

JVP News

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Spring 2014 Newsletter of Jewish Voice for Peace • Israelis and Palestinians – Two Peoples, One Future

#Winning

By Stefanie Fox and Rabbi Alissa Wise,
Co-Directors of Organizing

Over the last six months, by far the most common and accurate hashtag for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement is a simple word: winning.

Technically, hashtags track conversations on social media such as Twitter. But increasingly, they're shorthand to mark shared assumptions and frameworks in all arenas of public debate.

We want to share our reflections on the watershed victories of the last few months, focusing on the common organizing strategies at the root of each win: strong coalitions, rapid responses to emerging issues, and a commitment to building power over the long haul.

Coalitions

Jewish Voice for Peace is, above all, a bridge-builder. We prioritize effective working relationships across issues and within the movement for justice in Israel and Palestine. Last November, we saw this commitment pay off with two coalition-based wins over Veolia, a multinational corporation that profits from transportation



An example of the image meme that compelled Scarlett Johansson to resign her post at Oxfam after she decided to endorse SodaStream, made in the illegal settlement Ma'ale Adumim.

and infrastructure contracts in the occupied West Bank.

First, pension-giant TIAA-CREF dropped Veolia from their Social Choice Fund, thanks to years of campaigning by the *We Divest* coalition. JVP initiated the campaign four years ago, and we've prioritized building and maintaining a broad coalition

since the start. On the heels of that victory, a local coalition of environmental justice, labor, and Palestine solidarity groups in St. Louis, including the local JVP chapter, succeeded in blocking a Veolia contract with the city government. No single organization could have won either fight alone – it took our relationships and diverse areas of strength to force these changes through.

(For another coalition-based victory, see our report on New York's fight for free speech on page 4.)

Through coalitions we build power, influence, and reach. Whether local or national in scope, these wins remind us that our best work happens through the alchemy of coalition: each of us bringing our uniqueness to create a force more powerful than any of us alone. #Winning.

Rapid Response

As JVP grows, we can respond more

Kerry's Peace Process: Breakthrough or Breakdown

By Cecilie Surasky, Deputy Director

By the time this newsletter goes to press, it's possible that Secretary of State John Kerry will have announced the official framework for peace talks between Israel and Palestine, so for now this analysis is only conjecture. But one thing remains clear: the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is steadily changing the balance of power.

Many accounts based on leaked informa-

tion suggest the Kerry framework will be a non-starter for Palestinians. They will, yet again, be asked to give up the impossible, while Israelis annex Palestinian land and maintain control of Palestinian borders.

There is also a real possibility that Palestinian Authority Chairman

"Kerry's Peace Process" cont'd on page 3

"#Winning," cont'd on page 3

From JVP's Executive Director



Dear Friends,

At this year's AIPAC Conference, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dedicated at least a third of his speech to attacking the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Clearly, the right-wing Israeli government and AIPAC alike are feeling the pressure.

If nothing else, I am in agreement with them on this one point: in 2014 it's impossible to ignore the serious progress we are making.

The movement for justice and equality in Israel and Palestine is gaining power—and we're right in the middle of it.

We played a key role in the ad hoc coalition that successfully forced actress Scarlett Johansson to resign her position as Oxfam Ambassador after she signed a promotional deal with SodaStream. The campaign set an important new precedent: involvement in the settlements makes it impossible to also identify as a human rights activist.

Our chapters are also fending off vicious attacks on free speech in the New York, Maryland, Illinois, Florida and Pennsylvania state legislatures, with new state legislation emerging almost weekly to penalize boycotts. We won an important initial victory in New York, and are fighting hard around the country.

And last month, JVP members and staff were featured in another *New York Times* article about religiously observant Jews who support BDS, helping to further the fundamental distinction between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitism.

This issue explores many of the organizing strategies that make this growth possible. The engine of our power is our grassroots members: our chapters, our youth branch, and all of our members and supporters around the country. It's at times like these, when we're making a difference in campaigns all over the country and internationally, that we see our years of organizing paying off.

Of course, as we monitor the unfolding "peace process," we know we still have a tremendous amount of work cut out for us. But we are so encouraged by the shift in the public discourse, the smarts and dedication of our members, and the growing evidence that by sticking to our principles, our movement is winning.

As exciting as our progress is, I also know there are extremely tough fights ahead. We're going to need to double down on the commitments that have gotten us this far — in terms of volunteer power, communications strategies, coalition-building, and ambitious fundraising. And we're going to need you to help on each of those fronts.

Your support makes everything we do possible. It's an honor to work together.

Sincerely

Rebecca Vilkomerson
rebecca@jvp.org

We're going to need to double down on the commitments that have gotten us this far.

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JVP staff:

Back Row: Ari Wohlfeiler, Stefanie Fox, Elizabeth Ingenthron

Middle Row: Rabbi Alissa Wise, Rebecca Vilkomerson, Gabi Kirk, Alana Krivo-Kaufman, Cecilie Surasky

Kneeling: Liza Behrendt, Abe Greenhouse, Sydney Levy

Not pictured: Claire Sternberg, Jesse Yurou

SAVE THE DATE

The 2015 JVP National Membership Meeting

March 13-15, 2015
Baltimore, MD
jvp.org/nmm



“#Winning,” cont’d from page 1

powerfully to current events in real time. Leading up to the Superbowl, social media and mainstream media erupted with controversy over Scarlett Johansson’s contract with SodaStream, the seltzer-maker based in an illegal Israeli settlement.

JVP helped create and amplify this story by helping push out the #NoScarJo meme that ultimately pressured Johansson to sever ties with Oxfam. This victory will reverberate far beyond these particular players: the campaign made it impossible to ignore the hypocrisy of being a human rights advocate involved in the settlements, period.

You and others in our growing base of supporters — now over 140,000 people strong — make it possible to push these moments into the mainstream. #Winning.

We always are thinking about how to build power to make lasting change.

Building Power

Even in the most heated campaign moments, we are always thinking about how to build power to make lasting change. A strong example of this has been our new Congressional Outreach Project. In the last six months, JVP chapters have held meetings with dozens of Congress members in their home districts. Beyond introducing JVP and



JVP activists protest Veolia in San Francisco.

our perspective, members have used these dates to disrupt plans for a Visa Waiver that would have codified Israeli discrimination into US law, and to blunt AIPAC’s latest attempt to replace negotiations with Iran with crushing new sanctions.

In a sign of how rapidly the political landscape is changing, AIPAC backed off of both these bills, its biggest setbacks in memory. #Winning.

The victories would have been impossible even a year ago. And they are also only stepping stones toward our ultimate vision and goal of a lasting and just peace agreement. The road ahead is long, but with your help we are gaining ground.

This is what it looks like to be #Winning. ♦

New National Network Battles Islamophobia

By Elly Bulkin, Stefanie Fox and Donna Nevel

At the JVP National Membership Meeting workshop on Islamophobia last April, chapter leaders from San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, New York, and many other cities across the country got a chance to learn from each other about our campaigns to fight Islamophobia.

We realized that we had experienced some of the same challenges: for example, how to respond to Islamophobic ads by Pamela Geller; how to hold the Jewish community accountable when it takes anti-Muslim positions; and how to be a responsive and

responsible Jewish partner in this work.

So we decided to formalize the JVP Network Against Islamophobia (J-NAI) to support each other and other groups taking on these urgent justice struggles.

Already, we’ve seen that this work makes much needed connections between the struggles for justice in Palestine and Israel, and against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, and enables us to be more effective partners in our work. ♦

For more information email J-NAI@jvp.org

“Kerry’s Peace Process,” cont’d from page 1

Mahmoud Abbas would accept such an unfair and unsustainable framework, or that it will be vague enough to keep both parties engaged in meaningless “peace talks” while Israel, per usual, expands its occupation (more than 5,000 homes in illegal settlements have been announced since Kerry began his push). Unfortunately, better scenarios seem unlikely, though not impossible, at this point.

When our governments fail us, BDS provides effective, principled, and non-violent tactics for changing the balance of power.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu displayed an unusual enthusiasm for peace talks at his recent AIPAC speech, while painting a Manichean and blatantly racist portrait of a contest between life and death, suggesting that he is preparing to portray the Palestinians as rejectionists if the talks do fail. His gambit — embracing the language of peace while continuing to entrench the occupation — is further evidence that yet again, the US is not pushing Israel to negotiate in earnest.

If peace talks fail, it is incumbent upon Jewish Voice for Peace supporters to continue amplifying the internationally recognized human rights claims of Palestinians. And if they become another time-delaying tactic, we will continue to highlight the Israeli government’s use of that time to expand and solidify the Occupation.

But fail or stumble on, global civil society groups must redouble efforts to put pressure on Israel through the BDS movement. From the New York Times’ Thomas Friedman, to Secretary of State Kerry and President Obama, to Israel’s most prominent government and business leaders, there is now widespread recognition that the Palestinian-led movement is working. But we still need to build.

When our governments fail us, BDS provides effective, principled and nonviolent tactics for changing the balance of power so that one day, Israelis and Palestinians can sit down to negotiations as equals, and strike a deal that is both fair and durable. To date, no other tactic has been as effective. ♦



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FOR INFORMATION about planned giving or other JVP development programs, contact ari@jvp.org

Defending Academic Freedom

*By Alana Krivo-Kaufman,
Northeast Regional Organizing Fellow*

Sometimes our biggest advances come when we have to fend off attacks. This has definitely been the case over the last few months, as state legislatures (and even Congress) have tried to criminalize academic boycotts targeting institutions that receive funding from the Israeli government. While JVP doesn't take a position on academic boycotts, we have a long track record challenging politically inspired censorship, and defending the legitimacy of nonviolent, time-honored tactics like boycotts.

The latest attacks started in January, in response to the American Studies Association's (ASA) decision to endorse academic boycott. New York State legislators, led by powerful Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, introduced a bill to deny funding to public universities that had any formal ties to the ASA. We were, to be honest, far from certain we could go up against one of the most powerful men

in New York State. But one of the most impressive aspects of this campaign was the incredible coordination between our New York City, Ithaca and Albany chapters. Together, we helped build a coalition, pressure decision-makers, and seize the media narrative — and, most importantly, defeated this censorious legislation, all in a matter of days.

Our first step was to identify progressive legislators who were willing to vote against the bill (or at least to slow it down), and to pressure those who were at least moveable on the issue. We sent action alerts and e-blasts across the state and kept the Education Committee Chair's phone ringing off the hook.

But the most important thing we did was engage powerful, principled allies. Together with the American Association of University Professors, the Professional Staff Congress, the New York State United Teachers, and, of course, the ASA itself, we presented a united front. And we made it clear that this

The turning point came when we convinced The New York Times Editorial Board to meet with our coalition. The resulting editorial, "A Chill on Speech," provided the decisive blow.

wasn't just about Israel or Palestine. This was a fight to defend academic freedom as a value in and of itself.

The turning point came when we convinced *The New York Times* Editorial Board to meet with our coalition. The resulting editorial, "A Chill on Speech," provided the decisive blow. The bill was pulled — an amazing win!

And while similar bills are moving forward in Maryland, Illinois, and Florida, JVP chapters and our allies from coast-to-coast are more than ready for the fight. ♦