

SYDNEY STAFF FOR BDS  
(BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS)

## **- NTEU MEMBERS -**

**Our Union's Strength is in  
Open, Inclusive, Rational Debate.**

**Don't Be Rushed into Deciding -  
Complex Questions Need Full Discussion.**

**ON JUNE 4, OPPOSE THE CALL BY THE  
NATIONAL GENERAL SECRETARY  
TO SHUT DOWN DISCUSSION!**

- Our success in protecting our working conditions last year was the result of collective deliberation and democratic decision-making.
- Now, our branch has rightly decided to back NTEU member Jake Lynch against the attacks on his intellectual freedom. It is a logical step for us to consider whether, like many other unions, we should also support the BDS campaign for Palestine justice, in particular the institutional academic boycott of Israeli universities.
- Open and inclusive discussion of both sides of the question, over a relaxed time-frame, is by far the best way to decide. Discussing the question slowly and carefully will let members reflect, and not distract from the other important work we have to do.
- No motion taking a position either for or against BDS should be put until members have had the opportunity to consider the issue at greater length.
- Ordinary members, not anyone else, should collectively decide how much time, if any, they are willing for the branch to devote to the discussion of BDS.
- So let's have a debate on Wednesday about how much time, if any, members want to devote to discussion of BDS. This lets members decide if they don't want any.
- This solution is far preferable to any attempt to shut debate down:
  - it doesn't force members to commit themselves hastily on a complex and important ethical and political question;
  - it doesn't set a bad precedent by overturning the decision of the May 15 members' meeting;
  - it allows us to properly consider advice from all parties, including the General Secretary;
  - It puts the decision about how much time we devote to this issue directly in the hands of members.

## **What is Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions?**

The call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions is a Palestinian-initiated response to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, its siege of Gaza, and its systematic oppression of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Launched in 2005 by an unprecedented coalition of over 170 Palestinian civil society organisations on the model of the successful campaign against South African apartheid, BDS promotes basic equality, practical peacebuilding and democracy in Israel-Palestine. Unequivocally opposed to all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, BDS is endorsed by a growing range of unions, professional associations and other organizations internationally. Figures who support the academic boycott include physicist Stephen Hawking, American civil rights hero Angela Davis, philosopher Judith Butler, and Israeli historian Ilan Pappé.

## **Why are we meeting on Wednesday?**

At a meeting on May 15, the Sydney University branch of the NTEU passed a resolution calling for a "broad discussion among members about whether to endorse the BDS call and, if so, in what form." In recognition of the seriousness and complexity of this issue, the motion envisaged a series of meetings and open discussions leading up to a vote on the issue "by the end of the year." The aim was to enable members to make an informed decision on where they stand. The Branch Committee's role was explicitly to facilitate an open discussion, not to endorse BDS. Now, the General Secretary of the NTEU, Grahame McCulloch, is flying up from Melbourne to try and shut debate down.

## **Why does BDS matter to USyd?**

Sydney University is a conspicuous supporter of Israel, maintaining formal connections to a number of Israeli academic institutions through well funded exchange programs, such as the exchange with the Hebrew University, and a new partnership with the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. Through its active support of Israeli institutions the University of Sydney leaves Israel's oppression of the Palestinians completely unchallenged, and helps Israel to whitewash its acute human rights violations. As staff at the University of Sydney we have a responsibility not to work with institutions that

### **Sydney Staff for BDS forum Academic Freedom in Palestine**



Thursday, 5 June 2014, 1pm–2pm,  
New Law School Annexe Seminar room 100

Come and hear **Shamikh Badra** and **Mohammed Abualrob**, two students who have lived and studied in Palestine, talk about their experiences as students under the occupation. **Stuart Rees**, Chair of the Sydney Peace Foundation, will also be speaking, followed by a general discussion.

either remain silent while the Israeli state destroys the educational infrastructure of Palestine, or are actively complicit with this destruction. Jake Lynch, an NTEU member from the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, is currently being attacked through the Federal Court for his decision to exercise his intellectual freedom by upholding the institutional academic boycott.

## **Why weren't members notified that a discussion on BDS was happening on May 15?**

Sydney Staff for BDS notified the NTEU of the motion to begin a discussion on BDS before 9am on May 14, the day before the members' meeting. There was ample time to circulate the motion to members. It's important to note that the BDS motion wasn't treated differently from any of the other motions: *none* of the motions passed on the 15th – on the budget, on supporting Jake Lynch's right to intellectual freedom, on starting a discussion about BDS – was prenotified to members. No objections were raised at the meeting over a debate on the BDS discussion motion taking place, no procedural problems were raised by anyone, and a full discussion was had.

## **BDS and union priorities**

Unions have always engaged in questions of international justice and human rights. Union boycotts were a major part of the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa. No one advocating a discussion of BDS thinks it should be our main priority. Obviously, the branch should be concentrating on local issues like the job cuts at the library, and on playing a role in opposing federal funding cuts. Some Branch committee members have worried that if we begin considering BDS, all their time will be spent responding to media enquiries, placating the Israel lobby, and talking to irate members. The solution is straightforward. Form emails and letters could be prepared, stating that "Branch members are considering this issue, as they are considering many others. Until members have voted, the Branch has no position, beyond respect for its democratic processes."

## **Branch unity**

The NTEU needs maximum unity to fight university management and federal cuts. The motion to discuss BDS does not have to be divisive. BDS is a controversial question with strongly held views on both sides. Discussion is not bad for the branch; it is the best way to maintain unity and resolve any question on which we have a difference of views. We can maintain maximum unity by voting against the General Secretary's motion and maintaining the branch's commitment to open, democratic discussion of all issues.

## **The NTEU and the 2014 Federal Budget**

Budget cuts and further deregulation will bring drastic changes to our working environment, and severely restrict access to higher education. Sydney staff will suffer from the uncertainties of the new funding model, which will be used to demand increased workloads and greater flexibility (i.e. job cuts). This dismantling of public higher education must be met with a strong response from the NTEU, in solidarity with Sydney University students who have taken a lead in the campaign.

**Instead of holding emergency meetings to shut down discussion of BDS, we should be organizing initiatives to enable staff to resist the budget attacks.**