

Hillel condemns USS following anti-Israel resolution proposal

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The CUNY University Student Senate tabled a controversial resolution following major concerns over lack of information and strong critique from the Jewish community at CUNY. The resolution, titled CUNY Investment Policy, was in line with the ideology of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel.

That the BDS resolution would be voted on at the April 15 USS plenary meeting was "leaked" to a member of the Jewish community on Friday night, when many were keeping Shabbat. As a result, members of the pro-Israel community did not find out about the possible vote until Saturday night, giving them less than 24 hours to mobilize.

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Hillel condemns USS for proposing an anti-Israel resolution

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In a joint email sent to *The Ticker*, Baruch College's USS delegates Jasper Diaz and Daniel Morote said that they were not aware that BDS would be on the USS agenda until Saturday night, when they were notified by their constituents. Furthermore, Diaz and Morote said that none of the delegates were given a written copy of the resolution ahead of the meeting.

"There was not written documented [sic] presented at the plenary," Diaz and Morote wrote. "Apparently the resolution was not completed in time and the USS Chair announced he would table the item and refer it to the USS Civic Affairs Committee."

Furthermore, Diaz and Morote wrote that the sponsors of the resolution "have not been shared publicly with the delegation."

The Ticker interviewed Ilya Bratman and Ben Davidov, the executive director and president of Baruch's Hillel, respectively. They both said the way in which the resolution was brought up to USS was very sudden.

"This is a discriminatory action by certain people who are hateful to the State of Israel and the Jewish people," Bratman said in the joint

interview. "It only creates animosity."

Throughout the interview, Bratman also kept highlighting that the resolution is "an attempt to dehumanize [and] delegitimize a group of people, which is openly and transparently discriminatory."

Bratman said that resolutions to boycott and divest from Israel have been brought forth on over 100 campuses in the United States, but only 37 implemented them. These numbers could not be confirmed by *The Ticker*. However, he said that such resolutions are "logistically impossible to implement." He also said that such resolutions make students feel "uncomfortable and unsafe" on those campuses.

Davidov explained that the first person found out about the BDS resolution at 11:43 p.m. on Friday, April 13, via an email leaked to the unnamed individual. However, everyone else who kept Shabbat did not find out about it until 8:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 14 — a day before the USS plenary meeting was to take place.

Davidov said that he found out about the resolution through a group chat with "maybe 15 to 20 influential Israel-New York relations individuals" and the president of Brooklyn College.

"It was a bad, sudden shock for all of us, because usually after Shabbat you go on your phone, you get barely [anything] because everyone is also keeping Shabbat," Davidov said. "We're in a sudden shock that some party wants to sneak this in through USS, and the way in which they did it was very sneaky. ... They can't just bring it out of nowhere. Someone has to speak about it at the previous meeting."

According to the email statement sent by Diaz and Morote, a resolution titled CUNY Investment Policy was announced on April 7.

The resolution had no description attached, so the Baruch delegation was not aware that the resolution was about BDS until constituents reached out to them on April 14.

On the night of April 14, Davidov and other members of the Jewish community conducted a series of Skype meetings in which they strategized, created a Change.org petition against the resolution and marketed it. As of press time, the petition, titled "Say NO to the BDS Resolution at CUNY Student Senate!" has over 1,400 signatures. Over 1,250 of those were collected within the first 24 hours.

"There are hundreds of students, faculty and staff members, and members of the community who are mobilizing an effort to defeat it and to speak out against it," Bratman said.

Students on both sides of the issue showed up to the April 15 plenary meeting. Most of the students who were against BDS stated that they were upset with the lack of transparency, Diaz and Morote wrote. They both shared the sentiment and expressed that there should be more opportunities for students to voice their opinions on the issue.

Ultimately, USS Chair John Adorounmu tabled the resolution, as it was not completed in time for the plenary, Diaz wrote in his USS report that was read out by Undergraduate Student Government Representative Sen. Andrew Windsor during the April 17 USG senate meeting. The resolution was referred to the Civic Affairs Committee. The committee will then decide whether to discard or vote on the resolution once it is complete.

During the same USG senate meeting, representatives of Hillel authored and presented a "Statement of Condemnation" to the senate. The "Statement of Condem-

nation" was a document written by members of Hillel from USG's perspective that was meant to condemn USS "for their attempt to introduce a one-sided, controversial resolution without the knowledge or the input of the students they claim to represent."

In the "Statement of Condemnation," the authors list multiple issues they have with USS, including "lack of transparency and general lack of interest in actually solving the issues that plague our campus communities."

The authors also speak about other USS faults, such as that the meeting agenda and the resolution itself were not posted ahead of the meeting. They also wrote that meeting minutes have not been posted since the end of 2016, the list of delegates is out of date, the USS does not send out newsletters to keep students informed and Annual Reports have not been posted since the 2014-15 term.

However, USS does not post meeting agendas on its site at all. Furthermore, as of press time, meeting minutes have been posted until the April 2017 meeting.

The Ticker was not able to verify whether the list of delegates was out of date. However, the USS Staff Members list available on the USS website includes Donovan Borington as the legislative director, although he is no longer associated with USS.

Windsor highlighted that the statement was not passed by USG. This is because USG wants to "recommend transparency" and not "condemn" USS." USG tabled the vote to April 24, when an updated version of the statement that recommends transparency will be available.

Ultimately, Bratman and Davidov said that their biggest concern with the BDS report is that it may

promote hatred on CUNY campuses.

"If, let's say, CUNY were to enact [this], to an extent it means that we're promoting hatred," Davidov said. "If BDS is the first type of enacted hatred, that opens the floor to more hatred."

Several instances within CUNY show that Davidov has reason for concern.

On several CUNY campuses, including Brooklyn College, City College of New York and John Jay College of Criminal Justice, pro-Israel and pro-Palestine groups often come into conflict both during events and during regular school hours. In CCNY and John Jay, for example, Hillel events were protested by pro-Palestine groups.

In CCNY, Oshra Bitton, a creative writing major and undergraduate editor at *Promethean* — CCNY's official literary journal — wrote an article for *The Campus* in which she describes how she felt when members of Hillel found out that their sign was vandalized with swastikas and the phrase "white power."

"You'll picture those swastikas plastered on the sign of the Hillel door," Bitton wrote. "You'll have flashbacks of experiences that you yourself have never had, but can somehow remember. You'll become irrationally frightened at the prospect of someone barking German commands at you. You'll tell yourself to stop acting like a paranoid Jew. Stop acting like a frightened, paranoid Jew."

USS Executive Director Fernando Araujo did not respond to requests for comment. An email sent to a general inquiry email address available on the USS Facebook page also did not receive a reply.

Additional reporting by Victoria Merlino.

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