

Trade Union Solidarity

For effective BDS Campaigns

Palestinian grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign - www.stopthewall.org

AIMS

A trade union boycott campaign works like a consumer boycott or divestment movement run at a local institutional level. It means that trade unions help to bring about the cutting of economic and diplomatic ties with Israel as well as with their Israeli trade union counterparts.

1. Build solidarity with Palestinian trade unions and send a message to Israel that occupation and racism against the Palestinian people is unacceptable.
2. Ensure that contracts and business do not go to Israeli companies and companies supporting Israel, as this provides indirect financial support to the Occupation and props up the Israeli economy.
3. Build greater awareness among trade unionists globally.

APPROACHES TO THE CAMPAIGN

1. The lessons from the anti-apartheid movement in solidarity with South Africa

The South African struggle serves as a model for how a movement can be built. Throughout a period of almost 20 years, the Trade Unions were at the forefront in global support of the South African struggle against apartheid.

The endorsement of the boycott by the trade unions put pressure on governments to impose sanctions, on corporations to divest, stimulated and backed up the bold action of branches and workers and in some cases almost single-handedly enforced trade bans on South African goods.

Some outstanding examples are:

- In 1963, Danish dockers refused to unload a shipment of South African goods. When the transport arrived in Sweden, dockers joined the boycott. Dockers continued to reject South African shipments on numerous occasions. Two months later, governing parties in Scandinavia jointly proposed a resolution advocating economic sanctions on South Africa at the Conference of the Socialist International, revealing how initia-

tives taken on the ground had the potential to pressure or influence governments into taking a more progressive stance.

- In the '60s the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in the UK adopted the boycott call. In the '80s, the TUC called on Britain's leading 50 retailers to remove South African goods from their shelves and by December 1985, nine had agreed. The boycott was strengthened from the workers, with Liverpool dockers refusing to unload apartheid goods and checkout assistants in Irish supermarkets declining to handle South African produce. The TUC further pressed union trustees to challenge the use of those funds with investment in South Africa, with the first pensions divesting from 1982.

- The Finnish Transport Workers' Union (AKT) imposed an effective and total ban on trade between Finland and South Africa in the mid-1980s. This was assisted by the fact that all Finnish dockworkers belonged to the AKT. With help from unions in other countries they caught companies trying to evade the ban and threatened to boycott all their foreign trade unless they stopped dealing with South Africa. With the tacit approval of the government, trade fell to 4% of former levels.

- In June 1960 a conference organized by the American Committee on Africa (U.S.), co-sponsored by a range of trade unions, laid some of the groundwork for sanctions and divestment. It urged Washington to stop buying gold and strategic resources from South Africa and called for a consumer boycott of South African goods. It urged dockworkers to refuse to unload these goods and attempted to dissuade businessmen from investing in the country. In March 1986, the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO) endorsed a consumer boycott of Shell as part of the secondary boycott of corporations complicit in South African apartheid.

- The exemplary and successful Campaign against Barclays Bank was strongly supported by a variety of trade unions, including the National Union of Public Employees and the World Confederation of Labour.

- The Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union (IDATU) agreed in 1984 to boycott South

African goods. After representations from IDATU many shops stopped selling South African goods. A long strike against Dunne's stores was triggered when an IDATU member at the checkout was suspended for refusing to handle a South African grapefruit. This finally resulted in a government ban on South African fruit and vegetables.

2. Getting active

a) Motions, resolutions and twinning

Trade unions can support the boycott by:

- Passing motions and measures in support of the BDS call and condemning Israeli aggression.
- Changing purchasing and investment policies to ensure that trade unions are not contributing financially to the Occupation.
- Lobbying for within local, national and international trade unions and their confederations to adopt the BDS call and to sever ties with the Histadrut (the Israeli trade union congress).
- Twinning with Palestinian unions where suitable.



Every day, thousands of Palestinian workers from Gaza wait to enter the "Pathway of Death", a 2km long tunnel at Erez checkpoint.

b) Work within your local Trade Union branch

Union representatives need to ensure that Israel's breaches of international law become a matter of serious concern to their members. Discussion of such issues at the meetings of local branches is one way to begin lobbying for progressive actions in your work place. Prepare BDS motions against Israel and the Histadrut, highlighting Israel's breaches of International law and the reality of apartheid on the ground in Palestine. Bring this to the attention of district and national levels.

c) **Establish a national campaign group to educate your trade union for change**

Pressure is more effective if you are part of a **coordinated group**. Join or organize a Friends of Palestine group within your national trade union to spread the word about the situation in Palestine. Explore the issues relating to the Histadrut's discrimination against Palestinians and underline the urgent need for BDS campaigns. Use activist materials compiled in Palestine or abroad or make your own ones.

Start **research** about the relations of trade unions with Israel and the Histadrut and companies with strong union representation and their relations with Israel.

Spread the word by arranging meetings in the branches and at district and national meetings.

Link up with the international relations department of your trade union and keep them updated about the situation in Palestine and the global BDS movement as a whole.



d) **Link trade union activity to other BDS campaigns**

- As a minimum, trade union **investment portfolios** should not include companies investing directly or indirectly in apartheid Israel.
- Trade union members of the controlling boards of **pension funds** should seek to end their holdings in companies investing in Israel.
- Trade unionists should join campaigns to persuade particular **companies to withdraw from Israel**.
- Trade unionists, especially in the public sector, should support moves in local authorities to declare '**apartheid-free zones**' involving a pledge that no council funds will be invested in companies operating in Israel, and that they will discourage investment.
- **Make trade unionists aware** of the need for BDS, by circulating material to branches, organising meetings, film shows, exhibitions, etc.
- At a national level, the issue of **sanctions** could be raised on industry-wide national negotiating bodies.
- At an international level, trade unions should work through **international trade union bodies** to coordinate and build pressure for sanctions.

THE STORY SO FAR

Trade Union Friends of Palestine, UK have worked for several years to create effective trade union solidarity.

2002 - Danish trade unions call for boycott.

April 2004 - "Labour for Palestine" founded in New York to support the Palestinian struggle and lobby the trade unions to divest from Israel.

June 2006 - The Ontario branch of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) passes a resolution at their Annual General Meeting committing the branch to support the Palestinian call for BDS. (See full text below.)

July 2006 - The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union of Ireland calls for sanctions against Israel and immediate suspension of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement with Israel until such time as that country ends its violations of international law.

July 2006 - In the UK sacked Merseyside dockworkers call on the trade union movement to boycott Israeli consumer goods.

June 2006 - CUT Brazil and other trade unions in South America join the mobilization that blocks the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the Mercosur countries and Israel.

August 2006 - Willie Madisha, President of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) states that South Africa must boycott Israel and supermarket workers should refuse to handle Israeli goods.

August 2006 - An Irish tramline is forced to cancel a contract with the Israeli occupation authorities in Jerusalem following pressure from trade union representatives.

August 2006 - The Metal and Electrical Workers Union of South Africa calls for Sanctions Against Israel in the wake of the Qana Massacre.

November 13, 2006 - The Norwegian Electrician and IT workers' union representing 37,000 members has adopted a resolution calling for a comprehensive boycott of Apartheid Israel.

February 3, 2007 - The Youth Congress of the CUT Brazil, the countries powerful trade union federation - endorses the unified Palestinian call for BDS issued on July 9, 2005 and calls upon the Brazilian government to suspend all commercial relations with Israel.



SAMPLE BDS MOTION

CUPE Ontario resolution N. 50 in support of BDS
(http://www.ontario.cupe.ca/www/background_on_resolution_50)

CUPE Ontario will:

1. With Palestine solidarity and human rights organization, develop an education campaign about the apartheid nature of the Israeli state and the political and economic support of Canada for these practices.
2. Support the international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law including the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.
3. Call on CUPE National to commit to research into Canadian involvement in the occupation and call on the CLC to join us in lobbying against the apartheid-like practices of the Israeli state and call for the immediate dismantling of the wall.

Because:

- The Israeli Apartheid Wall has been condemned and determined illegal under international law.
- Over 170 Palestinian political parties, unions and other organization including the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions issued a call in July 2005 for a global campaign of boycotts and divestment against Israel similar to those imposed against South African Apartheid.
- CUPE BC has firmly and vocally condemned the occupation of Palestine and have initiated an education campaign about the apartheid-like practices of the Israeli state.

The resolution now goes to the CUPE Ontario Executive Board to develop a plan for implementing support for the boycott and developing an education campaign.