

Harry Browne, and the Hypocrisy of the Irish 'Academics for Palestine' Boycott

by Robert Harris (March 2014)



Harry Browne with 'Occupy' University Students

Source: *Ceasefire*

Journal.ie recently published [a piece](#) by Harry Browne, entitled 'I'm supporting a boycott of Israeli academic institutions – here's why'.

Journal.ie innocently describes Browne as 'a lecturer in journalism in DIT'. However, this statement doesn't begin to qualify as the journalistic [disclosure](#) of an interested party, a failure perhaps fitting for *Journal.ie*, given the [highly-prejudicial](#) slant of its coverage on the Arab-Israel conflict.

Harry Browne, an American of Irish descent, today largely writes for left-wing publications. Browne is perhaps best known for his book *The Frontman: Bono (In the Name of Power)*. It is a typical example of Browne's hard-left worldview. He attacked the famous Irish singer, for attempting to assist the Third World in a fashion he found politically unfitting. Browne's thesis: Bono's supposed egomania allowed him to become [a patsy](#) 'for a system of imperial exploitation'. Browne also [took issue](#) with Bono's low-level association with Israel.

Browne on Boycotting

Browne opens his pro-boycott apologia by citing a rift between Oxfam and Scarlett Johansson, to suggest an:

...extraordinary index of the growth in consciousness about Israel's illegal occupation and settlements on Palestinian land...

Browne justifies this statement by claiming Oxfam is 'not especially associated with the Middle East.'

Whilst not as oriented toward the region as some, Oxfam's stance has nonetheless long been [characterised as](#) anti-Israel. In 2003, Oxfam notoriously produced anti-Israel propaganda, featuring blood-libel imagery. Last year, it was discovered that Oxfam [was funding](#) an Arab-Palestinian NGO that published anti-Semitic material. Oxfam is also [associated with groups](#) closely linked to the [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine](#).

Browne claims the Johansson row 'shows the success of the wider campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel.'

Whilst the BDS movement has had some very modest successes in academia, ultimately the project has been a [notable failure](#). For example, Israel's export market remains extremely healthy, despite the focus on [economic boycotting](#).

Browne states:

That campaign, far from being a creature of western do-gooders, originated nine years ago with a call from a broad coalition of Palestinian civil-society groups.

The oft-parroted propagandistic line, that BDS constitutes a 'call from Palestinian civil-society', is a deeply deceptive whitewash. In actual fact, the BDS movement developed due to the fostering of an [anti-Israel alliance](#) at the anti-Semitic 2001 Durban I conference, and boycott campaigns emerged soon afterward.

Thus, BDS is an [evolution](#) of the old anti-Semitic pan-Arab boycotts, with a modified humanitarian façade, due to the notable success in the international boycott of Apartheid-era South Africa. Certainly, the endgame is the same, a demand for the [cessation of the Jewish State's existence](#). BDS is very much part of the pan-Arab/USSR move at the UN to [isolate Israel](#) diplomatically, after the Yom Kippur War defeat. Browne states:

But even people who avoid Israeli avocados may feel uncomfortable about academic and cultural boycotts, of the sort recently endorsed by the 5,000-member American Studies Association in the US. What about dialogue and the free exchange of ideas? Well, try explaining those concepts to Palestinian artists, students, lecturers and researchers under Israeli occupation.

The 'Palestinian artists, students, lecturers and researchers' are not so much under 'Israeli occupation' as what might be termed 'Palestinian Authority suppression', since the majority of Arab-Palestinian society is controlled by the PA under the Oslo Interim Accords, and Hamas, under a defacto statelet.

Indeed, it may be worth noting that academic freedom in Arab-Palestinian society is suppressed by the same forces that have long suppressed [journalistic freedom](#), and [political opposition](#). Perhaps the failure to even hold elections, in what have become near-totalitarian environments, should be reflected upon, or is only [one side](#) in this conflict to be deemed blameworthy, à la the notable disinterest these campaigners have of Syria?

Browne cites the “American Studies Association” boycott. The boycott advocates conducted a [campaign](#) with little debate prior to the ballot. Indeed, the move has even been deemed akin to the 1930’s Nazi boycott by a [surprising source](#).

‘Academics for Palestine’

Judging by its themes, Harry Browne’s article, is probably part of a co-ordinated effort to push through a March 6th National University of Ireland-Galway Students Union referendum, [advocating](#) an Israeli boycott.

Indeed, Browne finds time to hail the launch of a supposedly new group, ‘Academics for Palestine’:

This week saw the launch of a new group, Academics for Palestine, which has gathered about 140 signatures from people who teach in universities and ITs throughout Ireland, north and south.

According to an article, ‘UCD Academics Sign Pledge to Boycott Israeli Collaboration’, in the [College Tribune](#), ‘Academics for Palestine’ (AFP) was officially launched on February 20th, and the head of the organisation is Jim Roche, a long-time anti-Israel activist.

Various sources also [note](#) that David Landy is the founding member of this group. Rather than being new, “Academics for Palestine” appears to have existed for a year, or perhaps more. The group is mentioned as playing a role in last year’s [Teachers’ Union of Ireland boycott](#), notable for being the first European trade union involved with academia to adopt a resolution calling on its members to ‘cease all cultural and academic collaboration with Israel’.

Interestingly, both Jim Roche and David Landy played a leading role in achieving the boycott.

Browne parrots the oft-spoken line that the ‘boycott is aimed at institutions and does not mean Irish academics can’t work with Israeli individuals.’ Such a sentiment is highly misleading. Boycotts inevitably impact upon dealings with individuals. What exactly do these apologists think academic institutions are made of? Individuals, perchance? And when engaging in activities of an academic nature, these Israeli individuals will almost inevitably have

some degree of association with Israeli universities for funding etc. Thus, this attempt to forward a boycott is almost as much an attack on individuals, as it is on broader Israeli society, regardless of which side of the 1949 Armistice Line!

Last year, Landy, also [claimed](#) that 'the Palestinian call for an academic boycott of Israel is an institutional boycott, not a boycott of individuals.' However, 'Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine', which attempts to bring these divergent communities together, asserted that the TUI boycott resolution was highly [indiscriminate](#) since it includes students and academics who support self-determination for the Palestinians. Thus, this defence should be seen as duplicitous.

An IPSC front?

Some have suggested that 'Academics for Palestine' is little more than an 'Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign' (IPSC) front. The IPSC is the largest anti-Israel group in Ireland. Jim Roche, a [member of the IPSC](#) leads 'Academics for Palestine'. The group's founder, David Landy, is also a senior IPSC figure.

The IPSC has run very similar [academic petitioning](#) campaigns for [at least a decade](#). They largely featured the same old names, and didn't achieve any particular success. Thus, 'Academics for Palestine' is a useful way to lend new boycott crusades some credibility, by avoiding the [controversial](#) baggage surrounding the IPSC's activities over the years.

Disclosure of 'Academics for Palestine's' character would be philosophically fitting, given its mantra, but, interestingly the group [does not mention](#) any prior IPSC connections in its 'About Us' website page. Similarly, the IPSC's gushing piece, [heralding](#) the organisation's achievement, failed to mention its links to 'Academics for Palestine'.

It is unclear whether Browne is himself a member of the IPSC. He has written heading articles for IPSC [journals](#), and defended the rather [shocking tactics](#) the IPSC adopted against Irish folk group Dervish, to prevent them performing in Israel.

Browne forcefully [characterised](#) reportage of this shameful behaviour as a 'miscarriage of journalism'. In the article, he claimed:

I am not a member of the IPSC but have supported and advised it on media matters, including the case discussed in this article.

It may be inferred, from Browne's claim, that an apologia is acceptable, from a journalistic perspective, if one has collaborated extensively with a group, just as long as one is not a

card-carrying member.

Browne appears to have been involved with the attempted boycott of Israeli produce, in an ambitious '[two-week petition drive](#)' to 'enlist Dunnes customers in Dublin, Cork, Belfast, Limerick,...' etc. The authors of the text are identified as belonging to the IPSC: 'Freda H and Harry Browne – IPSC', 'Freda H' abbreviating 'Freda Hughes', [a leading member](#).

Browne also appears to be a full member of "Academics for Palestine", since his mobile phone number is being disclosed freely in [promotional press material](#) for the purposes of contacting the group. If he is indeed a member, it would represent a further possible journalistic non-disclosure in the well-publicised *Journal.ie* article.

A moderate, with a change of heart?

Subsequently, Harry Browne portrays himself as the wholesome ingenue:

For years I felt I couldn't support the boycott, though I did oppose the privileges Israel enjoys in EU research funding. I thought academics and their institutions should be talking to each other, exchanging ideas. Freely, you know? Then, last year, I visited Gaza. The conditions endured by 1.8 million people there under Israeli siege were sickening to behold, but so was their determination to live normal lives

What of the fact that Israel vacated Gaza, whilst Egypt also employs an embargo on the defacto statelet? Is Browne calling for similar treatment against Egypt? No, it would seem not. Do the people who [elected](#) Hamas in 2006, on a mandate of continued "armed resistance" against Israel, have any culpability for causing this crisis?

Hamas is widely understood to be [creating conditions](#) that have led to a desperate fuel shortage, whilst taxing Gazan's to the hilt. Yet, once again, Browne lets everyone off the hook except Israel, a nation that continues to electrify and water the belligerent area. Recently, Israel took steps [to lessen](#) Gaza's fuel crisis by increasing power transfers.

In [another article](#), Browne stated:

I recently returned from Gaza, where comparative death-tolls are frequently wielded to highlight the brutality of the 2008-09 war (roughly 1,400 dead Palestinians versus 13 Israelis) and the one last November (160 versus six).

Notably, Browne still speaks of an old debunked death toll advanced by Hamas, which was

[uncritically accepted](#) by anti-Israel NGOs, such as B'Tselem. Similarly, it is estimated that half, or perhaps more, of [those killed](#) in 2012's Pillar of Defense were militants. However, Browne, like so many others, conveniently conflate militant combatants, with civilians. Evidence of vast massacres would be more easily found next-door in Syria.

Most puzzling of all, Browne claims to have only objected to some supposed preferential treatment of Israeli academia in the past. Is this the same Harry Browne who for years has been one of the harsher critics of Israel, in a nation where criticism of the Jewish State can almost be described as a past-time?

An [article](#) by David Landy, entitled 'Irish academics call on EU to stop funding Israeli academic institutions' (Electronic Intifada, 16th September 2006), might at first suggest Browne's claim is correct, as he is a signatory to the letter described therein. However, the letter, as published in the Irish Times, does in fact call for a relatively broad anti-Israel boycott. Landy noted that whilst:

this letter does not call for a comprehensive boycott, it does demand that European academic institutions cease funding collaborative projects with Israeli institutions. *It also calls for academics to refrain, where possible, from institutional collaboration with Israel.* Such actions are to continue until Israel abides by international law, part of which is ending the occupation.

Therefore, it would seem Browne has lent his support to considerably more than just a lessening of EU funding. Browne put his name to another letter in January 2009, which attacked Israel for defending itself during a November 2008 Hamas border incursion. To quote a description of the text by an [anti-Israel website](#):

The letter was organised in response to the Israeli attack on Gaza and the Palestinian call for an academic and cultural boycott. The letter demands that the EU cease funding collaborative projects with Israeli institutions.

Browne's presentation, as a moderate recently turned by suffering, should be received with scepticism.

A veritable roll-call of one-state 'Rwanda solution' advocates

An article that makes extensive use of the opinions of other individuals, in order to justify its claims, may be measured by the broader stances of such individuals, even outside the

topical domain of a given article. Thus, if an author uniformly cites the opinions of extremists, we may assume an extremist stance, as an underlying theme, is being put forward in the article. And so with Browne's advocacy:

I met, for example, Ayah Bashir, a great young scholar determined to become Gaza's first woman PhD in English. But the things any student or academic should take for granted – the books you need, the capacity to travel to your college – were so rarely available.

Ayah Bashir is in fact [a university lecturer and activist](#), who seeks an absolute boycott. She is also part of a group, 'Real Democracy', seeking to subvert the legitimate vote of the Israeli electorate.

And in Gaza I met Miko Peled. Son of a famed Israeli general, he told an audience of Palestinian students that BDS was the only message his society would understand. He firmly and finally convinced me.

Miko Peled seeks a [one-state solution](#), namely the destruction of Israel as a principally Jewish state, whilst spreading rather ugly untruths about the conflict. He cheapened the [memory of the Holocaust](#), describing Gaza as an 'enormous concentration camp'. Peled also peddles other obvious historic falsehoods, e.g. [claiming](#) Israel is to blame for the Six Day War.

And what list of arch anti-Israel defamers would be complete without mentioning Ilan Pappé?

In fact the famed Israeli historian Ilan Pappé sent a message to the boycott organisers here: "The recent pledge by Irish academics to boycott Israeli academic institutions is yet another landmark in the growing international refusal to allow Israel to continue its oppressive policies against the Palestinians."

Browne's reference to Ilan Pappé might seem a little disingenuous to those familiar with this 'historian'. Pappé, now *in situ* at the English University of Exeter, was instrumental in peddling [overt untruths](#), which have defamed Israel over the years. He is one of the most sustained and prolific [pro-boycott advocates](#) in the world, where his [speaking events](#) helped generate toxic environments on university campuses.

Pappé is a 'famed historian' but perhaps partly for the wrong reasons, unless the repeated [fabrication](#) of Ben Gurion quotes is a worthy move for historians. He advocates a one-state solution so is hardly representative of Israeli academia.

Moreover, despite Browne painting Pappé's intervention as a major development, he has repeatedly supported the IPSC's boycott calls for years, and to little avail. He has also [visited Ireland](#) on several occasions to promote this agenda so Pappé's 'message' is hardly a major development.

In a section entitled 'I believe in justice' Browne makes much of cultural links with Judaism – he comes across as almost wishing to claim he is Jewish, so keen is his professed love of Jewish Culture:

I have to admit it – I have philosemitic tendencies. Growing up as I did in the US, with Rabbi Gottlieb next door, with Jewish girlfriends, with that sweet old couple nearby with the terrifying Nazi-assigned numbers tattooed on their arms, I came to believe, and sneakily still keep somewhere in my consciousness, the idea that as a people Jews have more often than not represented the most genuinely civilised traditions of an otherwise dissolute 'western civilisation'.

...and promptly utilises another well-worn sophistic tool: *look the Jews don't want a militarised Israel!*

Politically, it should be enough that a representative swathe of the oppressed Palestinian people have asked for BDS... But this time, me personally, I must confess that I take my lead from Israelis and other Jewish people (Pappé, Peled, Haim Bresheeth, Hilary and Steven Rose, Judith Butler, Naomi Klein) who insist that militarised Zionism does not represent them, and who have called for an international campaign to rid Israeli society of the shameful injustice.

Most of these people have called, in one fashion or another, for a one-state solution, and have displayed a deep unerring hostility to Israel. Thus, it is hardly a matter of wonder that these people do not want a Jewish state that can defend itself. To take Judith Butler as an example: she [described](#) the viciously anti-Semitic 'Hamas [and] Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, that are on the left, that are part of a global left, [which] is extremely important.' Haim Bresheeth [advocated](#) a witch-hunt against Israeli academics whilst [taking considerable sums](#) for projects from the Jewish state. He, of course, [advocates](#) for the elimination of Israel.

Hilary and Steven Rose [also seek](#) the abolition of Israel. Whilst Naomi Klein, a one-time member of '[The Free Gaza Movement](#)', has inverted the truth of the [Durban I anti-Semitic hate-fest](#). Klein, like many others, seems to have a real issue with Jewish people possessing conservative opinions. She even finds Jewish people [blameworthy](#) for economic conditions that

may, in time, give rise to Fascism!

Like Browne, these people also share a distinctive left-wing-inspired hatred for the West, whilst largely ignoring the wrongdoing, or even supporting, the wrongdoing of opposing entities. Yet, after citing the opinions of so many other extremists, Browne still wants to insist he doesn't want to cut all Israeli ties:

...the real object of BDS. Not to cut off discussion with Israelis – that would be impossible even if it were desirable, which it is not.

As with the insistence that BDS won't harm individuals, this mellifluously apologetic line presents mere sophistry, to reassure an audience disturbed by the singling-out of the sole Jewish state in existence.

Miscellaneous expressions of extremism

Some of Harry Browne's views on the Israel-Arab conflict are nothing short of extraordinary. He spoke of Ireland's media having a [biased pro-Israel stance](#):

Harry Browne, journalist and lecturer in DIT, spoke of the mainstream media bias in favour of Israel and its official sources which he said were often accepted at face value without the application of critical analysis on behalf of reporters. He stressed that some of the best and most honest reporting from Gaza came from Gazans themselves, like Sameh Habeeb, because very few Western media outlets had a presence there when the war was launched. He referred to this as 'real reporting'.

This is a staggeringly [counter-factual belief](#) to possess, particularly for one involved with the Irish media itself. It is typical for Irish coverage of Arab-Israeli controversies to give little space to the Israeli perspective, whilst dwelling on Arab-Palestinian complaints. Elements of the Irish media are linked with anti-Israel posturing amongst Irish political elites, as Rory Miller [noted](#).

Reading between the lines however, Browne is clearly suggesting that any response from Arab-Palestinian sources should be treated with absolute credulity. This is a disturbing deviation from the basic premise of journalistic impartiality, one that a mentor should be wise enough not to advocate.

Furthermore, Browne praises Sameh Habeeb, who runs a website called the [Palestine Telegraph](#), which has published content by neo-Nazi's, under the pretext of freedom of expression.

Indeed, Browne [asked his readers](#)

Given the ubiquitousness of political violence, the relevant question about Gaza is not “how dare they fire those rockets?”. We should ask, instead, what decent or fearful or otherwise-restraining impulse causes Palestinians to use violence as little as they do?

Such a sentiment should of course be seen as a moral legitimisation of Arab-Palestinian terrorism.

Browne on the abandonment of ‘critical faculties’

On January 30th 2010, Harry Brown [appeared on a TV chat-show](#) challenging the conspiratorial views of Jim Corr. Brown rightly questioned [Corr’s stance](#), and referred to components of conspiracy theory having links to anti-Semitism. Of course, many objected to even the mere mention of the word ‘anti-Semitism’, and the conspiratorially minded even [suggested](#) that Browne was a shill for the programme-makers, working for the government etc. Such conspiracists commonly support the Arab-Palestinian cause, and deem Israel to have colluded in 9/11, as well being as a central part of Zionist-World-Government.

Was Browne’s conscience pricked when he left a [detailed comment](#) (November 9th, 2006) on the extreme-left site Indymedia? His views provide an insight into the moral wiggle-room those possessing high-on indefensible political stances seek to create. When the Irish Anti-War Movement invited Ibrahim Mousawi, a known anti-Semite, to Ireland, Browne stated:

The arguments against hearing a Hezbollah speaker don't convince me – of course it makes sense to take (though not endorse) our anti-imperialists as we find them, however we might wish them to be; the IPSC runs a tour of ex-CIA analysts...

Thus, Browne thought there was no moral problem with a Hizbullah speaker being invited to speak on at a political conference in Ireland, since the act of doing so does not necessarily endorse a given individual’s perspective. This stance is self-evidently untrue, when a speaker’s views are in close conformity with that of the organisers, and he likely knew this was far from an act to provide another viewpoint for balance. The IAWM did indeed act as if they supported Mousawi’s stance, and had previously [expressed strong support](#) for Hizbullah itself.

the warmth of the IAWM embrace... seems indeed to be worth discussing in some detail. This speaker, after all, does not represent the courageous military resistance to Israeli aggression, nor the laudable social commitments of Hezbollah 'on the ground'.

The desire to have ones cake and simultaneously consume it continued, by expressing disapproval for the IAWM's great welcome to Mousawi, since he is part of Hizbullah's propaganda wing, rather than being at the vanguard of the struggle against the Jewish State! Thus, Browne appears to have no issue with these terrorists, only one wing disseminating hatred.

Would Hizbullah's terrorist wing not endorse the same opinions? Are they not part of the same entity, Mousawi and his colleagues merely inculcating hatred, the 'militants' acting it out, with the ultimate objective to [annihilate](#) the Jewish State, despite its complete withdrawal from Lebanon? Al Manar, the propagandistic Hizbullah channel that Mousawi ran, glories in the violent deeds of Hizbullah's jihadists, those jihadists that Browne vocally supports. Al Manar is not an independent agent – it is a mere tool assisting in generating the hate that reinforces Hizbullah's belligerency, in which Jewish civilians are seen as a [legitimate target](#).

Besides Browne's admiration of those with deeply problematic views, he has himself written for the [leftist anti-Israel site](#) 'CounterPunch'. It is [noted for possessing](#) a very disturbing attitude toward the Jewish race and its history. Browne asks those of his 'anti-imperialist' persuasion to keep their 'critical faculties intact'. If his concern about anti-Semitism is sincere, then he should consider taking some of his own advice.

Robert Harris contributes articles to several websites on contentious political issues (not to be confused with the popular English novelist (1957-) of the same name). He also blogs at