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**The Gaza Freedom March, December 2009.**

*As promised in the January newsletter, Keith Hammond has provided more detail about this demonstration*

Cairo at the end of December 2009 was not quite the place you would expect. Nothing was standard for Egypt at that time of year. Egyptians seemed to enjoy the novelty of seeing people demonstrate support for Palestine in a way that they are not allowed. There were around 1,350 internationals in the city, trying to make their way over to the Rafah crossing and onto Gaza to join the Gaza Freedom March 2009 but it was not to be so.

Staying in different hostels and hotels around the city, all the internationals were determined to join their

friends and colleagues in Gaza commemorating twelve months since the Gaza massacre. Walking around the city, quite openly wearing t-shirts celebrating their support for Palestine, these internationals were followed everywhere by the Egyptian security services. Internationals were denied the possibility of meeting in groups of more than six and venue proprietors were warned that they would be breaking Mubarak's 'security laws' if they accepted bookings from large groups. The electricity supply was threatened in some venues where meetings managed to be organised. Yet when street traders saw the t-shirts they would smile and give a quiet nod ... this would be at the very same time that Ministers were appearing nightly on TV to talk about the threat to Egypt's security posed by the presence of foreign hoodlums. Foreigners would invariably be linked to Iran. The Egyptian leadership had no intention of allowing the Gaza Freedom March to go through Rafah. The government were much more concerned to show their support for the Obama administration and Israel in building their wall deep into the ground around Rafah, hoping to collapse the tunnels. But internationals were not to be dismissed and sent on our way. We have marched with the Palestinians too often to be dismissed so easily.

Internationals were denied travel in the direction of Al Arish. Groups were held at bus stations, taxi ranks and any one of a number of the endless security checks between Cairo and Rafah. Gaza Freedom Marchers were held in hotels and pavement camps outside the French Embassy. Contingents were followed everywhere. For over a week, between Christmas and the New Year, the Egyptian security forces were on full alert. Black paddy wagons were all over the city. Public buildings like the Journalists

Syndicate and the Courts were surrounded by security police at the mere sight of a few people wearing the keffiyeh. Any sniff of a few Egyptians joining the internationals to support Palestine caused mayhem. On one occasion there were around twenty lawyers in a venue called the Lawyers Syndicate and they were surrounded by thousands of uniforms and riot shields. The fear of the Egyptian leadership was that their might be domestic support for the Freedom Marchers that would encourage broader support. It was really all about Palestine of course, and justice for the Palestinian people. In Egypt, nothing could be more threatening for the government.

The power of 'Palestine' as a symbol for international support amongst grass-root organisations of professionals and international law created an unprecedented panic in the Egyptian leadership. And so it should. There are around 18,000 prisoners held in Egyptian jails for 'security' reasons. Few have been formally charged or given real trials. Most are just placed before Military courts and they disappear. No internationals were formally charged. Everyone was held at one point or another and most were held in lockdowns three or four times, in different locations. Similarly, no internal was deported but no one was allowed to go on to Gaza either. In effect 1,350 internationals were held in isolated groups here and there all over the centre of Cairo. No one could use internet facilities in some areas without 'signing in' ... Bloggers have become the new threat to Mubarak. Around 73,000 bloggers went on line before the big textile workers strike at the Al-Mahallat al Kubra complex. Opposition to Mubarak emerged in spite of the most barbaric treatment. The treatment given to the 6 April Movement was extended to the Gaza Freedom Marchers.

Emergency powers were put into effect that have been renewed each couple of years by Mubarak. This meant that on arriving in Cairo, internationals were faced with the choice of operating outside the law whilst in Egypt or not doing anything at all. The 82 year old Holocaust survivor, Hedi Epstein and many others chose to put themselves on hunger strikes, joining the Viva Palestine contingent who were being denied entry to Egypt and held in a compound at Aquba. At one point there were around 60 people starving themselves because the conditions for travelling on to Rafah were made more and more

impossible, minute by minute. The Freedom March was in complete solidarity with Viva Palestine, who once they had been allowed into Egypt, suffered the most horrendous violence. The French contingent did not have things much better and South African colleagues had plain clothed thugs escorting them everywhere. On several occasions they had what looked like Generals escorting them from their hotels to taxis, the Generals giving instructions to the taxi drivers about where the South Africans could go. 350 French colleagues were held in a pavement 'lockdowns' where they did not even have adequate toilet facilities. The French however knew the meaning of resistance ... they shouted it constantly giving the Palestine 'V' sign to riot police and traffic on the road outside the French Embassy. Both the French and the South Africans demonstrated the real power of peaceful resistance, whilst at the same time remaining completely determined as they raised the spirit of the whole Gaza Freedom March.

Egyptian people live in fear as well as a great deal of poverty. But they are some of the warmest people I have come across and they deserve better. They have not forgotten the experience of 1967 and definitely not forgotten 1973 when Israel was given much more than a bloody nose. In the middle of the most oppressive conditions internationals expressed support for Palestine at one place after another and in full view of the Egyptian people. At the UN Building, the American Embassy, the French Embassy and of course the Israeli Embassy, we stood solidly with journalists and academics who dared to voice their opposition to Israel. On the 31st of December, at exactly the same time as our brothers and sisters in Gaza marched in remembrance of the massacre, we ran into Tahrir Square in the full view of Cairo and raised the Palestinian flag. Whilst the Egyptian police and army surrounded us very quickly, the people of Cairo looked really pleased that someone had broken Mubarak's ban. The ban placed on us had not made one bit of difference. In Cairo December 2009 international solidarity for Palestine came of age. We demonstrated our solidarity with Palestine in the most horrifying of conditions. We took to the street right in the centre of Cairo, amidst the traffic, right outside the city's most prestigious Museums and Palaces where we yelled 'P-a-l-e-s-t-i-n-e' and jumped about like lunatics raising banners and waving the keffiyeh ... It was wonderful!

Keith Hammond, University of Glasgow

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**The British Council and the British Israel  
Research and Academic Exchange  
Partnership (BIRAX)**

*Note: BRICUP has corresponded with the CE of the British Council concerning the BIRAX programme (See Newsletters 10 and 22). Our last letter concerned the outrageous treatment of a student, Jameel Zayed, whose project was a joint one with partners in Israel (see Newsletter 22, Nov. 2009.)*

The CE of the British Council has replied as follows:-

January 7, 2010

Dear Dr Boyce

First let me apologise for the delay in responding to you. However, I know that James Hampson was in touch before the Christmas holidays regarding the incident involving Mr Zayed at Ben Gurion Airport last September.

As you will now be aware, the matter was escalated to the British Embassy and I understand that no explanation has yet been received by them for Mr Zayed's treatment.

Had Mr Zayed been on an official British Council-sponsored visit then we would, as is routine, have entered into an advance clearing process with the airport authorities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which does avert most of the more serious security problems. At that stage Mr Zayed was not amongst those Cambridge University researchers listed in the first round of BIRAX.

You cite the exchange of letters between Professor Rosenhead and me in October 2008 and I can confirm that our position, as stated then, remains the same today and we will continue to take a balanced approach, as we have always done, to our cultural relations work with our partners in Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Yours sincerely, Martin Davidson

Robert responded for BRICUP thus:-

February 4, 2010

To Martin Davidson, Chief Executive British Council

Dear Sir

Thank you for your letter of 7 January. I am gratified to know that you have at least considered BRICUP's objections to the British Council's involvement in the BIRAX scheme. I am disappointed nonetheless that you dissociate the British Council from the plight of Mr Jameel Zayed simply because at the time he endured mistreatment by Israeli officials and was excluded from Israel he was not actually engaged in a BIRAX-supported project. The fact is that Mr Zayed was a member of a Cambridge research team who were hoping to obtain BIRAX funding. Because Israel excluded him from entering its territory for a five-year period, Mr Zayed can no longer participate in a BIRAX-supported project; at least not to participate fully in it. This surely raises serious questions about the appropriateness, indeed the legitimacy, of the BIRAX scheme itself.

I don't suppose there will be many British passport holders of Palestinian origin involved in projects submitted to the British Council for BIRAX support. Nonetheless, as you must be aware, Israel commonly excludes Palestinians holding foreign passports from entering its territory. This whole category of British citizens is therefore unlikely to be able to benefit from BIRAX funding, which makes the scheme inherently discriminatory.

News of Mr Zayed's mistreatment has been widely circulated on the Internet, adding to the damage that the BIRAX scheme is causing to the British Council's reputation in the Arab world and beyond. Rather than attempting a 'balanced approach' in a situation where your one partner, Israel, so brutally disadvantages your other partner, the largely refugee population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, you would serve the cause of justice much better by dissociating the Council from the scheme.

Yours sincerely, Dr. Robert Boyce, Secretary,  
BRICUP.

## **The UK government response? To give extra funding to BIRAX!**

Foreign Office Minister Ivan Lewis expressed delight that the UK government is to contribute an additional £29,000 to the Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange partnership (BIRAX). Ivan Lewis said: “I am delighted that the UK government is contributing an additional £29,000 to the Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange partnership (BIRAX). In its first year the scheme went a long way to help build and enhance university links between Britain and Israel. BIRAX currently supports 15 innovative scientific research projects - with topics ranging from galaxy clusters to motor neuron degeneration - involving 17 different universities from across the UK and Israel. The volume and calibre of applications submitted to the scheme in 2009 demonstrated just how keen British and Israeli academics are to work together and complement each others research strengths. Government support for BIRAX is a tangible example of our determination to oppose boycotts against Israel, which are unacceptable and do nothing to promote understanding or the cause of peace in the Middle East. We hope the extra money we are investing will boost BIRAX in its second year and help extend the scheme more widely. But in this we are not alone. We are part of a broader partnership including the Government of Israel, Pears Foundation, UJIA, Universities UK, the British Council and Israels University Presidents Association “ that recognises the value of enhancing academic co-operation and building stronger links between our nations.”

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### **The PACBI Column**

## **Confronting Official UK Support for Israeli Science and the Arts**

Once again, the Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership (BIRAX) is in the news. Conceived and publicized in July 2008 as an official UK-Israel response to the academic boycott of Israel, the scheme is now celebrating its scientific grant making successes one year later with the UK and Israeli governments announcing the allocation of

additional funds. UK Foreign Office Minister Ivan Lewis has declared that “[g]overnment support for BIRAX is a tangible example of our determination to oppose boycotts against Israel, which are unacceptable and do nothing to promote understanding or the cause of peace in the Middle East. We hope the extra money we are investing will boost BIRAX in its second year and help extend the scheme more widely.”<sup>i</sup> The scheme is also supported by the United Jewish Israel Appeal, Universities UK, and Israel’s University Presidents' Association. It was designed and is administered by the British Council, the UK’s international cultural and educational agency.

When the founding of BIRAX was announced in 2008, both PACBI and BRICUP condemned the initiative publicly. In particular, the direct linkage between the scheme and the anti-boycott campaign—openly admitted by several sources to the media at the time--was highlighted. BRICUP urged British and Israeli academics of conscience not to participate in the proposed academic collaborations, viewing the partnership initiative as “a clear response to the decision of the University and College Union (UCU) in the UK, and other teaching and scholarly organisations internationally, to reflect on the appropriateness of continued contact with Israeli institutions in these circumstances.”<sup>ii</sup> In PACBI’s view, the scheme “was meant specifically to undercut UK, Palestinian, and international academics' calls for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.” What PACBI found particularly offensive was the active sponsorship of BIRAX by the British Council, a UK agency with a long history of work in the occupied Palestinian territory.<sup>iii</sup>

The recent announcement<sup>iv</sup> highlights collaborative research projects involving academics from across the gamut of UK universities—from Oxford and Cambridge to Manchester, Leeds, and Cardiff—and from Israel’s main research institutions, primarily Tel Aviv University and the Weizmann Institute. It is no coincidence that the latter two institutions are the top offenders when it comes to the organic partnership with the Israeli defense and military establishment that characterizes all Israeli universities. Israeli universities have played a direct and indirect role in promoting, justifying, developing or supporting the state’s racist policies and persistent violations of human rights and international law. Just as an

example, Tel Aviv University's involvement in developing the Israeli army's doctrine of "disproportionate force" is one area where the university can be accused of complicity in war crimes.<sup>v</sup>

We believe it is time to confront the British Council more directly than in the past, not only for its administration and sponsorship of BIRAX but for its involvement in and indeed leadership of other UK-Israeli projects as well. The British Council co-administers, along with the Israel Ministry of Science, the Science Network Development Scheme (SNDS), billed as a project encouraging "cooperation between professional scientists in both countries already engaged in national projects, supporting research topics to which both governments attach priority." In view of what is known about the collaboration between the military and the academy in Israel, one can only speculate about the types of research supported by SNDS. In addition, the British Council co-funds, along with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Sport the scheme called BI ARTS, the British Israeli Arts Training Scheme, besides other projects encouraging collaboration with Israelis in different fields.<sup>vi</sup> BI ARTS was the focus of protest last year for its role in promoting the incorporation of Apartheid Israel into major international forums and industry events such as the Sci-Fi-London International Festival of Science Fiction and Fantasy Film, which had organized a "focus on Israel."<sup>vii</sup>

The British Council is no stranger to Palestine, having supported Palestinian educational and cultural institutions for over five decades. With offices in various parts of the occupied Palestinian territory and in Israel itself, the British Council is daily witness to the Israeli policies of apartheid and colonial domination, not to mention war crimes and other serious breaches of international law. Therefore, the high-profile support for British-Israeli cooperation must be seen for what it is: an unabashed policy of encouraging and rewarding the oppressor, particularly in the scientific and artistic domains, two of the mainstays of the Israeli strategy of normalizing, or "re-branding," itself on the global academic and cultural map. The British Council's purpose, which is to "build engagement and trust for the UK through the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people worldwide,"<sup>viii</sup> is severely

compromised by its biased support of the complicit Israeli academic and artistic establishments.

While Palestinian trust in the UK government is daily eroded by this and other examples of official UK bias towards Israel and British policy in Iraq and elsewhere, PACBI and indeed most of Palestinian civil society are greatly inspired by the steadily increasing support at the popular and grassroots organizational levels for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Campaign against Israel.

We call upon British academics, scientists, and artists to reject grants through BIRAX, BI ARTS and other similar schemes (there are current calls for proposals for BIRAX and BI ARTS grants), and to pressure the British Council to end its unholy alliance with the Israeli government and its complicit institutions. A similar partnership with the academic and cultural institutions of apartheid South Africa would have been morally and politically untenable in the 1980s. Indeed, as support for the boycott against the apartheid regime grew, the British Council was faced with the question whether it should withdraw from South Africa or continue to work there, albeit under a different policy that can help end apartheid.

"The issue was debated by both the European Community and the Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1985," the British Council website states<sup>ix</sup>, "and both agreed that member governments would not engage in cultural events. But the European Community added the recommendation that programmes of assistance to non-violent anti-apartheid organisations and programmes to assist the education of the non-white community should continue. This formed the basis of our work in South Africa during those years."

In Israel, though, the "basis" of British Council's work is evidently different; by partnering with Israeli institutions, the British Council, this time around, is being complicit in perpetuating apartheid and colonial oppression.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said of the British Council's work in the 1980's: "It is important to try to prepare people for the post-liberation South Africa. This makes your scholarship programme relevant."<sup>x</sup> BIRAX and BI ARTS are clearly at variance with such noble goals. It is time to end official British

collusion in Israel's ongoing violations of human rights and international law.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=21586308>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.flwi.ugent.be/cie/Palestina/palestina440.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=788&key=birax>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=21586308>. See also

<http://www.alternativenews.org/english/2413-bds-and-the-britain-israel-research-and-academic-exchange-birax.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.electronicintifada.net/downloads/pdf/090708-soas-palestine-society.pdf>. See also the important report documenting

the complicity of the Israeli academy in maintaining the structures of domination:

<http://www.alternativenews.org/english/2313.html>

<sup>6</sup> [www.britishcouncil.org/israel-birax-academic-links-2.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/israel-birax-academic-links-2.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=990>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/about-us/who-we-are/vision-purpose-and-values/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.britishcouncil.org/history-where-sub-saharan-africa-southafrica--working-under-apartheid.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

PACBI

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## Israeli boycott advocate in London

### A meeting to be addressed by Anat Matar of Tel Aviv University

The Palestine Societies at SOAS, University College London, Imperial College, Kings College, Goldsmiths and University of Westminster, with BRICUP, invite you to a meeting on **“Supporting the Boycott of Israel: Campaigning from Within”**.

The speaker will be Anat Matar of Tel Aviv University. The chair will be Mike Cushman of BRICUP and Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods

**TIME** : Wednesday 17th February 2010 AT 6.00pm

**PLACE**: SOAS Room G2, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square London WC1H 0XG

**NOTES**: Anat Matar is a senior lecturer at the department of philosophy, Tel Aviv University. She specializes in 20th century philosophy of language, in particular that of Wittgenstein, Dummett and Derrida. Anat Matar has been politically active for many years. She has taken part in movements resisting the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories, mainly those urging the refusal to serve in the army and the BDS movement. She is a founding member

and the chair of The Israeli Association for the Palestinian Prisoners.

Mike Cushman is a member of the Department of Management at LSE where he researches the nature of digital and social exclusion. Mike has been politically active for many years but he has increasingly focused his activities around the area of Palestinian rights. In December 2008 he visited Gaza on the Free Gaza boat ‘Dignity’ on the last successful voyage before the Israeli invasion

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## An open letter to David Bellamy

We are writing you this open letter to ask you not to take part in the Zionist Federation’s event Israel: Blue, White and Green, scheduled to take place on the evening of February 9th.

As you will know this is part of a whole day of activities, of which the first part (called Israel and the Environment 2010) is aimed specifically at 6th form pupils. This is the follow-on from last year’s ‘Israel Science Days’ held at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, and at the Science Museum in London.

We note, as you must have done, that the outrage at the Israel Science Days has caused the Zionist Federation to treat the location of this year’s events as a closely guarded secret. All they will say is that they will be at a ‘Central London Venue’. That secrecy alone should give you some pause for thought.

We are outraged, and think you ought to be too, at the prospect of Israel presenting itself (especially to relatively unformed minds) as a champion of environmentalist virtues. Their university scientists, as elsewhere, have made some useful contributions. These events, however, will try to use these to ‘greenwash’ the whole state of Israel. Consider the contrasting reality on the ground:

- over-pumping by Israel to supply its illegal settlements has drastically reduced the level of the water table in the Occupied Territories

- military attacks on Gaza’s waste treatment facilities has caused large sewage lakes to develop
- West Bank settlements are dumping untreated sewage and waste water into the valleys, polluting Palestinian water sources and agriculture
- Israeli companies have for years been dumping hazardous and solid waste in the West Bank
- the assault on Gaza in December 2008/January 2009 wantonly laid waste to large areas of fertile agriculture, and left a heritage of long-lasting poisonous residues in Gaza City
- industries which are seen as toxic or undesirable in Israel have been set up in the West Bank where they can operate without tiresome restrictions
- many of Israel’s Nature Reserves and National Parks have been sited to obliterate the memory of destroyed Palestinian villages
- during the Occupation Israel has up-rooted or otherwise destroyed over 1½ million trees, mostly olive trees
- Israel drives out Palestinians from their land by demolishing water cisterns, destroying irrigation systems, smashing solar panels, declaring water facilities “closed military areas” etc.

This is what Amnesty International in its 2009 report (Troubled Waters - Palestinians denied fair access to water: Israel-Occupied Palestinian Territories, 2009) has to say:

**“during more than four decades of occupation of the Palestinian territories Israel has over-exploited Palestinian water resources, neglected the water and sanitation infrastructure in the OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territories), and used the OPT as a dumping ground for its waste – causing damage to the groundwater resources and the environment.....Israel has[established] dumpsites throughout the OPT without lining them, leaving dangerous substances, including hazardous industrial waste, to permeate through the soil and pollute the aquifer”**

This is the reality of Israel’s environmental ‘credentials’. No environmental scientist of integrity should collaborate in this public relations exercise for a noxious regime, or in the attempted indoctrination of a swathe of Britain’s school students.

*97 signatories at the time of writing*

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## **Cancellation of Concert by Carlos Santana.**

Yedioth Ahronoth has reported that guitarist Carlos Santana has received messages arguing that it is better that he not perform in Israel. Then the legendary guitarist's team announced the cancellation of his show that had been scheduled for early June at Bloomfield Stadium in Jaffa.

A few thousand tickets had already been sold for the show and the Israeli production company was considering adding another show when it received news from Santana's team that the show would be delayed to an unknown date. A member of the production staff is reported to have said, "Our clarifications revealed that he received messages from anti-Israel figures who pressured him to cancel the performance. Of course, no one there claimed that any connection between these pressures and the show's cancellation, but we are certain there is a very close connection." The paper reports that sources in Israel's music industry hope that Santana's cancellation does not create a chain reaction. As published in Yedioth Ahronoth, Elton John, Rod Stewart, Rihanna, and The Pixies are all slated to perform in Israel over the summer.

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## **BRICUP writes to the University of Bergen**

February 3, 2010

To Professor Sigmund Grønmo

University of Bergen

My colleagues on the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP) have asked me to express our support for the position you have taken in favour of ‘open, free and critical’ debate, including debate of a boycott of Israeli universities (Ha’aretz, 23 January 2010). We trust that this debate will



eventually take place at Bergen, and that it will result in overwhelming support for a boycott.

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) has recently sent you an open letter briefly setting out the evidence of the complicity of Israeli universities in Israel's illegal, immoral and profoundly destructive occupation of the Palestinian territories. We hope that all members of the University of Bergen community will satisfy themselves of the strength of the evidence by consulting the sources cited in the PACBI letter. (It can be accessed at <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1168/>) We appreciate that many members of your University may nonetheless find it difficult to reconcile support for a boycott of other universities with their commitment to the principles of freedom of thought and expression and opposition to censorship of any kind. On the face of it, a boycott will seem to them antithetical to the very idea of a university. Let me set out our response to this principled objection.

First, we at BRICUP as well as PACBI draw a fundamental distinction between institutions and the individuals involved in them. We do not presume to judge the behaviour of individual Israeli students, academics or researchers, nor would we wish to interfere in any way with their academic activities. Institutions are another matter. Israeli universities, without exception, are deeply complicit in the oppression and destruction of Palestinian society through their links with the Israeli Defence Forces and other agencies of the Israeli state. We therefore regard it as a moral imperative to avoid any contact with these institutions, whether by accepting invitations to work, teach or speak there, by acting as external examiners, assessors of their programmes, or in other ways. Sceptics might protest that this is a distinction without a difference. We strongly disagree, since – to repeat myself – we would not refuse contact or collaboration with individual academics. Nor would we refuse to welcome them to our own universities, to read or cite their research output, or otherwise to hinder their professional activity.

Second, the proposed boycott is a voluntary act of self-denial, intended to demonstrate moral revulsion of the dehumanising oppression of the Palestinian people by Israel and its institutions. It is not an act of

coercion, nor is it a refusal of dialogue. Those of us who support a boycott welcome the opportunity to engage in open debate with defenders of Israeli policy. Moreover, recent events support our view that a boycott actually makes such a debate more, not less, likely. There is no good reason, therefore, to claim that a boycott is a form of censorship or barrier to free thought and expression.

Academics must defend their right to freedom of thought and expression. But they must also have the right to dissociate themselves from those institutions which, through their complicity with agencies of the Israeli state, deny freedom to the Palestinian people, and to express their dissociation through a voluntary boycott.

For those who have read this far, but remain unpersuaded of the propriety of a boycott of Israeli universities, I suggest they try this thought experiment: Consider if it would have been legitimate to boycott German universities in the 1930s, after they had expelled their Jewish faculty and students and were actively assisting in the Nazi racialist project. I hope it goes without saying that I am not suggesting that the current situation in Israel is in the least comparable. But if the response to this thought experiment is that it would have been legitimate to boycott German universities, then it follows that boycotting Israeli universities is not wrong in principle, but wrong only if allegations of the universities' complicity in Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and suppression of Palestinian rights (including right to education) do not bear scrutiny. In this case, I suggest that they start by consulting the evidence in 'Academic Boycott of Israel and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions in Occupation of Palestinian Territories', published by the Alternative Information Center (AIC), October 2009, which can be accessed at <http://www.alternativenews.org/>

Since I do not know how to communicate with the wider Bergen University community, I shall be grateful if you will circulate this letter to the faculty, students and others, as you see fit.

Yours sincerely, Dr. Robert Boyce, Secretary, British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP)



## Reflections on “What is it with oranges?”

Oranges may not be the only fruit, or orange the only colour but they are distinctly troublesome all the same. Much of my early life was spent picking over fruit, first in markets then in supermarkets, to avoid buying the products of apartheid South Africa or Francoist Spain. What is it about oranges that they would only grow in fascist soil? There was temporary relief when democratic oranges arrived from Florida; soon, however, Cesar Chavez and the United Fruit Workers revealed to us the appalling conditions under which Chicano farm workers toiled in California and there was little reason to believe Florida gang-masters were more humanitarian.

Following the death of Franco, Spanish oranges became edible and I could indulge myself on liberated fruit and later emancipated Outspans entered our home. But the need for careful inspection of labels did not stop, Jaffa oranges were still the problematic fruit of a discriminatory regime. For many years this was an individualised gesture of disdain for a state that granted me the right of return (how could I return somewhere I had never been - a right of return to Shepherds Bush at pre-BBC house prices, now that's another matter ) but denied access to their homes to people expelled within my lifetime.

This is no longer an individual gesture. BIG -Boycott Israeli Goods – was organised to co-ordinate and promulgate the feelings of many others. This year a group of us, of Jewish origin, formed J-BIG, Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods, to demonstrate that there are many who will not support Israel – an apartheid state or worse. Jimmy Carter was roundly attacked for using the A word to describe Israel. But Apartheid means, in strict terms ‘separate development’ and has Israel not called the wall it has built, deep within the West Bank, the ‘separation fence’. So Apartheid Wall seems an appropriate term – it looks far more like a wall than a fence so, again, this terminology is accurate. But the separation in Israel is in many ways worse than South Africa's was. South Africa depended upon its Black labour force to keep its mines and farms running which made the growth of trade union activity a possible and effective means of survival and opposition. Israel has adopted a policy of relying less

and less upon its Arab population, denying them work, free movement and the possibility of work based organisation. They have, instead, encouraged immigration of people who would qualify as Jews under the Nazi's Nuremberg classification but do not under rabbinic tradition.

South Africa had no settlement policy, occupying the most fertile land within the Bantustans (of course, at a national level, the whites had already grabbed all the best bits) and garnering to themselves all the water resources. Israel's settlements, established in violation of international law, eat into the West Bank like termites, insisting on no-go zones for the Palestinian populations around each gated community, and appropriating farmland and demolishing inconvenient houses.

It is not just the fruit, of course, but the very colour orange has been adopted by separatists and as the marker of racial and religious discrimination. Orange Order and Orange Free State are names to trouble any believer in human rights. The word itself seems to be a disease vector; Orange, in Provence, was one of the first towns in France to be run by le Pen's National Front.

But why Israel, why now? Advocates of consumer, professional and academics boycotts of Israel are asked ‘why pick on Israel?’ Israel is not uniquely awful, and neither was South Africa: countries from Burma to North Korea to Sudan and beyond also treat their people with contempt and brutality. Israel is our problem, as was South Africa, in ways these other countries are not. Israel was created in response to Europe's inability to live at peace with its Jewish citizens; Israel claims, despite geography, to be part of Europe, a participant in the Eurovision song contest and the UEFA football competitions. Israel has privileged economic and academic arrangements with the EU; Israel is the recipient of United States military aid at level that would have made Latin American dictators of previous decades green (or orange) with envy; and Israel is deeply implicated in planning America's disastrous strategy in the Middle East, a strategy that has sorely damaged Britain and the other European countries that have become ensnared in it. Many of the most febrile advocates of Israel's expansion have been American and European recent immigrants. It was striking, when listening to the accents of the diehard

resisters of the evacuation of the Gaza settlements, how many of these people fighting the Israeli army and police were fleeing the pogroms of Brooklyn and Redbridge. It was also striking how small the risks of violent response such people ran from their aggression, compared with the quotidian experience of Palestinian children and teenagers.

That is why I cannot buy a Jaffa orange, a Carmel avocado or a Palwin bottle (although I must admit the last is no hardship). In the last century we knew there was blood on the coal, these are blood oranges.

The irony is that orange as a colour is very difficult to wear with a pale complexion and only looks good against a darker skin. It is my hope that soon I can buy my fruit for taste and quality not as a small but continuing gesture of solidarity with an oppressed people.

Mike Cushman

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