRICUP, they are now beginning to find their voice, especially in the aftermath of the Israeli atrocities in Gaza in 2014, when 2,251 Palestinians were killed, more than half of them civilians.

All academics can see that they have a duty to take a stand when fundamental norms of self-determination and equality are at stake, because these fundamentals are intrinsic to the functioning of scholarly life itself. No academic can work in a university that has been bombed. Our duties here are harder to evade when Palestinian civil society and academic colleagues have been calling on us since 2005 to withdraw our complicity with institutions involved in their oppression.

Those who research and teach on the region, however, have particular reasons to feel their responsibilities, because their own activities and freedoms as scholars and pedagogues, as well as those of their Palestinian colleagues, are directly thwarted by Israeli government policies from visa regulations to checkpoints. Furthermore, Middle East academics' quotidian cooperation with Israeli academic institutions is increasingly and rightly seen as an uncomfortable complicity with ethnic and racial discrimination, and systematic abuses of international law, human and educational rights.

Specialists in the region are more familiar than many other academics and professionals with the atmosphere of censorship, intimidation and

propaganda that impinges on research, teaching and public engagement on Israel-Palestine. Many of us regularly encounter the distorting influence of the *hasbara* industry: the propaganda and white-washing of Israeli atrocities by well-funded PR companies, private foundations, think-tanks, and Israeli government programmes. We are vexed by the academically-discredited, racist, colonial and Orientalist clichés about Arabs and Muslims that abound in this spin-doctoring. We also know what it means to be abused and smeared by bloggers, trollers, and unsolicited emailers, *inter alia*, simply for pursuing our academic craft or engaging in public debate. Our specialist knowledge gives us a particular insight into the depth of deception disseminated by Israeli spokespersons, often unchallenged, in prestige platforms such as BBC Radio 4's Today Programme. Some have seen our conferences cancelled, our meetings censored, or our voices marginalized when they are selectively and unfairly deemed controversial in regard to Israel-Palestine. We have reasons to worry about the encroachment of US-style political hiring and firing, or campus thought-police, and thus good cause to speak out against it before it is too late.

As UK- and Ireland-based academics, we are peculiarly aware of the historical responsibilities of those teaching and researching in the ex-imperial power which bears so much responsibility for the dispossession of Arab-Palestinians. It was Britain, after all, pursuing imperial and strategic interests of its own, that promised Mandate Palestine to be national home for a third party, the European Zionist movement, in 1917. It was Her Majesty's Government that repressed the Palestinian Great Revolt of 1936-39, exiled and scattered Palestinian leaderships, and then abandoned the Mandate to a fate driven by unequal fighting on the ground in 1947-49.

In this context, the commitment by BRISMES to fostering a debate about the BDS movement is a responsible and constructive move that reflects an important groundswell of opinion among its membership, and will enable the Society to change with the times and engage progressive and critical constituencies that for too long it has neglected. There is nothing here that alters the constituting purpose of BRISMES, or its status as an educational charity, or its mission as a non-political organization committed to academic cooperation. Sometimes non-political

organizations have to engage in campaigning activities in order to do their job. And sometimes we must consider very carefully the difference between positive academic cooperation on the one hand, and complicity with human rights violations and international law on the other. The BDS movement, it must always be remembered, calls for individuals to withdraw their cooperation from institutions, not for institutions to exclude individuals.

Finally, we cannot consider ourselves to be supporters of academic freedom unless we both speak and act to oppose the un-freedom of our Palestinian colleagues, and take seriously the complex ways in which universal and educational rights are inevitably intertwined. It is increasingly clear to academics that the BDS movement is opening up spaces for critical debate on campuses around the world, and allowing the interrogation of issues that are otherwise censored or silenced. As standard funding- and university ethics codes, not to mention reflexive theory teach, researchers' positions are not entirely separate and detached from their subjects of study. We cannot act as if they are.

The move by BRISMES is a welcome sign that academics in Middle East Studies at the collective level are starting to consider their responsibilities in regard to the oppression of Palestinian academia and society in general and the BDS movement in particular. The door is now open in the UK and Europe for professional associations, academic and non-academic, to follow suit. BDS continues to gather momentum in Europe just as in the United States, South Africa and beyond.

What matters now at BRISMES is whether academics will step up to organize and participate in this debate to ensure that it is meaningful and persuasive, paving the way for BRISMES to consider seriously its own position on the BDS movement.

Making theatre in the garden city of Jenin

Artists for Palestine UK

'If the Israelis take our water so we can't grow grapes', says a Freedom Theatre actor in London in May 2015, 'we'll make art instead.'

But making theatre in the Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin has always been political, one way and another. When Arna Mer Khamis -- barefoot driver of Palmach jeeps in 1948, Communist Party member from shortly afterwards, Jewish wife of Palestinian communist Saliba Khamis from 1953 – started doing play and drama therapy with Palestinian children in Jenin during the First Intifada, she said, ‘I have not come here to show there are nice Jews who help Arabs. I came to struggle against the Israeli occupation’.

In 1993 (the year of the Oslo Accords), with money she was given by the Swedish Right Livelihood Prize, Mer Khamis opened a theatre in Jenin refugee camp. They called it the Stone Theatre, after the stones Palestinian youths threw at the Israeli army; in 2002, the Israeli army demolished the building.

Four years later, her son, Juliano Mer-Khamis – ‘100 per cent Palestinian, 100 per cent Jewish’ – set up the Freedom Theatre in the camp, along with Zakaria Zubeidi, former head of the Al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade in Jenin, and Jonatan Stanczak, another Israeli citizen.

In his long [article](#) about the life and death of Juliano in the London Review of Books, Adam Shtatz says:

The idea that, even under occupation, Palestinians could improve their situation, was central to Juliano’s pitch. ‘Israel is destroying the neurological system of the society,’ he said, ‘which is culture, identity, communication,’ but ‘if you’re going to keep blaming the occupation for all the problems of the Palestinians, you’re going to end up in the same situation we’re in today.’ He was careful not to denounce the armed resistance; that would have been heresy in the camp. But the next intifada, he declared, ‘will be cultural’. Perhaps art could succeed where violence had failed. ‘We have to stand up again on our feet,’ he said. ‘We are now living on our knees.’

In April 2011, a single masked gunman fired five bullets into Juliano as he drove away from the Freedom Theatre with his baby son on his lap.

Four years and numerous arrests of Freedom Theatre personnel later, nobody has yet been charged with the murder. ‘We gradually realised’, [says](#) Abir Baker, his widow’s lawyer, ‘that the theatre itself has become a target of investigation and that pursuit of the murderers was abandoned.’

The Freedom Theatre in the UK

Through May and June 2015 the Freedom Theatre toured the UK – the first time they’ve performed in this country. For six weeks, a company of actors, stage managers and carpenters accompanied artistic director Nabil Al-Raei and co-director Zoe Lafferty from Colchester to Glasgow and Frome and seven other towns and cities to perform *The Siege*, an original drama based on first-hand interviews with the Palestinian fighters who sought sanctuary in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in 2002.

The Freedom Theatre’s [Facebook page](#), and the [Facebook page](#) of the UK Friends of the Freedom Theatre, contain many reviews, pictures, and first-hand accounts of the tour, which was hugely successful in spite of a pre-tour [attempt at sabotage by the Mail on Sunday](#), rapidly [condemned](#) by leading theatre practitioners whose support was enlisted by Artists for Palestine UK (APUK).

APUK, which promotes cultural boycott and has published an extremely readable booklet, [The Case for a Cultural Boycott of Israel](#), organised several of the post-show Q&As.

APUK filmed the session after the first performance of *The Siege* at a sold-out run in the Battersea Arts Centre in London – and an intense, funny and revealing [discussion](#) it turned out to be. Actor-director Samuel West and comedian-activist Jeremy Hardy joined Nabil Al-Raei, Zoe Lafferty and theatre director Hilary Westlake, who chaired for APUK.

The edited version of the discussion – ‘gripping’, says one viewer, ‘whether or not you saw the play’ – is available below.

Ctrl + Click on the image below to display the video recording of the discussion.



200 Mental Health professionals call for cancellation of Israeli Conference

Martin Kemp

The UK-Palestine Mental Health Network

An impetus behind the founding last year of a solidarity group amongst mental health workers was an understanding that the psychological well-being of the Palestinians was a direct target of Israeli strategy. This was illustrated recently when an IDF soldier explained why he had given testimony to *Breaking the Silence*. Describing the deliberately intrusive and intimidating nature of night raids on Palestinian homes, he wrote: *As my commander explained to me, the aim of this operation, as with many others that I carried out throughout my service, was to create "a sense of persecution" among the Palestinian population* (1).

One of the aims of the UK-Palestine Mental Health Network is to encourage our colleagues to consider their response to the Palestinian call for BDS. We would expect that boycott would be accepted only as a last resort by those whose professional identities are built on the importance of dialogue. Yet the growing awareness that negotiations have been a ruse behind which the Zionist project has progressed apace, and that conditions do not yet exist in which meaningful dialogue can take place, perhaps explains why many are now prepared to accept and support the bds position.

This was confirmed when over two hundred professionals agreed to put their names to a letter condemning the location of the EABCT's Annual Conference, due to begin in Jerusalem on 31st August (for background information see UKMHN

reports in Bricup Newsletters 78 and 80). The letter was published in *The Independent* on 3rd July (text and full list of signatories at (2)).

This experience has been heartening. The numbers surprised us, as did the speed with which people came forward. It was gratifying to find that many with senior positions joined the call, including some who have made public pronouncements on Israel/Palestine in the past but who have not previously supported the strategy of boycott. While it was the initiative of a group based in the UK the letter quickly became an international affair, with many Americans, Europeans and Palestinians adding their names. Finally, the list allows us to speak meaningfully of a 'mental health community', as workers in psychiatry, clinical and academic psychology, psychoanalysis and many different modalities of psychotherapy are represented. We are wondering whether such an expression of internationalism and support for civil rights has emerged as clearly and emphatically from the world of mental health care before.

1. <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.663650>

2. <http://ukpalmhn.com/eabct-open-letter/>

The AUT Academic Boycott, 10 years on

Sue Blackwell

It seems incredible that it is already a decade since the AUT Council of 2005, when the union representing academics in the pre-1992 universities passed a series of resolutions in support of boycotting Israeli universities, whereupon all hell broke loose and Yours Truly became Public Enemy Number One in the Israeli press.

It didn't actually all begin in 2005. Back in 2002, AUT Council had passed a motion from the Executive stating "Council supports the call made recently by academics in the UK and elsewhere for a moratorium on EU and European Science Foundation funding of Israeli cultural and research institutions until Israel abides by UN resolutions and opens serious peace negotiations with the Palestinians." BRICUP founder members Hilary and Steven Rose had had a major hand in getting this adopted. So we started with what was in effect a pro-sanctions policy, and the

next obvious step was to push for a pro-boycott policy.

The following year, my branch (Birmingham University) submitted the following motion to Council:

"In view of Israel's repeated breaches of UN resolutions and of the Geneva Conventions, Council urges all UK institutions of HE, all LAs [Local Associations i.e. branches - SAB] and all members of AUT to review immediately, with a view to severing, any academic links they may have with official Israeli institutions, including universities. Members are urged to attend no academic conferences in Israel, and not to participate as referees in hiring or promotion decisions by Israeli universities, or in the decisions of Israeli funding agencies.

"Such links should be restored only after full withdrawal of all Israeli forces, opening of negotiations to implement UN resolutions and the restoration of full access to all Palestinian HE & FE institutions.

"Members are encouraged to continue to collaborate with, and host, Israeli academic colleagues on an individual basis."

The wording was closely based on a motion which had been passed by the National Executive Committee of NATFHE (our sister union in the post-92 universities), and those of us supporting it were hopeful that NATFHE's precedent would help to persuade AUT members to take a similar stand. Unfortunately, I learnt minutes before our motion was moved that NATFHE's NEC had just dumped their boycott policy, and our opponents in AUT lost no time in pointing this out to our delegates. All the same we got between 30-40% of the vote, which was a substantial minority. Perhaps one of the factors which persuaded delegates was the news that Israel actually had a college of Higher Education in a settlement: a supporter had tipped me off about the "College of Judea and Samaria" in Ariel the night before and I had incorporated it into my speech.

Council 2003 did pass a resolution deploring the witch-hunting of colleagues who were participating in the academic boycott of Israel. This resolution ended with the notorious clause:

"Council recognises that anti-Zionism is not anti-semitism, and resolves to give all possible support to members of AUT who are unjustly accused of anti-semitism because of their political opposition to Israeli government policy."

This in itself was sufficient to send the Zionist lobby apoplectic. And the debate got a large amount of coverage in the national press.

Under the AUT's rules, a Council motion which had been defeated could not be resurrected for two years, so things appeared to go quiet on the boycott front for a while. Behind the scenes, though, things were moving. One of the arguments used against the boycott at Council 2003 was that the call came from the UK and not from Palestine. We knew, of course, that this was nonsense, but we could not point to a document or website to disprove it. The founding of PACBI and its public call for academic boycott did much to make it clear that this was first and foremost a Palestinian campaign, which British academics were merely supporting. BRICUP was founded around this time to promote the PACBI call.

One significant meeting, entitled "Resisting Israeli Apartheid", took place at SOAS on 5th December, 2004. Omar Barghouti's speech in particular (1) was electrifying. Omar clearly set out the basis and the aims of the boycott call, and enumerated the "colonial crimes" of a number of Israeli academic institutions. I left the meeting armed with arguments and supported by new comrades, and determined to bring the academic boycott back to AUT Council the following year.

After discussion with colleagues in BRICUP and comrades in Palestine and Israel, I brought three boycott motions to Birmingham University branch for forwarding to Council. Instead of the generic academic boycott called for in 2003, this time we focused on three specific Israeli universities. This made it harder for our enemies to misrepresent the boycott as targeting individuals. The three institutions chosen

represented three significant aspects of the occupation:

- Bar Ilan, because it had "established and nurtured" the by now notorious "Judea and Samaria College" in an illegal settlement (2);
- The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, because it was partly built on land in occupied East Jerusalem and had actively expelled Palestinian owners from their land;
- Haifa University, because of its witch-hunting of Ilan Pappé for supporting a student whose Masters thesis described the Zionist massacre at Tantura during the Nakba.

The branch meeting at Birmingham looked as if it was going to be inquorate by one member, so I rushed down the corridor and dragged a colleague from the English Department into the lecture theatre. To this day I don't know which way he voted, but we passed all three motions easily, along with our "fall-back" motion asking for the PACBI call to be circulated to all branches.

The union leadership came up with what they must have thought was a smart tactic to defuse the boycott debate: a bland motion from the Executive calling, in its first paragraph, for closer links with the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees, and in its second paragraph for similar links with the Israeli Higher Education Union, along with the assertion that "the peaceful resolution of the problems facing the Middle East will not be brought about by the erection of barriers, but by open dialogue". Birmingham branch promptly submitted an amendment which simply sought to delete the second paragraph!

When the debate at Council began, it was this Executive motion which was taken first. I took great delight in proposing the amendment,

quoting both Palestinian and Israeli activists saying they had never heard of the "Israeli HE Union", and if it did exist it certainly did not take a stand against the occupation. I also pointed out how insulting the talk of metaphorical "barriers" was to people confronted by literal ones. This speech was well received.

Then my colleague Shereen Benjamin got up to propose the motion on the Hebrew University. She explained that this was her first time at an AUT Council and it was particularly difficult for her as a Jewish member of AUT who supported Israel's right to exist, but nonetheless saw no alternative to backing the boycott. She was armed with excellent blow-up colour pictures made for us by Brighton PSC showing the bulldozers moving in on the An-Helou family's land to make way for new student dormitories, and the family being pushed behind barriers (3).

Shereen also proposed the Haifa motion, talking about Ilan Pappé and also Avraham Oz whose theatre - which had involved Arab and Jewish students in multilingual performances - had got closed down.

Last came the Bar-Ilan motion and I spoke to this one, giving facts and figures about the West Bank settlements in general and Ariel in particular.

Then the Executive gave their response, explaining that they were calling for the motions to be "referred" because the universities concerned were disputing the facts in all 3 cases. What for me was the most disgusting thing of all was that we were told Bar-Ilan had asked to send a speaker to address Council and the only reason this had not taken place was because of the Jewish Sabbath. This, when our repeated calls for a fringe meeting where Palestinian trade unionists could speak directly to AUT delegates had been turned down!

After all the motions and amendments had been proposed, normally there would be a debate from the floor followed by "right of reply" for the movers of the motions and then the voting. However, we were running short of time, due to poor chairing of earlier sessions. The President told us that if we didn't vote now, all the motions would automatically get referred (if she'd done this there really would have been a riot) and so she asked if we would waive our rights of reply and move straight to the vote. We had no choice but to accept this as of course we wanted the motions voted on! However, the lack of debate, and in particular of any speeches against, was

very unfortunate and was to be used against us afterwards.

The first thing to be voted on was the Birmingham amendment to the NEC motion. This was carried overwhelmingly. Even when the Executive were asked from the floor once again whether the Israeli HE Union existed or not, they were helpless to answer - in fact they produced a name of another organisation which no-one had heard of and it was obvious to all that they were making it up as they went along!

At this point we knew things were going our way. The Executive motion as amended was carried overwhelmingly.

Then the composite calling for the boycott call to be circulated was carried overwhelmingly, as we knew it would be. This was our "fall-back" motion because we had genuinely believed that none of the actual boycott motions would be carried; we were merely hoping for a larger minority in support than we had had in 2003.

Then came the crunch. We had to vote on whether the Hebrew University motion was to be referred to the Executive. The votes were so close that they had to be formally counted. It was 93 for reference and 90 against: the motion was referred. We wondered whether the same would happen to the other two.

The vote on reference of the Haifa motion was again so close that there had to be a count. We all sat in suspense as the tellers came round - you could cut the atmosphere with a knife! This time it was 92 for reference and 96 against, so reference was lost and the motion was put to an outright vote. Of course it could have been completely defeated; but instead it was overwhelmingly carried. Shereen and I just hugged each other.

With the Bar Ilan motion, reference was clearly lost on a show of hands. The motion was then put to the vote and overwhelmingly carried. I had always thought that of the three, the Bar-Ilan one had the best chance of being passed because the issues were so clear cut.

We had had fantastic support from Brighton PSC with stalls, banners and leaflets, and Tony Greenstein had produced a brilliant leaflet from Return and Jews Against Zionism with damning facts and figures about Israeli academics.

When I finally got outside the hall there was a media scrum and complete jubilation outside the building. I confess that all the excitement went to my head. In an e-mail sent to comrades immediately after Council, I wrote "Victory to the academic intifada!"

But the victory was to be short-lived. We all knew there would be a Zionist backlash of one sort or another, but we could not have predicted the main form it would take. Under AUT rules, once a motion had been passed at Council it could not be revisited for two years. So we had assumed the boycott policy was safe until at least 2007, or the impending merger with NATFHE if that happened sooner. However, there was another rule which said that a special meeting of Council had to be convened if 25 members of Council requisitioned it. Special meetings of Council were not unheard of, but they had always been used for their intended purpose, namely to deal with urgent matters which arose between regular annual Council meetings, such as industrial action or pay offers. But since when had Zionists been bothered about using rules for their proper purpose? A requisition for a Special Council was duly submitted, with the sole intention of overturning democratically-made decisions which had just been taken at a regular Council. To be fair, not all those who signed it were Zionists; some of them were loyal AUT members who were troubled by the apparent lack of debate before the motions were passed. The Special Council was a one-day event in London, and was attended by a large number of people who had never been seen at a union conference before and have not made an appearance at one since. It took place against a backdrop of intimidation and hysteria. Just before the meeting took place, Anthony Julius wrote to the General Secretary on behalf of the University of Haifa, alleging that our motion had defamed the University with false allegations about Ilan Pappé. Instead of replying to Julius telling him to "bring it on" and contacting Ilan to ask him to testify in the union's defence, the union merely reported this threat as a matter of concern. Another letter

from Julius was on behalf of six AUT members who apparently wanted to sue their own union. One of them, Dr Eric Heinze, later popped up as witness in Ronnie Fraser's hapless tribunal case against the UCU (see BRICUP Newsletter number 63, April 2013). In all there were four distinct legal threats against the AUT.

Unsurprisingly, a motion repealing the boycott policy was carried, along with various other resolutions committing the union to a more "moderate" policy. The Israel lobby gloated, and those of us within the AUT supporting the boycott had to pick up the pieces.

It is always easy to criticise a campaign with the benefit of hindsight. What if we had tried to conduct a wider debate in the branches before raising the topic at Council again? What if we had only brought the motion on Bar-Ilan and left the Hebrew University and Haifa alone? What if we had challenged the chair in order to create time and space for a proper debate? All I can say for certain is that whatever tactics we had adopted, there would have been a Zionist backlash as soon as we passed a resolution committing the AUT to a boycott policy. And at the end of the day, resolutions passed at union conferences are not what counts; what matters is whether academics in the UK actually go to Israel or not, and whether they are becoming better informed about what Israel is doing to Palestinian schools and universities, teachers and students.

As my colleague Romy Hasan put it at the time, "the genie is out of the bottle now and they will never be able to put it back in". Ten years on we can look around the world and see boycott resolutions from the Association for Asian American Studies, the African Literature Association, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association and the Peace and Justice Studies Association. Who would have thought back then that a decade later it would be academic associations in the USA who would pick up the boycott baton and run with it, while the AUT's successor union remained hamstrung by its legal advice about *ultra vires* policies?

Ten years on, and the President of Israel is describing the academic boycott as "a strategic threat" and holding emergency meetings with the heads of Israel's colleges and universities to

counteract it (4). So we must have done something right.

References

- (1) <https://electronicintifada.net/content/boycott-resistance-moral-dimension/5388>
- (2) "You brought the boycott upon yourselves" - Gush Shalom letter to Bar Ilan University, April 26, 2005 reproduced in: <http://angrywhitekid.blogspot.com/weblog/2005/04/you-brought-the/comments/page/3/>
- (3) <https://electronicintifada.net/content/photo-story-hebrew-university-displace-palestinian-families/5328>
- (4) <http://972mag.com/israels-president-says-bds-is-a-strategic-threat/107156/>

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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