

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/anti-israel-rally-draws-small-crowd-at-unsw-max-brenner-protest/story-e6frgcjx-1226632345790>

Higher Education

Anti-Israel rally draws small crowd at UNSW Max Brenner protest

A MUCH-anticipated student rally in support of the international Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions campaign against Israel ended up a damp squib today, with journalists, police and security guards nearly outnumbering protestors.

The University of NSW protest against a planned Max Brenner chocolate shop on campus had been expected to see displays of anti-Semitism, which Prime Minister Julia Gillard had denounced in advance.

Ms Gillard's intervention, reported in The Australian today, came after controversial posts appeared on the rally's Facebook page, posts which organisers of the rally disowned, saying their campaign opposed racism.

As it turned out, only about 30 protestors marched under the banner Students for Justice in Palestine at the Sydney campus, chanting "Max Brenner, come off it! There's blood in your hot chocolate!"

There was no anti-Semitic rhetoric in the speeches delivered by speakers including SJP spokesman Damian Ridgwell, two Palestinian students, and the National Union of Students' national queer officer, Cat Rose.

But there were plenty of spirited attacks on Israel for its treatment of Palestinians.

Ms Rose said BDS was "something extraordinarily relevant" for students, exhorting the crowd to ensure "Israeli apartheid is not tolerated."

"The administration of this university puts profits and commercial interests ahead of human rights," Ms Rose said.

Ms Rose praised the University of Sydney student representative council for recently passing a resolution supporting BDS, including calling on the university to ban cooperation with Israel's Technion university.

Another speaker, UNSW education student Bec Hynek, described herself as an "anti-Zionist Jewish activist".

"I stand alongside a growing number of Jewish supporters of the BDS who don't want to support oppression of Palestinians," Ms Hynek told the small crowd.

Ms Hynek said she came from a German background, and had in the past recognised those who died in the Nazi holocaust.

"I used to say never again, but the question is, never again for whom?"

About a dozen Australian Jewish and Israeli students watched on, with some heckling the speakers with remarks like "what's chocolate got to do with politics?"

Max Brenner is a brand name of the Strauss Group, a large Israeli food and beverage company which has publicly supported the Israeli military, including "sponsoring" the Golani Brigade.

But in a statement yesterday, the public relations agency hired by Max Brenner Australia said the sole shareholders of the franchise operation in this country "are a young Australian couple" who have no direct connection to the Strauss Group.

"Max Brenner Australia is not politically affiliated in any way and proudly employs over 1,100 Australian residents across 4 states," spokeswoman Kate Jones from Magnum PR said.

NSW Jewish Board of Deputies chief executive Vic Alhadeff said of the protest: "The paltry turn-out was an encouraging signal that students at UNSW don't respond to crude theatrics and blatant politicising of what is nothing more sinister than a chocolate shop."