Moving Forward, Local Human Rights Campaign in Cambridge Remains Strong

Progressives maintain call for Cambridge to end public spending on companies profiting from human rights abuses

Cambridge, MA (DATE) -- Despite widespread support by 39 local groups for a resolution calling on the City of Cambridge to cut economic ties with Hewlett Packard Incorporated and Hewlett Packard Enterprise, proponents have agreed to postpone the introduction of such a resolution and the public hearing on it that had previously been expected to take place on April 23rd. Following a right-wing campaign of misinformation directed at Cambridge residents and intimidation of city councilors, the human rights activists leading this campaign have decided to broaden their campaign to encompass all companies that violate human rights. This was a suggestion of the Mayor of Cambridge Marc McGovern, and MAHP activists are excited to broaden our resolution to include all human rights violations at the Mayor’s recommendation. MAHP activists remain optimistic that their concerns regarding Hewlett-Packard’s record will be heard and intend to continue fighting for the recognition of all human rights including Palestinians, currently and formerly incarcerated members of our communities, and immigrants.

The Massachusetts Against Hewlett Packard (MAHP) campaign has called on the city of Cambridge and municipalities across the state to end contracts with companies that profit from human rights abuses. Cambridge is a center for socially responsible investment and contracted companies should end their corporate complicity in human rights violations. Part of the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (supported by human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch), the campaign in Cambridge is led by a coalition of 39 progressive organizations*, almost all based in Cambridge or with significant membership in Cambridge. Over 2,500 locals have signed a petition in support of the resolution, and 50 Rabbis, Cantors, and Rabbinical students from across the country have declared their support for the boycott in Cambridge.

Groups opposed to human rights for Palestinians and other people of color have coordinated an increasingly aggressive campaign to smear this grassroots coalition. Hundreds of Cambridge residents received fake phone polls labeling boycott proponents as terrorists, social media ads with misinformation about City Councilors, and letters that baselessly accuse the City Council of suppressing public debate and equating criticisms of a foreign government with “hate”. These groups include the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and the Trump-aligned anti-Muslim hate organizations Americans for Peace and Tolerance and Christians and Jews United for Israel. Their campaign to silence the democratic voices of Cambridge residents has only fueled the resolve of MAHP organizers and their supporters to broaden their campaign to include ending contracts with all companies that are human rights violators. This would be a win for all freedom struggles, including immigrant rights, environmental justice, Palestinian rights and those working to end mass incarceration and police brutality.

“The struggle to end Apartheid in South Africa was a long one,” said Caroline Hunter, who founded the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement in Cambridge in 1970, successfully organizing global boycotts of Polaroid until they ended their complicity in Apartheid. “The same level of commitment will be required to end Apartheid in Israel. I'm in it for the long haul.”

MAHP campaign supporters are inspired by Cambridge’s history of advocating for global justice, not only in South Africa but in El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, and Saudi Arabia. “I grew up to grand stories of how
justice runs in the veins of Cambridge, such as the campaign to make Cambridge a nuclear-free zone in the 80’s and the establishment of rent control,” said Tufts University student Sam Slate. “Cambridge has changed quite a bit since then, but I hope this tradition of standing up for justice and human rights that I grew up hearing has not changed.”

Public spending on companies that violate human rights directly impacts Cambridge residents who are immigrants or formerly incarcerated. “Surveillance tools and cheap labor prospects fuel a sickening business model made profitable by cyclical incarceration,” said Elizabeth Ruckus of Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ) and Black and Pink Boston, an organization that supports LGBTQ prisoners. “Furthermore, they incentivize even more corruption within our criminal injustice system.”

Palestinians and Israeli Cantabrigians experience the impact of technology companies that violate human rights whenever they visit home. “With my passport, I can move freely through Israel’s checkpoints,” says Tufts Professor of Anthropology Amahl Bishara. “When my husband is there, he is on his Palestinian identity card, and so he cannot pass through many of these checkpoints. He cannot visit my Palestinian family in the Galilee of Israel. HP Enterprise is the exclusive provider of the titanium servers Israel depends upon to run its population registry. This is what essentially separates [my husband’s] status from my own, what prevents our families from being together.”

“In addition to being a resident of Cambridge, I am also a Jewish citizen of the State of Israel,” said Yarden Katz. “This makes me the beneficiary of Jewish and white privileges that are built on the continual efforts, by the State of Israel, to erase and dispossess Palestinian land, life and culture. The Israeli state’s apparatus for controlling Palestinian lives and land relies on technology. HP, among other companies, has been willing to build those technologies for Israel.”

*The following organizations have endorsed the Massachusetts Against Hewlett Packard campaign: