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Jews Down Under: An Online Magazine for Australian Jews

**The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel,
*edited by Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm.***

The book bears the official publication date of 2015. Published by MLA Members for Scholars' Rights and distributed by Wayne State University Press, Chicago and New York, it contains 549 pages. ISBN 978-0-9903316-0-5 (paperback); 978-0-9903319-1-2 (e-book).

This very substantial volume consists of no less than thirty-four solid and useful essays by (mainly) American scholars and writers against any proposed academic boycott of Israel. It is an invaluable guide to the subject, and ought to be read by anyone concerned with this arrant attack on the Jewish state and it alone. Many of the contributors are senior and distinguished academics at American universities, among them Stanford, Brandeis, Chicago, Illinois, and Emory – as well as at Israeli and British universities – while several work for journals or human rights bodies. (Paul Berman, who wrote the preface to the book, is senior editor at the magazine *New Republic*.)

Taken together, these essays provide powerful ammunition for academics and students who are appalled by this latest exercise in antisemitism, and the book should certainly be read by Australian university staff and students who are determined that no boycott of Israel be allowed to happen here and need the intellectual cannon-fodder to fight proponents of a boycott.

Most of the essays in the book relate directly to the BDS experience at American universities, especially the well-publicised enactment by the American Studies Association in 2013. Some interesting points are made in the essays, for example that most faculty BDS advocates are employed in subjects concerned with race, class, and gender. It goes

without saying that most are far-leftists on a range of issues. Regrettably, but understandably, nothing in the book concerns Australia, where, thankfully, there is little to say – or to the egregious attempts at supporting BDS by Associate Professor Jake Lynch, Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Sydney University.

This is also a book about attempts by academic groups and university activists to boycott Israel, and not about attempts by other groups to impose BDS, for instance the demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne aimed at the Israeli-owned Max Brenner chocolate outlets. The reasons why academic boycotts of Israel (and all other BDS attempts aimed at Israel) must be resisted by whatever means necessary are self-evident, but perhaps not explicitly enunciated in discussions of the topic.

First, to single out the Jewish state for boycotting, while ignoring every other state on the planet engaged in human rights violations generally far, far worse than those allegedly committed by Israel – many of them Islamic states – is antisemitism in the nastiest, most odious, most deplorable sense of the term. No amount of disingenuous obfuscation will change this fact. On the contrary, most advocates of BDS are virtually apologists for the incalculably greater record of human rights violations carried out in the Third World, and especially in the Islamic world.

Secondly, there is the sheer hypocrisy of the BDS advocates. Every American and Canadian BDS advocate, without exception, lives in a house or apartment block on land stolen from the local American Indian tribe, just as every Australian advocate lives in a home that stands on land stolen from the Aborigines. None of these BDS advocates has the slightest intention of returning their stolen property to its rightful owners, yet are happy to condemn Israel for comprising a state given to it, in scaled-down form, by the United Nations.

Thirdly, the so-called Nakba of 1948 has to be seen in the context of enormous population transfers that occurred in many parts of the world

at the same time, without subsequent real controversy – involving ten million inhabitants of India/Pakistan when those countries became independent; in Czechoslovakia, where three million Sudeten Germans were expelled; in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe; as all readers know, one million Sephardic Jews were also expelled from or left the Arab world around this time. Only the Arabs of Palestine, now known as the Palestinians, inspire the slightest concern today. Fourthly, BDSers are overwhelmingly of the extreme left on a range of issues – probably 95 per cent hold a range of extremist, far left views on multiple issues and causes not associated with Israel. Their hostility towards Israel is the very mirror-image of the attitude of the extreme right in Europe towards the Jews from 1870 to 1945: antisemitism has simply morphed from one extreme to the other.

Finally, BDSers invariably underestimate the importance of religion in the conflict, especially the role of Islamic fundamentalism. They haven't noticed that the (relatively) secular nationalist Arab movements represented by Nasser, Saddam Hussein, and Yasser Arafat, have evolved into movements of religious fundamentalism which violate every notion of Western human rights on a daily basis, and it is mainly this religious fundamentalism with which Israel and the West is now confronted. It may seem incredible that, at the present time, anyone could fail to notice this, but, then, BDSers are incorrigibly stupid.

Professor William D. (Bill) Rubinstein is an Australian academic who in 2005, when living and working in the UK, resigned his membership of the Association of University Teachers in protest at its (subsequently revoked) decision to boycott two Israeli universities, Haifa and Bar-Ilan.