

Scottish Trades Union Congress

Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions Discussion Consultation with Interested Parties

B1 Introduction

B1.1 The General Council approached a number of organisations and groups in January 2009 seeking their views on the issue of boycott, disinvestment and sanctions. A number of organisations with a particular interest in this issue were approached, and informed of the STUC process resulting from the Congress resolution in 2007. Organisations were invited to provide any views or comments on the issue of boycott of Israel to assist the General Council with its consideration of this complex matter. The invitation to these organisations emphasised the importance to the STUC of the views of key organisations in Scotland, and within the trade union movement, that have an interest in this matter.

B1.2 The organisations invited to contribute views were:

- The Bishops' Conference of Scotland
- The Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland
- Jews for Justice for Palestinians
- Palestine Solidarity Campaign
- The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
- Scottish Friends of Palestine
- The Scottish-Islamic Foundation
- Scottish Jews for a Just Peace
- Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign.
- Trade Union Friends of Israel

B2 Responses

B2.1 The STUC received responses from the following organisations:

- The Church of Scotland, Church and Society Council.
- Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC)

- The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (ScoJeC)
- Scottish Friends of Palestine (SFoP)
- Scottish Jews for a Just Peace (SJJP)
- Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC)
- Trade Union Friends of Israel (TUFI).

B2.2 These responses are available in full on the STUC website, or from Congress Office. The themes within the responses are outlined below.

B3 Human Rights

B3.1 Organisations supporting BDS, or those supporting some form of solidarity with Palestinian people, identify the breaches of human rights as the main motivator for action.

B3.2 The Church of Scotland whilst not supporting full BDS against Israel, ensures the Church's money is not connected with oppressive practices in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, supports positive investment in the Occupied Territories, and would only endorse action targeted on goods produced in the illegal settlements.

B3.3 The Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign outlines the restrictions on the daily lives of Palestinians because of the Israeli occupation. It explains how this affects access to essential services such as housing and health, access to jobs and education. SPSC underlines the restrictions and controls on free movement and arbitrary confiscation of permits. Scottish Friends of Palestine references the significant attacks on human rights of Palestinians, rights which are embedded in international law.

B3.4 The Palestine Solidarity Campaign identifies the Israeli Government's clear breach of Human Rights Conventions, and campaigns for the right of Palestinian people to self-determination, the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from occupied territories, and the removal of the illegally constructed "apartheid wall". It suggests that actions to support these rights could include calling for the end to the

arms trade between Britain and the Government of Israel; unions to divest from companies which supply arms to the Government of Israel, or provide materials for the building of the separation wall; calling for the suspension of the EU-Israel Special Trade Agreement; and the implementation of a consumer boycott of goods produced in Israel.

B3.5 Scottish Jews for a Just Peace identify the illegal occupation and hostile actions of Israel against the Palestinians, and support measures that increase political pressure on Israel to stop its illegal activity.

B3.6 Trade Union Friends of Israel's submission speaks of the Hamas threat to Israelis, and the innocent civilians who suffer as they are held hostage to the spiral of violence initiated by militants who launch rockets from within Gaza.

B4 The Peace Process

B4.1 SFoP argue that it is up to civic society to take action in support of Palestinians, as international bodies and a peace process are failing to prevent the attacks on the people of Gaza, the construction of the wall, and the restrictions on movement enforced through checkpoints. It sees BDS as a significant step in support of Palestinians.

B4.2 SPSC argues that the peace process is a deception. However, TUFJ and the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities argue that the peace process must be allowed to continue, and BDS will harm this.

B5 The Economies of Israel and Palestine

B5.1 TUFJ argues that a stable relationship between the Palestinian and Israeli economies with good trade links is crucial for the peace process to succeed. It says that a boycott, whilst aspiring to weaken Israel's economy, would be detrimental to the Palestinian economy, the peace process, and to Palestinian people. TUFJ say that now is not the right time for divisive boycotts, rather the emphasis must be on peace negotiations.

B6 The Relationship Between Histadrut and PGFTU

- B6.1 Both TUFU, and ScoJeC highlight the constructive dialogue between Histadrut and the PGFTU. They state that both trade union centres urge constructive dialogue and solidarity rather than disruptive boycotts.
- B6.2 However, SFoP state that Palestinian public bodies with close associations with Israeli institutions, such as the PGFTU, have to tread a fine line to avoid being marginalised (and, SFoP claims to avoid being attacked or closed down), and so have to co-operate with the occupiers.
- B6.3 SFoP is critical of Histadrut and its proclaimed comradeship with PGFTU, criticising Histadrut for espousing its own generosity after keeping PGFTU money for 15 years and then returning it. SFoP is also critical of Histadrut for its support of the recent attacks on Gaza.

B7 Comparisons with Apartheid South Africa

- B7.1 ScoJeC and TUFU criticise the drawing of parallels between the boycott of Israel and the boycott of South Africa, stating this is false and a misrepresentation of the facts. TUFU say similarities between Israel and apartheid South Africa are wrong, as all minorities in Israel including Palestinians (Israeli Arabs) are guaranteed full equal rights under Israeli law. ScoJeC point out an important difference in that the South Africa boycott impacted upon South Africa itself and organisations that might otherwise have done business with South Africa, but not on any particular community in Scotland. ScoJeC says that an Israeli boycott would impact heavily on the Scottish Jewish community, exposing the Jewish community to attack.
- B7.2 SPSC draws parallels between Israel's actions against Palestinians, and apartheid South Africa in its submission. It compares Israel's state policies and their impact upon Palestinians, with South Africa's treatment of Black people, in terms of Israeli military law, documentation required for movement, use of land, and breaches of human rights.

B8 The Impact Upon Communities in Scotland

- B8.1 ScoJeC states that a boycott would impact upon Scottish Jewish communities who consume kosher food from Israel. They believe this would breach Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights by obstructing the right “to manifest religion or belief, in... practice of observance”.
- B8.2 SJJP say that some of its members would be concerned at boycotting Israeli produced kosher products particularly at Jewish festivals such as Passover. SJJP signposts to the Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods website for information on this.
- B8.3 ScoJeC references the reports by the Community Security Trust on the unprecedented rise in anti-Semitic activity in the first four weeks of 2009. ScoJeC also provides examples of anti-Semitic attacks in Scotland. ScoJeC explains that protests against the Israeli Government’s action have been very intimidating, and that people who report feeling intimidated feel they are being targeted because they are Jewish. ScoJeC references the Macpherson principle that “if offence was taken, then offence was given”.
- B8.4 ScoJec accepts that criticism of any country’s government is legitimate, but that targeting, intentionally or otherwise, a local community is not legitimate.

B9 Anti-Semitism

- B9.1 ScoJeC express its deep concerns at current rhetoric which does not distinguish between what is said about Israel from what is said about Jews, particularly in debate about boycott. ScoJeC also rejects the equation of the Israeli action in Gaza with the Holocaust.
- B9.2 ScoJeC express their strong concerns at the rise of anti-Semitism, and the conflation of “Jew” and “Israeli”. They also claim that singling out the Jewish state for criticism and boycott when they act just like other states is anti-Semitism. ScoJeC questions why political activists and

campaigners focus on Israel and Palestine, and do not pay as much attention to other crises such as Darfur.

- B9.3 SJJP notes that any boycott or sanctions aimed at Israel needs to avoid any prospect of boycotting Jews individually or as a group.

B10 Support for BDS?

- B10.1 SFoP claims there is support for BDS in the UK and elsewhere. It points to the number of declarations made through public bodies and the media, in Israel, Palestine, Britain and elsewhere for BDS. It refers to an open letter to the Guardian with over 300 signatories, Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees, The High Follow Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel, and another letter to the Guardian from concerned members of the Jewish Community.

- B10.2 SPSC references influential individuals and organisation across the globe who are receptive to or supportive of a BDS campaign. SPSC cites trade unionists in Ireland, Canada, Brazil, Norway and South Africa who are taking action in solidarity with the people of Palestine.

- B10.3 TUFU states that there is no official Palestinian call for a boycott, and specifically notes that the PGFTU has not called for a boycott despite having opportunities to do so in its address to the TUC in September 2008. TUFU also notes that the elected Palestinian Authority has not called for a boycott of Israel.

B11 Views on the targets of BDS

- B11.1 A number of organisations gave us views on the merits of particular aspects and targets of BDS. As noted above the Church of Scotland has policy to ensure the Church's money is not connected with oppressive practices in the Israeli occupation. The Church of Scotland is also calling

for clear labelling of products so consumers can make an informed choice.

- B11.2 PSC focuses on divesting from companies which supply arms to Israel or provide material for the building of the wall. It also calls for the suspension of the EU-Israel Special Trade Agreement, and proposes a consumer boycott of goods produced in Israel.
- B11.3 SJJJ in principle support BDS which target Israeli institutions politically and economically. SJJJ specifically support disinvestment and sanctions related to arms and the military. However, they express concerns at a total boycott of Israel which covers all aspects of its society. As noted above SJJJ, and ScoJeC point to Jewish people's reliance on kosher products from Israel.
- B11.4 ScoJeC opposes BDS, and points to the potential hypocrisy of people calling for boycott, but are still prepared to use Israeli technology to take forward their campaigns.
- B11.5 Both the Church of Scotland, and SJJJ identify the need for positive investment in the Occupied Territories. SJJJ support parallel campaigns to support Palestinian civil society and Israeli peace activists. TUFJ also highlight how trade unions can play a constructive role in bringing who are people working for peace on both sides together.

B12 The role of the STUC

- B12.1 SJJJ says it welcomes the role the STUC could play in supporting and promoting BDS. It states that at present BDS campaigns are often ad hoc, and would benefit from the political leadership that could be offered by the STUC. Conversely, TUFJ references trade unions dropping their boycott policies and playing a more positive role as being more beneficial in working for peace. Likewise, ScoJeC cites the STUC's record of dialogue with Histadrut and the PGFTU as delivering more constructive engagement than a boycott.

B13 Conclusions from Consultation

B13.1 There are a number of themes emerging from the comments received from organisations, particularly on the issue of human rights, the breaches of international laws, and the prospects for the peace process. There are valuable contributions on the practical aspects of and targeting of BDS, with the concerns expressed on the impact of Jewish people who rely on kosher products. There are important contributions on the impact of campaigns against the Israeli Government on local communities in Scotland.

Scottish Trades Union Congress
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