BRICUP

BRICUP Newsletter 27

British Committee for the Universities of Palestine

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The BBC admits its reporting error.

The BRICUP Newsletter 24 (January 2010) reported that the BBC had smeared a BRICUP meeting by incorrectly reporting, on the BBC News website, that a Jewish heckler at a BRICUP meeting had been subjected to "racist jeering [that was] stark and chilling". This was not true. Our newsletter reported the actual event in which the heckler had asked, "Why do you interrupt me?" to which the response was, "Do you really want to know?" There

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was no use of the word "Jewish" as reported on the BBC News website. BRICUP member Mike Cushman complained to the BBC and their response

Jewish man jeered at SOAS university debate, BBC News Website

I am writing to let you know the outcome of the Editorial Complaints Unit's investigation into your complaint about a web page which was previously posted on the BBC News website.

Having reviewed the original article, I accept that it would have given readers a seriously misleading impression of what happened at the meeting in question. In considering whether to uphold your complaint, I have borne in mind the action taken by BBC News once it became aware of the true situation. Within 24 hours, of its being posted, the article was removed from the BBC News website and replaced with an accurate version which you can

http://news.bbc.co.uk/l/hi/england/london/841953 2.stm In addition, the editor responsible, Hugh Berlyn, has assured us that the reporter concerned has been made aware of the need to check information provided by sources more carefully in future and to ensure that a wider range of views is sought. The reporter has, in turn, recognised the errors that were made in researching and writing the original article and has apologised to Mr Berlyn in writing.

In some circumstances, actions of this kind would enable me to conclude that the complaint had been resolved. In this case, however, it seems to me that the first and erroneous account of events has gained the kind of circulation which calls for correction on the public record. I am therefore upholding your complaint, which means that further action will be taken by BBC News in response to my finding. I shall come back to you when it had been decided what form this action will take, but I would expect it to involve some way of informing readers of the story as it now stands that the original version was misleading.

Yours sincerly

Fraser Steel, Head of Editorial Complaints

So, it is worth complaining. Sometimes, as in this case, it does work. It requires persistence and accurate, detailed and specific argument..

A BDS Roadshow by Ghada Karmi and Jeff Halper

The campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel is one of the most exciting developments in the battle against Israel's oppression of the Palestinians to appear on the activist scene. However, while we in BRICUP and colleagues in similar boycott campaigns may feel that the BDS case is made and needs no further justification; this is by no means a universal view. There are those who would argue that trying to isolate Israel is counterproductive, that an academic boycott, for example, stifles free debate with the very people whom one ought to engage with, that Israel is too powerful to be affected by such pin-pricks, and that boycotting Israeli goods is evocative of the ban imposed on Jewish shops by the Nazis in the 1930s.

It was with this in mind that Jeff Halper, the director of the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions (ICAHD), and I undertook a lecture tour between March 15 and 20. We were sponsored by BRICUP and ICAHD, with help from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in the places where we spoke. Our aim was to convince sceptical audiences of the case for BDS, and we felt that the combination of an Israeli and a Palestinian would add to the validity of

our position. Our lectures went under the title of "Israeli apartheid: the case for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions". It was not at all certain that Jeff and I would make a good speaker team. It doesn't follow that, just because he and I like and respect each other, that we would necessarily have lectured well together. In fact, it worked well. He usually started with an incisive review of the current situation in Israel, supported by a series of excellent maps and photographs. As he himself noted, the maps were key to getting the message across. However much our opponents might have wanted to challenge his account, the maps were unassailable. I then spoke for the next half of the session about the meaning and significance of BDS. But of course we overlapped, and branched out to talk about, among other things, the one- state solution.

Our tour started in Exeter, went to Birmingham, then Glasgow and Edinburgh, then Bradford, and finally London. Most of the lectures were held at universities, and we generally spoke to students at mid-day and to a wider audience of activists and the general public in the evening. The numbers who came to listen to us varied from under 20 to over 100. They were mostly enthusiastic and engaged, and perhaps we succeeded in changing some views on the merits of BDS. Several people wanted to start their own local BDS campaigns and asked for guidance and suggestions. When that happened, it was a rewarding and heart-warming experience, likewise, the reassuring presence of BRICUP members at the venues we spoke at, who supported us marvellously.

But now that it's all over, what did we learn from this tour? First, that sympathy for the Palestinian cause is widespread. We thought the striking absence of Zionists in our audiences was indicative of their reluctance to defend Israel in this climate of opinion. Second, that BDS is generally accepted as a concept, but less understood as a practical strategy. There was room for guidance on the "how" of joining BDS, as opposed to the "why". But third, the most important lesson we took from the tour was the need to address the "unconverted". Heartening as it was to talk to people who agreed with our position, we have to convince the unconverted. Our aim, to address sceptical audiences, was not realised this time. Persuading such people must be the objective of the BDS campaign in future.

Ghada Karmi

BDS activists gather in Shropshire

The Boycott Israel Network (BIN), a coalition of organizations working for BDS in the UK, Ireland and Europe, held its second highly successful residential workshop in Coalbrookdale, Ironbridge over the weekend of the 26th-28th March. The overall aim of this workshop's programme was the implementation of the commitments of the Cairo Declaration , the outcome of the international Gaza Freedom March which promises to be an important step forward in the international BDS movement.

Over 90 BDS activists gathered together from the UK, Ireland and mainland Europe to discuss progress and the direction of all aspects of BDS - consumer, academic, cultural, sporting, divestment etc. Particular attention was given to the following: the growing campaign of Zionist counter attacks against BDS activists on campuses, within trade unions and in other institutions; the provision of support for the victims of such attacks; the use of the Law to prevent war criminals being brought to justice and to suppress street protests. The issue of the European Union Monitoring Committee's definition of anti-Semitism. which effectively includes any criticism of Zionist Israel, was also addressed. BRICUP was very well represented, and made a major contribution to the weekend's events.

A BIN Liaison Committee has been established to ensure that the Network is able to respond to its rapidly expanding reach and to the growing need for communication and cooperation between its constituent organizations. Specialist working groups were also established to promote and coordinate the different campaigns. We particularly welcome the establishment of specialized working groups on cultural and sporting boycotts and will be reporting regularly on the progress of these and the other initiatives arising out of the weekend's discussions.

Monica Wusteman

PACBI column

Delegitimizing Oppression

The Reut Institute, an influential Israeli think-tank, recently issued a document entitled "The

Delegitimization Challenge: Creating a Political Firewall" where it identified an ominous "Delegitimization Network" and targeted the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement as worthy of serious attention, even "sabotage," by Israel lobby groups. Only a few days ago, an article in the Forward, a US Jewish daily, noted that supporters of this emerging advocacy effort point to the BDS campaign as a primary marker distinguishing "delegitimizers" from genuine critics. Indeed, "delegitimization" has become the latest buzzword and rallying point of the Israel lobby worldwide.

The genuine concern on the part of the Israel lobby comes on the heels of the ever-expanding international BDS movement following the July 2005 Palestinian civil society call for BDS; a movement that has seen an exponential increase in support from international trade unions, social movements, faith communities, academics, artists, among others, in the wake of Israel's lethal assault on Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009, when over 1400 Palestinian men, women and children were murdered, with wide-scale destruction of the civilian infrastructure.

The charge that BDS delegitimizes Israel is equivalent to saying that the civil rights movement in the US was delegitimizing the USA or that the antiapartheid movement was delegitimizing white existence in South Africa. In fact, by extension, one could argue that the anti-war movement in the US today is not simply about opposing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but about delegitimizing the "American way of life" and the very existence of the US, after Bush and the Neocons identified the "war on terror" as an existential battle.

The main argument to counter this increasingly vocal attack on the BDS movement is simple. Like other struggles, particularly the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and the civil rights movement in the USA, the Palestinian BDS movement struggles to deligitimize *Israel's racist and colonial oppression and the structures and institutions that uphold and perpetuate this oppression*. The Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people manifests itself in three forms: occupation, colonization, and apartheid. It is important to note that the BDS call focuses on all three inalienable rights of the Palestinians, which are an end to the occupation including dismantling the

Apartheid wall, equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. BDS is premised on the fundamental recognition that the structures of Israel's oppression must be dismantled and justice for the Palestinians realized, in harmony with international law and universal human rights.

Palestinian author and commentator Ali Abunimah has expressed the first option pursued by the Israel lobby succinctly: "Reut does not recommend to the Israeli cabinet -- which recently held a special session to hear a presentation of the think tank's findings -- that Israel should actually change its behavior toward Palestinians and Lebanese. It misses the point that apartheid South Africa also once faced a global 'delegitimization network' but that this has now completely disappeared. South Africa, however, still exists. Once the cause motivating the movement disappeared -- the rank injustice of formal apartheid -- people packed up their signs and their BDS campaigns and went home."

The re-packaging of the well-worn anti-Semitism charge directed at critics of Israel under the new "delegitimization" brand is a sign of the bankruptcy of the Israel lobby and its affiliates; as historian Tony Judt wrote to the Forward, "the 'de-legitimization' issue is a fraud....[it] is just another way to invoke antisemitism as a silencer, but sounds better because [it's] less exploitative of emotional pain." The fact that the BDS movement is anchored in a distinctly humanist platform that rejects all forms of racism, including anti-semitism, makes this charge even more preposterous. Moreover, the global BDS movement has witnessed a healthy wave of endorsements by prominent Jewish groups and intellectuals in Western countries, as well as in Israel, particularly since the Israeli massacre in Gaza.

Supporters of the rights of Palestinians, especially those advocating BDS, are not on the defensive. Indeed, the aim of the BDS movement is to delegitimize the *system of Israeli colonial and racist oppression*, to make it non-negotiable, morally repugnant, and untenable in the 21st century. We believe that a sustained campaign of pressure on Israel, thus isolating it in the international community, is the best way to realize Palestinians' UN-sanctioned rights. The struggle may be a long

one, and the well-funded and still influential Israeli lobby groups may come up with more creative buzzwords, but in the end there is nothing legitimate for them to defend; the time of defending occupation, colonialism and apartheid is past.

PACBI

i "The Delegitimization Challenge: Creating a Political Firewall" (The Reut Institute, 4 February 2010) http://reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=3769

ii Nathan Guttman, "Communal Groups Mobilize Against 'Delegitimizers' of Jewish State." http://www.forward.com/articles/126991/

iii Ali Abunimah, "Israel's new strategy: 'sabotage' and 'attack' the global justice movement," *The Electronic Intifada*, 16 February 2010. http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11080.shtml

The medical boycott campaign: a summary

The World Medical Association (WMA) is the official agency overseeing medical ethics worldwide; one of its members is the Israeli Medical Association (IMA). In May 2009 last year we launched a protest asking that the record regarding complicity of the IMA in torture be examined and the ethical implications be properly acted upon. The appeal was made on behalf of 725 physicians, including 114 professors, from 43 countries (See BRICUP Newslatter 18, available on our website). As far as we are aware, this campaign by physicians from fully one quarter of all the nations in the world is unprecedented.

Evidence regarding the routine use of torture in Israel as state policy, and of the complicity of both individual doctors and the Israeli Medical Association, has been steadily accumulating for many years – see the Amnesty report of 1996, the PCATI 'Ticking Bombs' report of 2007, and the submissions by Amnesty and the United Against Torture (UAT) Coalition to the UN Committee Against Torture in 2008. The WMA should not have required outside parties to draw their attention to this independent, robust and hugely compelling body of documentation

iv Guttman, op. cit.

in the public realm since the WMA is mandated to ensure that its member associations abide by its codes.

We did not receive even an acknowledgement of receipt of our letter and evidence from Dr Hill and the WMA Council. Over the following two months Professor Meyers, lead signatory, or myself sent several further reminders, as well as additional relevant material. In all we wrote on around five occasions and pointed out that the wording of the Declaration of Tokyo provided on the IMA website had been altered in a way that appeared to water down the commitment of doctors to take action when torture is encountered.

The first response to our initial letter came, not from the IMA but from the Jewish Chronicle in London and newspapers in Israel that published very pointed responses from the President of the WMA, Dr Yoran Blachar: he made no mention of the evidence on which our case was based, but blamed me personally as someone who was conducting some sort of obsessional crusade against him as an individual. The articles also made racist-sounding statements about the supposed motivation of those of the 725 signatories with Arab surnames. We noted that the Zionist websites were canvassing for signatures and no doubt the WMA received many appeals in support of Dr. Blachar and/or the IMA from many people around the world, but we were left to wonder how many of these would have referred to the evidence we had cited: no counter-evidence was possible because none exists. The WMA had the obligation to properly examine the evidence of which we were mere messengers.

Our campaign was and continues to be widely reported in international medical journals like the British Medical Journal (BMJ) and the Lancet, and in mainstream newspapers such as the Guardian. In a letter in the Lancet in 1997 we had cited a statement in which Dr Blachar had endorsed the use of 'moderate physical pressure' which the UN Committee Against Torture is clear is torture. A BMJ report in June 2009 quoted a 'WMA spokesman' as denying this allegation but we were unable to establish with what authority this 'WMA spokesman'

spoke or whether he represented Dr Blachar personally. No neutral reader of the Lancet letter could possibly agree with this spokesman and in fact Dr Vivienne Nathanson, Head of Ethics in the International Committee of the British Medical Association, agreed that our interpretation was indeed what Dr Blachar had meant. In fact, an interview with Dr Blachar in the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz on 15 November 1999 quoted him directly as saying that 'moderate physicial pressure' could be justified in a 'ticking bomb situation'. The 'ticking bomb' defence was decisively rejected by the UN Committee Against Torture in the 1990s. This matter aside, the WMA has not said a single word about the evidence we attached, suggesting that it had been primarily concerned to protect Dr Blachar rather than fulfil the ethical duties for which it was created.

Several months passed without further word from the WMA Council, and it was only when lead signatory Professor Alan Meyers reached Dr Edward Hill on the 'phone in his clinic in the USA in October 2009 that we were told directly that the WMA would not be responding, would not be commenting, and did not welcome any further material in support of our case. Scandalous!

The next event, in August 2009, was that I, personally, received formal notice of a possible writ from London libel lawyers hired by Dr Blachar and the IMA. So, 725 doctors make unprecedented allegations concerning medical complicity with torture, direct them to the Council of the organisation appointed to deal with such matters but the WMA President then instructs lawyers to threaten a libel suit against the convenor, myself. I was accused of conducting a personal vendetta against Dr Blachar, and of 'deceiving' the other 724 signatories into signing. I was told that if I did not retract and apologise in the BMJ, the Lancet and the Guardian newspaper, the writ would proceed. We wrote back to re-affirm our case and its principled intention which was framed within the WMA's own codes! Around 150 of the signatories emailed the lawyer direct to insist that they were not deceived, had been independently aware of the evidence incriminating the IMA, challenging the lawyers to sue them too etc.

Shortly after this the IMA announced that henceforth it would not maintain links with, nor respond to anything from the NGO Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI). The grounds were that by its criticism of the IMA the PHRI was encouraging "anti-Semitic" and "anti-Israeli" sentiment abroad, and because PHRI had also submitted material to the WMA Council that was in agreement with our campaign. (See BRICUP Newsletter 19, available on the BRICUP Website) PHRI have been perhaps the most effective medical humanitarian non-governmental organisation in the world in recent years. Their documentation and principled protest at the violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention caused by the blockade of Gaza, in addition to their anti-torture work, shows their commitment to the ethical role that the IMA is mandated to play...but will not. It was also clear that Dr Blachar had not enjoyed a meeting he had attended in Tel-Aviv on 10 December 2008 at which the leadership of PHRI had held up the evidence of medical complicity with torture in Israel in front of his eyes.

One problem we have had throughout is to ensure that out messages reach the intended recipients. We have used the address given to us for the secretariat Secretariat@wma.net. We felt that we could presume that, as a matter of course, all of the geographically scattered WMA Council members would see each letter. As time passed we began to wonder if the whole Council was being actively involved, or whether a decision had been taken at headquarters to keep our appeal closely under wraps and manage it by simply not responding. The somewhat perverse nature of Dr Hill's response on the phone to Prof Meyers lent itself to such an interpretation. Consequently, late in 2009, we set out to contact some individual Council members in their home countries to obtain confirmation that they had seen our letters and the supporting evidence, and had been party to the decision not to respond and not to comment. We have now had written confirmation from a WMA Council member that he did not see our original letter to the Council until we sent it to him in November. It seems reasonable to conclude from this that no WMA Council member (except the Chair, Dr Hill) saw this letter or our subsequent letters, nor the separate submissions from PHRI and PCATI, nor the appeal on our behalf from such as Dr Wendy Orr, the South African doctor who blew the whistle on the

complicity with torture by doctors during the apartheid era. Some or all of these WMA Council members must have attended the WMA General Assembly last October in Delhi, and still, we infer, were kept in the dark. The role of Secretary General Dr Kloiber cannot but have been central in what might be described as a stitch-up.

Then there is the question of the health and human rights conference "Right to Health as Bridge to Peace in Middle East" which the WMA co-organised in Turkey in October 2009. (See the report in BRICUP Newsletter 23 avaiable on the BRICUP website). Dr Marton, an Israeli psychiatrist who founded PHRI, is one of the 725 signatories and at this conference she described the torture of "Case M". Secretary General Dr Kloiber was present at the conference, as were both the new WMA President Dr Dana Hanson (Canada) and new IMA President Dr Leonid Eidelman and all saw the details of Case M in front of their eyes. In this firsthand way all three have become a witness to Case M. We should recall the words of the then WMA President Dr Jon Snaedal at the 2007 Assembly, "This is the first time the WMA has explicitly obliged doctors to document cases of torture of which they become aware. The absence of documenting and denouncing such acts might be considered as a form of tolerance and of nonassistance to the victims" So what are the WMA President and Secretary going to do to avoid the charge of non-assistance regarding Case M, quite apart from the rest of the evidence base? Case M is but the latest reminder of what has been at stake all along. Within the last 2 weeks PHRI and PCATI have sent the details of Case M to both the IMA and Ministry of Defence, giving names of the specific doctors implicated, and challenging them to take it up. (The last time they did this, over the "Ticking Bombs" report, the IMA Head of Ethics Avinoam Reches wrote back a half page letter to say they had conducted an 'investigation' but that all Israeli doctors serving in the unit had denied everything and of course you can't rely on the word of any Palestinian prisoner!)

A number of the signatories who are members of the British Medical Association (BMA) have been pressing the BMA International Committee to play a positive role in all this and have sought interviews with Dr Vivienne Nathanson, Head of Ethics. The BMA has always stressed its collegiate relationship

with the IMA and refused to take the matter up at the WMA. At this time, the BMA seems to have accepted a dossier of letters from the IMA as evidence of their probity when none of them actually addresses the torture issue at all! Dr Nathanson has confirmed that the BMA is aware of Amnesty International's findings on the complicity of doctors with torture in Israel, and found them 'credible' (her word). Other UK signatories have appealed to Dr Hamish Meldrum, BMA Head of Council, who has just replied to the effect that the BMA has asked the WMA to respond to our letter.

The IMA retains a significant presence at the WMA headquarters. In fact the WMA website suggests that an influential triumvirate exists, comprising the current President, the President-elect and that the immediate Past-President. The WMA simply cannot get away with so hypocritical and highly visible a breach of its basic duties and mandate. Media attention, not least in the international medical journals, continues to address the story. It is absurd that the WMA is prepared to speak out on Iran on the basis of "several reports of abuse" (though rightly so) but not speak out on Israel. This is an issue that goes to the heart of the moral standing of the medical profession worldwide. It is painfully evident to us, to the BMJ and Lancet, and to many others, that the WMA is currently not fit for the purposes for which it was created. What the WMA does appear to offer member associations is a fig-leaf defence: in response to evidence-based challenges in medical journals and elsewhere over the years, the IMA has often pointed to its WMA membership as proof in itself of their ethical credentials. It would be better to have no WMA at all than a hollow shell, surely.

Our case provides the litmus test to demonstrate whether the whole system of international medical ethical codes actually amounts to anything at all. The WMA can recover honour and credibility only by addressing our still unanswered evidence against the IMA. We are continuing to maintain the momentum of the campaign, and by various routes to expose the ethical cul de sac into which the WMA has taken itself in its efforts to protect the IMA. They are colluding with the colluders.

Derek Summerfield.

To Margaret Atwood, Say "NO" to Prizes from the Israeli Apartheid!

The following Open Letter has been sent by the Israeli BDS's movement to the well-known Canadian writer- Margaret Atwood who was invited to attend a Tel Aviv University symposium, at which she is to receive a prize.

March 30, 2010

Dear Margaret Atwood,

We are Israeli citizens and residents. Jews and Palestinians, who are committed to the Palestinian struggle for justice and freedom. We heard with dismay that you are set to attend this spring an apartheid-complicit Tel Aviv University's symposium, where you are to receive a prize. [1]. We urge you to heed the Palestinian call for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions, reject that prize, and refrain from attending the symposium or any other Israeli academic event. [2]. Palestinians are denied any democratic liberties and are harshly and collectively repressed when trying to struggle for their freedom, even if non-violently [3]. They are subjected to an apartheid regime that denies refugees' right of return, discriminates against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and implement a cruel form of occupation, including a crippling siege on the Gaza Strip. By engaging in boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) you can help raise the oppressed Palestinian voice instead of adopting a "business as usual" attitude towards the Israeli regime and its academic institutions, all of which are state-run and state-funded.

After years of attempts to change the minds and hearts of the Israeli public, we also believe that this change can be achieved now only through significant external pressure. As time passes by, we witness our society becoming more and more callous and stuck on its racist track. Since the beginning of the "peace talks" period, we witness Israel and its supporters abroad attempting to portray the oppressor and oppressed as two equal sides in a conflict to be remedied if they simply straightened out their mutual

differences.

Today, many people around the world mark the 2nd Global Day of Action on BDS against Israel [4].

BDS means power to the people in a time when world governments fail to act accordingly. We call on you to be one of those who help bring justice and freedom for the Palestinian people, by denying legitimacy to the Israeli apartheid and its institutions.

Sincerely,

Nitzan Aviv, Ronnie Barkan, Lilach Ben-David, Naama Farjoun, Iris Hefets, Racheli Gai, Neta Golan, Yael Oren Kahn, Yigal Laviv, Dorothy Naor, Ofer Neiman, David Nir, Adv. Emily Schaeffer, Ayala Shani, Jonatan Stanczak, Ruth Tenne,

On behalf of BOYCOTT! Supporting the Palestinian BDS Call from Within http://boycottisrael.info

Send your message toMargaret Atwood via her agent Curtis Brown Group Ltd

[1] See

http://www.pacbi. org/etemplate.php?id=1097

- [2] For more details on this campaign, see http://www.pacbi.org
- [3] See recent Addameer and Stop the Wall joint report

http://www.stopthew all.org/download s/pdf/repress.pdf

[4] See http://bdsdayofacti on.wordpress. com/

A BRICUP statement on BDS

(March 15th 2010)

BRICUP endorses the Palestinian call for all non-violent forms of boycott, divestment and sanctions against the Israeli institutions and companies that are complicit in the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and the denial of basic human rights to the Palestinian people. We emphasise that the academic

and cultural boycott that BRICUP supports is not targeted against individuals and nor does it prevent the free exchange of ideas. However, we do not believe that official representatives of the Israeli state should be welcome on our campuses and we call for all war criminals to be brought to justice.

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

We need funds to support our program of visiting speakers, public meetings, printing leaflets and meeting the whole range of expenses that a busy campaign demands. You can make a one off donation 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, Account Number 65156591

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www.bricup.org.uk/documents/StandingOrder.pdf

More details can be obtained from treasurer@bricup.org.uk

BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine. We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings . Send requests and any comments concernibng this Newsletter to newsletter@bricup.org.uk