

## Open Letter to BCTF Executive

January 12, 2006

The Executive Committee

British Columbia Teachers' Federation

100 - 550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 4P2

Dear Executive Committee Members:

We have become increasingly concerned by recent actions on the part of the BCTF executive regarding the Palestinian/Israeli issue. While the campaign for Divestment from Israel is gaining momentum in Canada, the latest being 20 Québec groups who recently called for a boycott of Israel, including the Québec union of CEGEP teachers, you seem to have fallen on the side of injustice and reaction.

We watched the BCTF executive intervene in late 2004 in an attempt to derail a resolution condemning Israel's Apartheid wall at the BC Federation of Labour convention, which was originally presented by your own social justice advisory committee. By the way, Canadian Zionist leaders publicly took credit for initiating that intervention. Fortunately another resolution, this one also presented by teachers, the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association, did finally make it to the floor and passed. 1

We also noted how the BCTF executive was reported to have played a major role in defeating BCTF Assembly resolution 149 last June by not endorsing it. That resolution called on "the Canadian government (to) support the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)" regarding Israel's wall.

Then, on July 15, 2005, the B.C. Teachers Federation placed a quarter page ad in the Jewish Western Bulletin (JWB) wishing them "Happy 75th Anniversary ... from the teachers of B.C." Also, on Dec. 23, 2005, the B.C. Teachers Federation placed another quarter page ad in Jewish Independent (formerly the JWB) wishing them "Happy Chanukah! Holiday greetings from the teachers of B.C."

For your information, the Jewish Independent (formerly the JWB) is a mouthpiece for Zionism and has always supported Israeli Apartheid policies and its war crimes against the Palestinian people (see "Dispute over art exhibit, Bulletin 'complicit in war crimes,' says Hanna Kawas" 2 and "Bulletin award is scandalous" 3)

The "Jewish Independent" (JWB) is a right wing paper that never supported trade union struggles or anti-imperialist and anti-war movements. While most of the rest of Canada opposed the war in Iraq, the JWB actually supported it (4), as well as supporting other US-Israeli policies in the Middle East and all over the world. Any review of their web site confirms what we are stating.

The BCTF ads in the "Jewish Independent", coupled with your other recent actions, clearly show that the Executive has crossed the line from being indifferent to the suffering of the Palestinian people to publicly advertising in a paper that supports war crimes against the Palestinian people. We will not be surprised if the BCTF Executive buys a commercial in the "700 Club" wishing Christians "Merry Christmas", or an ad in a pro-Saudi Arabia paper wishing the Muslims "Happy Eid".

It would seem the BCTF Executive gave in to blackmail, pressure and dictates that came from many pro-Israeli lobbyists both inside the BCTF and outside, especially major Canadian media outlets. The pressure by the Canadian media on the BCTF has been well-documented and includes, amongst others: two Vancouver Sun articles by Pete McMartin, one on May 2, 2005 entitled "BCTF tactics akin to U.S. Republicans, One-sided resolutions, TV ads undermine teacher credibility" and a May 25, 2005 article "Israel's wall divides B.C. teachers, Resolution before June meeting calls for dismantling of barrier"; and a May 31, 2005 Globe and Mail article "Teachers, Campbell in nasty showdown."

The BCTF Executive regrettably allowed itself to be manipulated by the well- financed pro-Israeli lobby, at times it seems even against the will of your own membership. The JWB first published a critical article on June 3, 2005 of the BCTF (5) and then after your representative assembly which squashed the resolution that called for support of the International Court ruling, they praised you in their editorial on June 10, 2005. (See: "Mazal tov to the BCTF" 6) Meanwhile the local Palestinian solidarity movement and the anti-war movement were never consulted nor did they ever interfere or try to influence the democratic process inside the BCTF.

If the BCTF Executive cannot determine their strategic allies in the local Jewish community, then your union and the whole trade union movement is in trouble. Here we could offer you some advice; if you want to wish a Jewish paper happy anniversary then the Canadian Jewish Outlook [www.vcn.bc.ca/outlook/](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/outlook/) "Canada's Progressive Jewish Magazine", the "secular Jewish publication with

a socialist-humanist perspective" would be the best candidate. And if you want to wish the Jewish community a "Happy Chanukah" why not send it to the "Outlook" and to "Jews for a Just peace" [www.jewsforajustpeace.com](http://www.jewsforajustpeace.com), who supported your strike and struggles and are truly seeking a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis.

In closing, we call upon the BCTF Executive to stand up for the genuine interests of your membership, not just minority lobbyists, and to uphold the progressive principles that your union and all Canadian unions should advance.

Hanna Kawas

for/ Canada Palestine Association [www.cpavancouver.org](http://www.cpavancouver.org)

Statement Endorsed by:

Palestine Community Centre, Vancouver [www.palestinecommunitycentre.com](http://www.palestinecommunitycentre.com)

Palestine Solidarity Group, Vancouver [www.palsolidaritygrp.org](http://www.palsolidaritygrp.org)

Voice of Palestine, Vancouver [www.voiceofpalestine.ca](http://www.voiceofpalestine.ca)

<http://www.jewishbulletin.ca/archives/Dec04/archives04Dec24-02.html>

<http://www.jewishbulletin.ca/Archives/Aug03/archives03Aug01-01.html>

<http://www.jewishbulletin.ca/Archives/Nov02/archives02Nov29-22.html>

<http://www.jewishbulletin.ca/archives/April03/archives03Apr18-08.html>

<http://www.jewishbulletin.ca/archives/June05/archives05June03-14.html>

<http://www.jewishbulletin.ca/archives/June05/archives05June10-14.html>