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April 19-21, 2013

Breaking Through:

The 2013 Jewish Voice for Peace National Member Meeting Berkeley, California

Featured Keynotes

*Left, top to bottom: Dr. Vincent Harding, Omar Barghouti (via video link), Noura Erakat, Josh Healey
Right, top to bottom: Dina Omar, Cecilie Surasky, Rebecca Vilkomerson, Dorothy Zellner*

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JVP News

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Spring 2013 Newsletter of Jewish Voice for Peace • Israelis and Palestinians – Two Peoples, One Future

The Changing Face of Muzzling

By Cecilie Surasky, Deputy Director

Back in 2006, I started our blog Muzzlewatch, which charts efforts to silence criticism of Israeli policies, because I was shocked by incidents of media stories getting killed, art shows getting taken down, talks getting cancelled, and so forth. The first step in stopping the attacks was to make them visible.

Soon thereafter, JVP started getting our supporters involved, organizing to shine a light on Jewish opposition to what amounted to bullying. This was critical because the silencing of dissent is effective when dissenters are isolated. We showed then, and now, that academics, religious leaders and others who acknowledge the Palestinian narrative have widespread support, and that it is those who try to set rigid boundaries around acceptable thought and action who are the extremists.

It has always been clear that these efforts to shut down criticism are driven by fear: fear that the simplistic narrative of Israel as innocent victim surrounded by hate-mongers would be challenged and rewritten — on campuses, in the media, and in Jewish communities.

Breaking Through: 2013 JVP National Membership Meeting

By Stefanie Fox,
Director of Grassroots Organizing

Brilliant. Dedicated. Savvy. It's my privilege to work with JVP members every day — and those are the words I find myself using time and again when I describe you.

But don't just take my word for it. Find out for yourself this April 19th-21st in Berkeley for *Breaking Through: The 2013 JVP Membership Meeting*.



Press Conference defending talk about Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions at Brooklyn College by JVP advisory board member Judith Butler and Omar Barghouti, February 2013.

Today, while unconditional supporters of Israel still exercise an embarrassing grip on Capitol Hill, they are losing the battle over the story, and time is not on their side. We know it, and they know it:

- On campuses there has been an explosion of progressive student activism, including

inside Jewish spaces. Through academic studies, events, and activism, students are learning new narratives that also make clear links with their studies of colonialism, race, queer theory, and feminism.

- The meme of pro-Israel McCarthyite overkill has now reached the heart of the mainstream in shows like *The Daily Show*, *60 Minutes* and *Saturday Night Live*; and in outlets like *The New York Times* and *Newsweek*. This conversation reached a new threshold during the recent Brooklyn College brouhaha, with Mayor Michael Bloomberg suggesting that if critics didn't think there should be a talk about Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions at a public college, they could go to North Korea.

- In recent months, Israel's destructive lobby has racked up a series of high profile losses (all of which JVP was involved in), from President Obama's nomination of Chuck Hegel as Secretary of Defense, to Brooklyn College's decision to stand by free speech, to the New York LGBT Center's reversal of

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"Muzzling," cont'd on page 2

From JVP's Executive Director



Dear Supporters,

In the last few months Jewish Voice for Peace has successfully pursued several strategic openings in Washington D.C. Between President Obama's re-election and second inauguration, we gathered a ground-breaking 60,000 signatures on an open letter asking him to make sure military aid to Israel is conditioned on compliance with US policies and international law. This campaign was initiated in support of the historic letter from leaders of 15 churches to Congress asking the same.

In partnership with the US Campaign to End the Occupation, we ran a full-page ad in *Roll Call*, one of the most widely read Beltway publications. At the same time, thanks to the leadership of our D.C. Metro Chapter, we were able to show grassroots support for the letter through the powerful No Blank Check rally the night before the inauguration.

At the same time, Senator Chuck Hagel's nomination as Secretary of Defense drew intense criticism for his views on US policy toward Israel, despite the relatively minor differences between his positions and those of the major political parties. Still, we recognized that his nomination was potentially a real rebuke to the power of AIPAC and other institutions that continue to try to impose litmus tests on political nominees. We quickly gathered 10,000 signatures on a petition protesting the litmus test, resulting in multiple mentions in *The New York Times*, *Roll Call*, and an op-ed in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

More recently, I was honored to attend the Congressional Progressive Caucus retreat earlier this year. This was a tremendous opportunity to build relationships with progressive members of Congress and their staff. My conversations confirmed that JVP's true power comes from our commitment to fearlessly asserting our core values, backed up by the reality of the burgeoning grassroots movement that we are building together.

As I write, we're also planning actions to coincide with the 2013 AIPAC Conference in Washington, D.C. Our goal is to continue to show that the Jewish community is split on Israel and Palestine, that AIPAC does not represent us — and that JVP represents the growing side of that split.

In the context of these strategic battles, you can see why our numbers really matter. I invite each of you to become an official JVP member in 2013, and to join us for our National Member Meeting April 19th-21st in Berkeley, Calif. This year's meeting is titled *Breaking Through* — because that's what we're doing — from D.C., to the press, to all the cities and towns where our organizing makes a difference. Having just experienced the controversy at Brooklyn College over hosting speakers who talk about Palestinian human rights, (see pg. 1), I know just how big a difference our voices can make. We have an incredible slate of speakers and workshops lined up for the National Membership Meeting, and I hope you'll join us there.

The power we leveraged in D.C. this winter ultimately came from you, as part of a growing network of supporters around the US and the whole world. Thank you for the incredible work and the support you give to JVP. We could not do it without you.

Yours,

Rebecca Vilkomerson
Executive Director
rebecca@jvp.org

JVP's true power comes from our commitment to fearlessly asserting our core values, backed up by the reality of the burgeoning grassroots movement that we are building together.

About Us

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JVP staff and board

Top row: Donna Nevel, Glen Hauer, Lev Hirschhorn, Stefanie Fox, Sydney Levy, Jethro Eisenstein, Ari Wohlfeiler
Middle row: Jordan Ash, Rebecca Subar, Elisha Baskin, Rebecca Vilkomerson, Cynthia Greenberg, Noah T. Winer
Front row: Jane Suskin, Dana Bergen
Not pictured: Elizabeth Ingenthron, Cecilie Surasky, Rabbi Alissa Wise

Boycott and Divestment Campaign Updates

Sydney Levy, Director of Advocacy

The nonviolent movement to pressure Israel to abide by international law, and JVP's role in it, is growing.

As part of the WeDivest Coalition, we helped organize over 200 individual shareholder resolutions with retirement giant TIAA-CREF, demanding an end to investments in companies that contribute to or enable human rights violations. In early February, over 50 people gathered on a freezing New York morning at TIAA-CREF offices to deliver these resolutions in person — triggering what should be the largest referendum yet on the strategy of boycott, divestment and sanctions this coming summer, when millions of US households will be asked to vote for the divestment resolution.

We also seek divestment from the French

multinational Veolia, which operates segregated buses, a light rail connecting illegal West Bank settlements to Jerusalem, and a landfill in the occupied Jordan Valley. Thanks to the efforts of the St. Louis Palestine Solidarity Committee, working in conjunction with the local JVP chapter, activists challenged the granting of a city contract to Veolia.

This year also marks the debut of a groundbreaking interfaith coalition of Jews, Muslims, and Christians boycotting SodaStream products that are manufactured in an illegal settlement in the West Bank. The D.C.-Metro chapter has led the way with monthly bilingual demos in front of these stores. The chapter earned mention on MSNBC, while the JVP-Boston chapter protests appeared on National Public Radio. ♦

For more information on our campaigns and alliances, email sydney@jvp.org



JVP members and allies staging a monthly SodaStream boycott action in D.C.

"Muzzling," cont'd from page 1

its ban on Palestine-related programming, to Sheldon Adelson's failed attempt to buy the US election.

Next, critics of Israeli policy continue to be aggressively vilified. A groundless lawsuit alleging anti-Semitism is being threatened against Brooklyn College after the talk about Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions by JVP advisory board member Judith Butler and Omar Barghouti. And groups are working on a strategy of criminalizing political speech as hate speech, starting with the University of California.

We should not be surprised — our political opponents hold onto their right to exclusively tell the story about Israel as a soldier might hold onto a weapon, for it is precisely the fantasy narrative, grounded in racism, which enables Israel's "special" relationship with the United States.

In many ways, these moments of absurd overkill help us build the movement — the Brooklyn College circus gave unprecedented media attention to the nonviolent, Palestinian-led BDS movement.

But there is still bad news.

Debates about muzzling can too easily be limited to conversation about free speech in the abstract, failing to confront the actual lives and rights of Palestinians.

On campuses, efforts to criminalize political speech as hate speech most intensely impact Palestinian, Arab and Muslim students, as we saw with the UC Irvine 11.

It has always been clear that these efforts to shut down criticism are driven by fear: fear that the simplistic narrative of Israel as innocent victim surrounded by hate-mongers would be challenged and rewritten — on campuses, in the media, and in Jewish communities.

And worst of all, muzzling still can work. We have anecdotal evidence that graduate students are steering themselves away from Middle East Studies because of the controversies. And it is clear that the Chuck Hagel hearings were meant to send a warning to future public servants.

We must continue to make muzzling visible, but we must not forget that much of it is happening behind closed doors on free junkets and over 2-martini lunches.

Let's not cede power relationships to the other side — we should leverage and build our own power relationships and stop McCarthyite efforts before they get off the ground, thus ensuring that all communities can freely have conversations about dignity and universal human rights for all people. ♦

Find Cecile on Twitter @ceciliesurasky, and the Muzzlewatch blog at Muzzlewatch.com

"Breaking Through," cont'd from page 1

our chance to experience that vibrance and power together in one place.

We're calling this year's NMM *Breaking Through* to capture the urgent and exciting moment we find ourselves in as an organization and a movement. It's a unique opportunity to meet the people you've been working with, learn from movement elders and allies from literally around the globe, and re-connect with old friends.

It's a chance to strategize the breakthroughs we're aiming at over the next two years. What will it take to move our campaigns further into the mainstream? How can we deepen our alliances with people all over the globe? What lessons can we apply from past struggles?

The meeting will also help you overcome barriers you're facing in breaking through to find support in your own communities. We will have local Insight Panels with grassroots perspectives tackling issues like: Responses to Islamophobia, Working Inside Jewish Communities, and Building Chapters. We will also have interactive workshops on topics ranging from pinkwashing to BDS strategies; from the Nakba to creative protest ideas.

Become a member, and register today! To learn more about the conference, check out www.jvp.org/nmm2013. Questions? Send an email to nmm@jvp.org

For more information about our grassroots organizing program, email stefanie@jvp.org