

Boycotts - Past and Present

International Conference, London: 20-21 June 2013

Call for Papers

A major international conference on *Boycotts - Past and Present*, conceived by the International Consortium for Research on Antisemitism and Racism (ICRAR), and hosted by the Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck, University of London, will be held on 20-21 June 2013.

The current call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel has generated fierce polemics but little substantive discussion or deep understanding of the different issues involved. The eponymous term "boycott" was first coined in Ireland in the 1880s during a campaign against Captain Charles Boycott, a British land agent, but the practice that it describes dates back even further.

Whether targeting institutions, political systems, commercial industries, national minorities or entire countries, boycotts have been a strategy of protest against British rule in its American colonies, slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas, Japanese aggression in China, Apartheid in South Africa, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Boycotts have also been called by activists wishing to protest a wide range of causes from sweatshop labour and predatory fishing practices to abortion and offensive advertising campaigns. In the United States, the best known and perhaps most successful boycott campaign took place during the Civil Rights movement.

Jews and Jewish interests have featured prominently in the history of boycotts. Jews were the targets of economic and political boycotts advanced by various national movements in Central and Eastern Europe such as the "Svůj k svému" (to each his own) campaign in the Czech Lands (late 19th century), the "Swój do swego po swoje" campaign in Polish lands (early 20th century), and the state-sponsored anti-Jewish boycotts in Nazi Germany and elsewhere in Europe. In response, some Jewish activists promoted a boycott of Germany, especially in the United States. More recently, Israel has been the target of repeated boycott campaigns from the Arab boycott of the 1970s to the current BDS campaigns.

This conference seeks to examine boycotts in the *longue durée* as part of a larger effort to understand the different factors contributing to the development of BDS and other movements that have used such means in an effort to weaken, ostracize and delegitimize specific institutions, polities, and states. Our aim is to be comparative. Specifically, we are interested in investigating the ways that different boycott movements have contested or expressed power relations, mobilized support and attempted to achieve their goals. We also wish to explore the political, ethical and legal debates that have been attached to boycott movements.

We welcome proposals for papers on boycott campaigns and movements from historians of all periods and continents as well as from social scientists, legal scholars, philosophers and other academics whose focus is on the present.

Among other issues, we are interested in:

- What can we learn from a comparison of boycott movements in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries?
- How can we account for the ways in which Jews and Israel have been targeted by boycott movements past and present?
- What legal and ethical dilemmas are raised by boycott campaigns?
- What terms and which political vocabularies have advocates and opponents of boycotts used to promote their causes?
- How effective have different boycott movements been in gathering support and achieving their goals?

Speakers will be provided with accommodation and meals in London as well as support towards their travel costs.

Paper proposals of 200-300 words, together with a brief CV, should be sent to ICRAR@bbk.ac.uk by 3 December 2012.

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3 September 2012

Further information on the International Consortium for Research on Antisemitism and Racism can be found at: <http://www.pearsinstitute.bbk.ac.uk/research/research-collaboration/>