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The Academic Boycott of Israel: A Review of the Five-Year UK Campaign to Defeat It

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On 28 September 2007, Britain's University and College Union (UCU) announced that, based on legal advice, an academic boycott of Israel would run a serious risk of infringing UK discrimination legislation and could not be implemented. The call for an academic boycott of Israel was a political move that from the start had very little chance of success as 60 percent of UK universities have joint programs and links with Israeli universities. Israel's enemies, however, used it to draw attention to their campaign for Israel's delegitimization and destruction. The success of the boycott campaign is not the number of actions that have succeeded but the fact that the issue is in the public domain.

The Israeli response to the boycott movement from 2002 to 2005 was haphazard and uncoordinated. Once the boycott motion of the 2005 Association of University Teachers (AUT) Congress had been overturned, Bar-Ilan University formed the International Advisory Board for Academic Freedom, which provided the main Israeli response. Yet it was only in February 2007 that the Israeli universities decided that the IAB should coordinate and speak on behalf of all of them.

Nearly 35 years of often unquestioned British trade-union support for Israel and the Histadrut ended in 1982 when the Trades Union Congress passed its first congress resolution critical of Israel, which also recognized the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. From that point on, many British unions have given support to the Palestinians and the boycott campaign while passing resolutions that are highly critical of Israeli actions in the "occupied" territories.

There is an urgent need for a proactive strategy especially on the part of

the UK Jewish community to build positive relationships with the leadership of institutions, trade unions, and professional bodies, something that has been lacking in recent years in the UK. It will be important to promote the positive side of Israel, for example, its academic excellence. The UK community also needs to monitor and record what is said by well-known anti-Zionists and boycotters, and to publish academic critiques of this propaganda.

On 28 September 2007, Britain's University and College Union (UCU) made the unexpected announcement that, based on legal advice, an academic boycott of Israel would run a serious risk of infringing UK discrimination legislation and could not be implemented. This brought to a close the latest chapter in a five-year campaign[1] that began in April 2002 with the publication of an open letter in *The Guardian*. [2]

The call for an academic boycott of Israel was a political move that from the start had very little chance of success. Israel's enemies, however, used it to draw attention to their campaign for Israel's delegitimization and destruction. The boycotters chose the British trade-union movement to further their aims as it had been very supportive of the Palestinian cause since the 1980s. Motions calling for an academic boycott of Israel were discussed by the Association of University Teachers (AUT) in 2003[3] and 2005,[4] by the University and College Lecturers Union (NATFHE) in 2006,[5] and by the UCU in 2007.[6] The 2005 motion was approved and was in force for one month before being overturned by a specially convened AUT Council meeting[7] and the 2006 resolution was a symbolic gesture, in force for only two days before lapsing when the NATFHE and the AUT merged into the UCU.

The boycott campaign was unique in being the first to make full use of the Internet. For example, some 60,000 emails opposing a boycott from all over the world were sent to NATFHE before their 2006 conference.[8] The leaders of the boycott movement number probably less than 25 people worldwide and include British academics Stephen and Hilary Rose, Mona Baker, Tom Hickey, and Sue Blackwell. Opposing these leaders was a similar number of academics from Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In other words, approximately 50 people worldwide, all of them grassroots activists aided by the Internet, ran the pro- and antiboycott campaigns.

The established Jewish organizations and the Israeli universities also contributed to the antiboycott campaign. Since 2005, however, the frontline work has been done by independent groups led by academics who are not

employed fulltime in this activity. These include the Academic Friends of Israel (AFI),[9] Engage,[10] the Academic Study Group (ASG),[11] the International Advisory Board for Academic Freedom at Bar-Ilan University (IAB),[12] Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME),[13] and the International Academic Friends of Israel (IAFI).[14] Their independence and ability to exploit the Internet afforded greater flexibility than many of the establishment organizations had.

The academic boycott of Israel is just one part of an eight-point program to delegitimize Israel that was launched in 2001 at the UN World Conference against Racism in Durban. The program's long-term aims are the boycott of Israel followed by divestment and the establishment of the Palestinian "right of return." [15] The fact that Israeli academics are world leaders, especially in the scientific and medical fields, meant that the boycott would never prevail with British academics; 60 percent of UK universities have joint programs and links with Israeli universities. In addition, academics worldwide oppose a boycott because it contradicts their belief in academic freedom.

The boycott movement used the UK academic trade unions as the vehicle to further their political aims. Academics have always reflected the changing views of the left, and the trade-union movement is more organized than in the United States or Western Europe. It has a long history of supporting international causes and presumed underdogs. The worldwide publicity the boycotters achieved in 2005 was due in part to the AUT's mishandling of the boycott debate at its congress. It had failed to prepare properly for the debate, because like the UK Jewish community and Israeli academia it had ignored the warning signs of the 2002 boycott petition and the defeated 2003 boycott motion.

The success of the boycott campaign is not the number of actions that have succeeded but the fact that the issue is in the public domain. Numerous people are aware of it and many still favor a boycott. Over the past five years very few instances of Israeli academics being boycotted have come to light. The most notable was UK professor Andrew Wilkie's refusal in 2003 to employ an Israeli student in his laboratory. Wilkie was found guilty by his employer, Oxford University, of violating its discrimination laws.[16] It is therefore highly likely that in the future, as a result of the UCU's decision, academics who are found to be boycotting will be accused of breaking UK discrimination laws, university regulations, and possibly their employment contract.

Has the Boycott Campaign Been Defeated?

Those opposed to a boycott can take little credit for stopping the campaign because the UCU decided itself not to break the law and took the item off the agenda. From the moment the vote was announced, the UCU Executive sought a way out because of pressure from both the UK and Israeli governments, which took a strong stand against a boycott,[17] and the efforts of the alliance of UK, Israeli, and U.S. antiboycott groups. There is no evidence at this time that any one action directed at the UCU had any effect, but there appears to have been a cumulative effect.

The measures included the Stop the Boycott (STB) campaign's call for a ballot of all 120,000 UCU members,[18] the visit to Israel by Universities UK (a group representing the executive heads of UK universities),[19] the condemnation of a boycott by the Russell Group of leading UK universities[20] and the National Postgraduate Committee,[21] and the American initiatives including the SPME petition[22] and the antiboycott statement by more than three hundred presidents of U.S. universities.[23] These latter had less impact on the UCU Executive, many of whom are on the far left and want nothing to do with the United States. The boycott decision, however, received little mainstream media coverage in Britain, and it is not clear if the general public, especially in the UK, knows that the UCU has called off the boycott. It is, therefore, in Israel's interest to publicize the fact that a boycott of Israel is discriminatory whenever possible.

Neither did the UCU change its mind because its members were concerned about restrictions on academic freedom and that the boycott movement was putting at risk jobs, research funding, and the reputation of UK academia in the world. The UCU's actions have also damaged the reputation of the British trade-union movement. The UCU has so far refused to publish the relevant legal advice and has not clarified which part of the discrimination legislation a boycott would infringe. The proboycotters want the advice published so as to help them plan their future campaigns. To circumvent previous UCU resolutions, the boycott motions of the 2007 UCU conference did not directly call for a boycott but for a debate on the subject within the UCU.[24] This backfired because the media reported that the union had called for a boycott.

The UCU's Reaction to the Boycott Resolution

If the UCU had asked for legal advice before the 2007 vote, it could have saved itself much distress, humiliation, and expense. Given that both the

AUT and the NATFHE had previously been willing to discuss and promote a boycott, it is not known why immediately after the vote the UCU asked for legal advice. It is thought that statements by Alan Dershowitz, the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law at Harvard University, in the days immediately after the vote "promising to visit financial and legal ruin on any UK academic supporting a boycott"[25] prompted the UCU to immediately seek legal advice since they knew from 2005 that the boycott resolutions had put their union assets at risk.

Three months later, in September 2007, the UCU admitted they had received advice in June that the union and its members were entitled to discuss and pass resolutions criticizing the policies of the Israeli government but: "It would...be beyond the Union's powers and unlawful for the union to call for or to implement a boycott by the Union and its members of any kind of Israeli universities and other academic institutions." [26]

What is not clear is why the UCU subsequently issued Circulars 31 and 34 [27] to advise members on how to implement Resolution 30 knowing they could not call for a boycott, unless it was done purely as a face-saving matter not only for UCU general secretary Sally Hunt and her colleagues but also for the far left. The UCU Left (a national organization) were opposed to a ballot and feared they would lose badly if it went to vote. [28]

A Symbolic Victory

The far left had promoted the 2006 NATFHE boycott motion knowing that with the merger it would lapse and only be in force for a few days. Having succeeded in 2006 with a symbolic victory for little effort, the far left tried again in 2007 and proposed a motion that circumvented the boycotting guidelines the UCU had put in place by calling for a discussion of a boycott. The outcome for the far left and the proposers of the resolution was a disaster as the media described the conference decision as calling for a boycott and the union came under huge pressure to do something. For the far left it meant the boycott decision was out of their hands, and the legal advice offered them a way out. One of the reasons Hunt was reluctant to call for a ballot of the membership was that she was not sure how the UCU's National Executive Committee would vote on the issue as half the members come from the far left.

The UCU has said it is to hold urgent talks with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to discuss the implications of the legal advice, which may affect any future trade-union campaigns such as protests about events in

Burma or Zimbabwe. In today's politically correct Britain, the UCU and all the other trade unions now have looked at their rules about equality issues and want to ensure they will not be legally liable for any future decisions or campaigns they may support.

The UCU rules on equality are:

To promote equality for all including through: collective bargaining, publicity material and campaigning, representation, Union organisation and structures, education and training, organising and recruitment, the provision of all other services and benefits and all other activities [and]

To oppose actively all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination whether on the grounds of sex, race, ethnic or national origin, religion, colour, class, caring responsibilities, marital status, sexuality, disability, age, or other status or personal characteristic.[29]

Therefore it is clear that if the UCU promoted an academic boycott of Israel it would be breaking its own rules by discriminating against Jews and Israelis on grounds of religion or ethnic or national origin, especially as Jews in Britain are considered by law an ethnic minority. It seems to be forgotten that in 2003 Prof. Wilkie was found guilty of breaking his college's discrimination laws.[30] It is disappointing that the warnings issued previously by this author[31] and others that boycotts were discriminatory were ignored.

It is not plausible that the union knew all along that a boycott was discriminatory because of the legal advice they had received at the time of the 2005 AUT Congress boycott motion. This author has been told that the advice the AUT received only related to threats of legal action from Haifa and Bar-Ilan universities and did not include advice on possible discrimination issues.[32]

Paul Mackney, the NATFHE general secretary, said at the 2005 NATFHE conference that if the union went for a boycott the following year they had to do it properly, following the rules and consulting with the membership, because he did not want to put the union's assets at risk.[33] Again in 2006, when NATFHE passed their boycott motion, much to everyone's surprise he urged delegates to vote against the motion because the union had not consulted the membership properly.[34] The 2005 AUT and 2007 UCU motions had broadly similar aims and both quoted the PACBI Palestinian boycott call.[35] It must be asked, however, why Hunt and her executive had not learned anything from the 2005 experience and taken legal advice before the congress in June.

Sally Hunt has now been the general secretary of a trade union that has discussed an academic boycott of Israel three times in the last five years. This has resulted in worldwide publicity, much of it bad publicity for the boycotters, her trade union, and her profession especially in 2007. The issue also has alienated many members, especially Jewish ones, of the union and diverted resources and money from the union's core concerns: jobs and conditions. It also has resulted in the British government condemning the union at a time when universities are under financial pressure. There appears, then, to have been no strategic planning at any time in the last five years on how to deal with the issue as neither Hunt nor her executive at the UCU and previously the AUT appears to have learned from the lessons of 2003 and 2005.

Anglo-Jewry's Reaction to the Boycott

For the past 350 years, Anglo-Jewry's attitude has been to play by the rules for fear of a possible upsurge in anti-Semitism. Hence the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD) and other leaders have often taken a low-key, behind-the-scenes approach and were able to control and dictate the community response until the advent of the Internet. However, both Anglo-Jewry and Israel in the form of the Histadrut, the Israeli trade-union movement, made serious strategic errors in the 1970s regarding their relationship and ability to influence the British trade-union movement.

In the period up to World War II, many of Britain's Jews saw socialism as the way forward, and many of them joined the Labour and Communist parties and the trade unions. However, since 1945 virtually the whole of British Jewry have left their trade-union roots and union membership behind. Unquestioned support for Israel by the Labour Party and the trade-union movement slowly started to change after the Six-Day War. Their support for the Palestinians grew as a result of the grassroots activism of the generation that became involved in the New Left. When Anglo-Jewry, which had failed to notice this change, realized in the late 1970s that it needed to be proactive and rebuild support for Israel, it was too late.

The Histadrut, which has had links with the British trade-union movement since the 1920s, decided in the late 1960s to concentrate on building ties with Europe. Hence the Histadrut moved its European representative from London to Brussels as it felt the European Community would become increasingly important to Israel and the Histadrut.[36] This, however, reduced the Histadrut's influence with the British trade-union movement at a critical time.

Contact with the trade-union movement during the next 25 years was left by the BOD and the Histadrut to the Trade Union Friends of Israel (TUFI), an underfunded and underrepresented body that did its best but was unable to influence the increasing trade-union support for the Palestinian cause. Nearly 35 years of often unquestioned trade-union support for Israel and the Histadrut ended in 1982 when the TUC passed its first congress resolution critical of Israel, which also recognized the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.[37]

This was the turning point for the trade-union movement, as from then on the majority of unions have given their support to the Palestinian people rather than Israel. Since the 1980s many unions have sent delegations to the "occupied" territories and several, including NATFHE, have passed resolutions that are highly critical of Israeli actions in these territories. Yet at the same time there has only been limited criticism of Palestinian actions.

The initial boycott threat in 2002 was recognized and actively opposed by UK academics including Robin Stamler, Shalom Lappin, and this author. At that time only three groups in the world were campaigning against the boycott: the UK-based AFI founded by the author, and two American groups, SPME founded by Edward Beck and IAFI led by Andrew Marks. All three had realized there was a need to work together in countering any future boycott attempts but were unable to find a suitable partner in Israel.

The hostile atmosphere at the 2002 TUC Congress debate on the Middle East,[38] which came five months after the initial call for an academic boycott of Israel, provided a wakeup call for Anglo-Jewry. It had already formed Bicom[39] as a community media-response group to develop key media contacts as well as provide support and information to grassroots pro-Israeli groups, which along with the BOD gave support to the AFI. The BOD's response to the successful 2005 AUT boycott resolution was to form the Campaign Group for Academic Freedom (CGAF) to coordinate the Jewish-community response to the AUT decision.

Shortly after the AUT decision was overturned the CGAF was disbanded, and the BOD, rather than building its own links with academics or backing existing community academic groups, decided to back Engage, which had formed in response to the initial AUT boycott decision. It was thought that since Engage had been instrumental in reversing the AUT boycott call, it was best placed to debate with those far left activists who supported an academic boycott of Israel and would also be able to defeat any future boycott resolutions.

Engage, which is not a Jewish organization and opposes Israel's occupation of the West Bank and [Gaza](#), had successfully organized the defeat of the 2005 AUT boycott motion, which was overturned by a special meeting of delegates directly elected by each of the 80 college UCU branches for this one-issue, one-off event. Engage's roots and contacts were in the AUT, and its campaign also had the support of the UCU leadership, which ensured that the delegates were opposed to a boycott.

Compared with the AUT, NATFHE had over 300 branches whose conference delegates were elected by regional meetings, where the far left was in a majority. Whereas the AUT had held very little discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before 2003, NATFHE had been very supportive of the Palestinian cause and had longstanding links with Birzeit University in the West Bank. It was highly critical of Israel, and supported the 2002 boycott petition.[40] Its general secretary also spoke regularly at Palestine Solidarity Campaign meetings.[41] NATFHE's annual conferences also were very different from the AUT's. This author, based on experience as a NATFHE conference delegate for several years, where the overwhelming majority of delegates had indicated they would support a boycott, had previously warned that if a boycott motion came to the 2007 UCU Congress it could succeed because ex-NATFHE delegates would outnumber those from ex-AUT institutions. That is indeed what happened.[42]

The UCU Boycott Call

Another warning sign came in February 2007 with the UCU Left winning half the seats on the UCU's National Executive Committee. The UCU Left is a national organization of UCU activists that has a substantial powerbase in the former NATFHE branches and is backed by the Socialist Workers Party, which supports an academic boycott of Israel. Boycotters Sue Blackwell and Tom Hickey, proposers of the 2005 AUT and 2006 NATFHE boycott motions, respectively, were among those elected to the executive. At the same time, in the election for the UCU general secretary more people voted for the two left-wing candidates than for the eventual winner, Sally Hunt.

In response to the 2007 UCU boycott motion, the leaders of the UK Jewish community launched their Stop the Boycott campaign in June 2007.[43] The campaign called on Hunt to stand by her statement, which she had made at the time of the election for UCU general secretary, that: "Any final decision to boycott should be made by full membership ballot not

conference alone." [44] Although, from the moment the boycott vote was announced, the campaign used every PR opportunity to remind Hunt of her promise, the STB campaign soon realized how difficult it would be to persuade her. Before the congress vote the UK leadership had been under pressure from within the community to be seen to be doing something, especially after the (American) Anti-Defamation League published notices condemning the boycott in the *Jewish Chronicle*.

It will never be known if the campaign for a ballot of the membership would have succeeded and won by an overwhelming majority to end discussion of the issue once and for all. The STB campaign would have had no control of the wording of the ballot-paper question, which probably would have been anti-Israeli since it would have had to be agreed by the UCU Executive. As any lawyer will point out, one should only ask a question if one knows what the question is and has a good idea what the answer will be. The STB campaign was very confident of winning the ballot; it would have been conducted by a postal vote, meaning members would have had to be motivated to return the ballot paper. As the majority of the membership does not attend meetings, to stand any chance of winning the STB campaign would have needed to contact union members directly. This would have been extremely difficult without access to a UCU membership list and would have required much intelligence work to obtain the necessary names.

As many British universities have joint programs with Israeli universities, the majority of ex-AUT academics probably would have voted against a boycott. It is hard to say, however, whether a majority of ex-NATFHE members would have done the same as they have no contact with Israeli academia, very few Jewish colleagues, and only know about Israel from the media. Another worry was that a low turnout for a boycott vote similar to the 14 percent turnout for the UCU February elections would have been to the boycotters' advantage.

This author was also told several times that many academics would ignore and possibly vote against an advertising campaign that was led by nonacademic groups such as STB. If the UCU refused to go to a ballot, the STB campaign's strategy was to put together a list of twelve thousand UCU members (10 percent) to call for a special meeting of congress to vote on the issue. This was allowed by the rules but, again, would not have been an easy task.

It is unlikely that Hunt, who had frequently said her members would not support a boycott, would have kept to her pledge to hold a ballot on the issue [45] for two reasons. First, it would have overruled the democratic

procedures in the union by going over the heads of the democratically elected National Executive. Second, with the STB campaign calling for a ballot, if she had agreed to one, she would have been accused of giving into Zionist pressure, something the UCU National Executive, which in recent years has supported the Palestinians, would have been unlikely to agree to. Hunt is a "consensus" person and has committed the UCU to help build a "civil society in Palestine." [46] The Union's partners in these plans include the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and Jews for Justice in Palestine. [47]

Could the UK Jewish community have done more to oppose the boycott calls? Yes, but it is unlikely that it would have changed the 2007 vote as a majority of congress delegates supported a boycott. The community's main failure was to ignore the trade unions from the 1980s onward and not to act earlier, from 2002 onward, and try and build relationships with the AUT and NATFHE leadership. The BOD, which is underfunded, has an unenviable record in recent years of only taking action after the event has taken place. Forward planning and intelligence has not been their strong suit except in the field of monitoring and combating anti-Semitism. The BOD also lacks the resources to deal with issues such as the academic boycott of Israel.

From 2002 to 2005, the BOD only had one meeting with the AUT leadership and two with NATFHE. Neither did it talk directly to the AUT during the three months surrounding the 2005 AUT boycott decision, preferring instead to work behind the scenes. The Academic Friends of Israel was the only group that was in regular contact with the AUT during this period. The BOD's record of talking to the UCU leadership since then has not been much better as the UCU refused to meet with them until after the 2007 congress decision by which time it was too late.

Israel's Reaction to the Boycott

The Israeli response to the boycott movement from 2002 to 2005 was haphazard and uncoordinated. The universities and the government left the task to individual professors and lecturers who may be outstanding in their chosen fields but often were out of their depth when interviewed about the boycott by the media.

Many Israelis believed that because the 2002 boycott petition and the 2003 AUT Congress resolution had been defeated, the boycott was no longer a threat. The Global Forum against Anti-Semitism discussed the boycott at its 2003 and 2004 meetings and Natan Sharansky, the then minister for

Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs, held a meeting in 2003 with the university presidents, who failed to recognize the danger and the need to organize against possible future threats.[48] In this respect the Israeli response was no different from Anglo-Jewry's; it was left to individuals to monitor events and organize a response.[49]

Why did Israel, a country renowned for its intelligence-gathering ability, take so long to realize the possible dangers of a prolonged boycott campaign before it acted? Manfred Gerstenfeld of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs believes it is because Israel is on the front line and cannot cope rapidly enough.[50] Another possible reason lay in the fact that this was the first Internet-based campaign against Israel; no one yet grasped the power and dangers of the new medium and how to deal with it.

Once the motion of the 2005 AUT conference calling for a boycott of Haifa and Bar-Ilan universities had been overturned, it was left to Bar-Ilan University, which had formed the IAB, to provide the main Israeli response. Yet it was only in February 2007, five years into the boycott campaign, that the Israeli universities decided that the IAB should coordinate and speak on behalf of all of them.[51] After the June 2007 UCU vote, the Israeli government agreed to support the IAB's future plans.

These included educational work in the UK, yet it appears that at the beginning of December, Ofir Frankel, the IAB's executive director, had been forced to resign and close the IAB because of lack of funding. If this was allowed to happen for financial reasons, it was a backward step, though the reason may have been that the boycott was now off the agenda and the work no longer considered a priority. Over the previous two years the IAB had played an important role in fighting the boycott, including supporting the UK lobbying efforts, organizing media coverage, and keeping Israeli academia up-to-date. As Gerstenfeld's book, *Academics against Israel and the Jews*, attests, life on campus for Diaspora Jews can only get worse in the future. [52]

There is an urgent need over the next five years for both the Israeli government and the universities to work together and promote Israeli academia especially in Europe and the United States. It appears that this will eventually happen, but perhaps not with the IAB as the vehicle.

What Will Israel's Enemies Do Next?

The boycotters will continue to call for a boycott of Israel. At this year's 2008 UCU Congress there will probably be a debate that may call for

action to be taken against Ariel College on the West Bank. The October 2007 boycott conference at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) commissioned a report on alleged "apartheid policies" against Palestinian and Arab students in Israel.[53] With 2008 marking the sixtieth anniversary of Israel's establishment, the PSC wants their campaign theme to be "Israel is an apartheid and racist state." [54] With the boycott off the agenda since the fall of 2007, their current campaign has focused on a one-state solution in Palestine.

The leadership of the other British trade unions that passed general boycott motions against Israel in 2007-the National Union of Journalists,[55] the Transport and General Workers Union,[56] and UNISON[57]-have refused to have anything to do with the resolutions and have indicated they want "normal relations with the Histadrut." [58] This could be considered mere lip service as the TUC has had very little contact with the Histadrut in recent years, claiming it has been too dangerous to send people to the Palestinian areas.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which was the political driving force behind the boycott campaign within the UCU, issued a statement two days before the UCU decision saying that the SWP no longer supported an academic boycott.[59] This author heard at the beginning of August 2007 that the UCU had been advised that they could not legally call a boycott. It is possible, then, that the SWP made the announcement because they also knew what was coming and wanted to get their statement out first. Several of the boycotters are SWP supporters and members of the UCU Strategy and Finance Committee that took the boycott off the agenda. For the SWP the issue was a political and tactical move, so it was not too much of a blow for them as they are only interested in promoting Israel's demonization and dissolution. For Sue Blackwell and fellow boycotters the issue was more of a personal commitment.

What Will the UCU Do Next?

The UCU was formed in 2006 with the merger of the AUT and NATFHE. Its membership of 120,000 is composed of 50,000 ex-AUT academics in 80 universities that have joint programs and contacts with Israel and 70,000 ex-NATFHE academics in the other 620 UK institutions for further and higher education, which have little or no contact with Israel. NATFHE was much more a traditional trade union that followed socialist ideals, whereas the AUT was considered more of a professional body than a trade union.

It appears that the UCU will continue to refuse to publish the legal advice it received. It has not yet explained why it is unwilling to do so. The total cost to the union for this advice that it received in 2005 and 2007 is believed to exceed £300,000. What is often overlooked is that another anti-Israeli motion was passed at the May 2007 congress, Resolution 31 proposed by Sue Blackwell. This calls for the union to campaign for a moratorium on EU research and cultural collaboration with Israel.[60] The legal advice only seems to have covered Resolution 30, but to many a moratorium is a boycott. Will the UCU see it that way? Not unless it is pressurized to do so. The UCU has possibly not taken any action so far because it is not unusual for a trade union not to act on a congress decision, preferring instead to "let the activists have their day at congress" and then ignore the resolution for the rest of the year.

Soon after announcing that a boycott was discriminatory, the UCU joined the campaign to allow a Palestinian student, Khaled al-Mudallal, who has residency rights in Britain to leave Gaza to continue his studies. The UCU also donated £2000 to the Birzeit University student hardship fund.[61] Was this coincidence, were these moves in keeping with existing UCU policy, or were they just trying to maintain credibility with their Palestinian partners?

The Strategy and Finance Committee of the UCU, which voted the boycott off the agenda, recognized

the importance of allowing the issues of Israel and Palestine to be put before members in order to focus our union's efforts on investigating ways of providing solidarity with Palestinian educators and contributing positively to a just peace. Alternative arrangements will be made to enact the non-boycott aspects of Resolution 30 before UCU Congress 2008.[62]

The first part of this statement confirms that the UCU will continue to find ways of carrying on as before, criticizing and demonizing Israel as well as helping build a civil society in Palestine, which will include promoting twinning with Palestinian universities and student exchanges. It seems very likely that the UCU will promote a UK lecture tour in 2008 by Palestinian academic trade unionists, to which Israeli academics may also be invited to take part. This could be what Sally Hunt means when she says: "We must play a positive role in supporting Palestinian and Israeli educators and in promoting a just peace in the Middle East." [63]

And what of links with Israeli institutions? There are none because so far the UCU appears not to want to build links with pro-Israeli academic groups in the UK, the IAB, or even the Israeli Coordination Council, which

represents senior academic staff and is the Israeli equivalent of the UCU. It also is unlikely that the UCU will be dealing with the part of Resolution 30 that states: "criticism of Israel cannot be construed as anti-semitic," which runs counter to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia's (EUMC) definition of anti-Semitism.[64] This is because the far left, which has a majority on the UCU's National Executive Committee (NEC), believes this statement to be true and does not recognize the EUMC definition.

Will anything change within the UCU? It is unlikely as Hunt has never once, to this author's knowledge, publicly opposed an academic boycott of Israel. She has said that she believes her membership is against boycotts, which is not the same thing.[65] In addition, the UCU has had links with Birzeit University for over 50 years and the far left dominates the current NEC, whose members include Sue Blackwell and Tom Hickey. From 2002 onward, NATFHE was the most pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli union in the UK because of its criticism of Israeli policies and actions. With such a heritage, why should anything change?

Achievements and Shortcomings of the Antiboycott Campaign

In the future, if academics are found to be boycotting they will be accused of breaking UK discrimination laws, university laws, and possibly their employment contracts. Presumably the UCU legal advice will also apply to similar organizations and professional bodies, which means that in the future there will no longer be boycott calls from groups of doctors, architects, actors, writers, and so on.

Since 2005, academics and Jewish communities throughout the world, including Israel, have organized and worked together to counter the anti-Israeli atmosphere on campus. Although they did not succeed in defeating the UCU boycott resolution, the international coalition opposing the academic boycott of Israel proved in 2007-by putting pressure on the UCU-that international cooperation between groups is necessary for any future joint action that may be needed to combat attempts to delegitimize Israel.

Although at least 60 percent of British universities have links and contacts with Israeli universities, very few people outside those universities are aware of these programs. In the interests of peace in the region, one priority for the future must be to tell the world about Israeli-UK and Israeli-Palestinian-Arab academic cooperation. As a result of the UCU boycott

vote in May, requests from UK academics to work with Israeli academics have dramatically increased. This further underlines the reality that an academic boycott of Israel would never succeed. To counter the boycott and anti-Zionism on the Internet, websites such as Zionism on the Web were set up to provide background information about Zionism and Israel.[66]

As discussed earlier, because of lack of publicity the general public is not aware that boycotts are discriminatory or off the agenda. Similarly, the initiatives designed by the antiboycott alliance to pressure the UCU received virtually no coverage in the UK national press or on the BBC and were only reported in the Jewish, American, and Israeli press. Moreover, because of minimal press coverage most UCU members were not aware of the STB campaign or of their call for a ballot that was launched during the summer vacation.

Dealing with Future Threats

Supporting a boycott of Israel is a token gesture that does not involve any effort or commitment, especially if one does not have any direct contact with Israel like the majority of UCU members. The UCU or any trade union or organization will, however, be liable if it has actively promoted a boycott, putting its assets at risk. It is much easier for the union to pass a general motion condemning Israel or expressing support for the Palestinians, which are symbolic gestures. If the UCU really wanted to help the Palestinians, it could do so in much cheaper and more practical ways. The issue could come alive again when something happens in the Middle East that involves Israel and if it directly affects students or academics. The academic-boycott threat as such from the unions may have ended for now, but one can never be certain that it will not reappear in one form or another.

There is a grave lack of knowledge about Israel in the UK even among academics, which is why the current priority for pro-Israeli activists must be to start educating the UK about Israel, Israeli academia and its achievements, and joint Israeli-UK-Palestinian projects. However, Israel should consider what message or image it wants to present to the UK, because it may not coincide with the message the UK Jewish community will want to project. The UK has in the past reacted to events in Britain and how they affect UK Jews by thinking about them in those terms, forgetting that in case of the academic boycott it is actually about Israel, not the UK. So the image Israeli academia will want to project may not be the same as

the UK campaign slogan "building bridges," or promoting only messages that relate to peace efforts. Israel may instead want to highlight its achievements, the fact that its academics are "premier league," and that if people want to work with the best, they have to work with Israeli academics.

The response of the groups opposed to the boycott movement has always been reactive; very rarely have they run proactive campaigns. The strategy since 2002 has been to publicize every new development. Initially a successful shock tactic, by 2007 Israel's enemies had learned to use the publicity for their own ends putting them in a win-win situation. The result of merely defensive tactics is that the issue of an academic boycott of Israel is still very much in the public domain. The antiboycott endeavor must in the future be more selective, should not directly respond to every campaign or letter or boycott call that is published, but should monitor the situation and carefully choose battles. It is crucial not to legitimize any future calls in the eyes of the general public.

The UK communities' 2007 Stop the Boycott campaign polled key business, cultural, and political leaders as well as academics. The results showed that 15-20 percent were in favor of boycotts against Israel and will presumably in the future support any similar action against Israel. These figures must not be ignored in any campaigning.[67]

It is disappointing that only a handful of leading British universities felt strongly enough to issue statements condemning the academic boycotts. Most British universities ignored the issue altogether or referred to the statement of the Russell Group. A priority for future Israel-advocacy campaigns has to be to promote Israel, its academic excellence, and Israeli joint projects with UK and Palestinian universities to university vice-chancellors and their senior staff members. This strategy should include building from within the academic community a campaign highlighting the point that academic freedom is at risk if a boycott succeeds.

There also is an urgent need for a proactive strategy especially on the part of the UK Jewish community to build positive relationships with the leadership of institutions, trade unions, and professional bodies, something that has been lacking in recent years in the UK. One of the few exceptions has been TUFU, which has worked hard to build a positive relationship with the British trade unions. Relationships are not built overnight and it is too late once the boycott call has been made. This strategy should also include laying the foundations for an armory of responses that are ready to go when the situation calls for it. An example is the Nobel Prize winners' letter,[68] which had a huge impact on the AUC Executive in 2005; or

preparing possible names for newspaper advertisements.

It will be necessary to promote the positive side of Israel, for example, its academic excellence, by using the local media to place favorable news stories that are of local interest, for example, Brighton University's links with Israeli and Palestinian students. Many potential stories are available as over half the UK's universities have links with Israeli universities. At present there is no coordination for the many visits to the UK by Israeli university presidents and senior academics. As ambassadors of Israeli academia they have an important role to play. This also should apply to Israeli artists, musicians, writers, athletes, and others who would be affected by a cultural boycott.

The UK community does not monitor and record what is said by well-known anti-Zionists and boycotters. By publishing academic critiques of what has been said, Campus Watch in the United States works to counteract anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism at U.S. universities. The UK community would do well to follow their example in future.

Intelligence gathering is the key to future success. It has been proved time and again that independent grassroots activists have been able to disseminate information well before the main community organizations have got into first gear. However, until the leaders of Anglo-Jewry and its organizations, who in the past have set community policy, appreciate and embrace the Internet fully, the role of the independent grassroots activists will continue to be of the utmost importance while remaining undervalued and underfunded.

It must be borne in mind that the world is hungry for news and the media has a lot to answer for. All future anti-Israeli campaigns will be driven by the Internet, which is unregulated and ungovernable. Hence it is a dangerous place and not everyone is like the UCU and obeys the law. Careful thought must therefore be invested in how to react to anti-Israeli campaigns in the future.

To conclude with a caveat, there are two elements to the Palestinian boycott campaign: divestment and sanctions. Divestment is at present only active in the United States, but it may come to Europe sooner rather than later. Ultimately it is not the individuals and the institutions represented in the battle against the boycott or similar campaigns that will suffer the consequences of a lack of a clear strategy. It is Israel, which is the basic uniting force.

* * *

Notes

[1] "Israel Boycott Illegal and Cannot Be Implemented, UCU Tells Members," 28 September 2007, www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2829. See also UCU Circular 41, 1 October 2007, www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/ucu41.html.

[2] Two British academics, Steven Rose and his wife Hilary Rose, along with 123 other mostly British academics published an open letter in *The Guardian* calling for a European Union moratorium on funding for grants and research contracts for Israeli universities. Although the letter called for an EU moratorium, it became known within a few weeks as "the academic boycott of Israel." Open letter, *The Guardian*, 6 April 2002.

[3] Julie Henry, "Lecturers under Fire after Call for Boycott of Israel," *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 May 2003, Will Woodward, "Lecturers Reject Call to Boycott Israel," *The Guardian*, 10 May 2003.

[4] Liz Lightfoot, "Lecturers Vote for Israel Boycott," *Daily Telegraph*, 23 April 2005.

[5] Paisley Dodds, "British Teachers' Union Votes on Boycott," Associated Press, 29 May 2006.

[6] Graeme Paton, "Lecturers Consider Israel Boycott," *Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 2007.

[7] "Academics Voted Today to Overturn Their Controversial Boycott of Israeli Universities," *The Guardian*, 26 May 2005; Tamara Traubmann, "AUT Boycott Supporters: Efforts to Ostracize Israel Will Continue," *Haaretz*, 27 May 2005.

[8] Tamara Traubmann and Benjamin Joffe-Walt, "Israeli University Boycott: How a Campaign Backfired," *The Guardian*, 20 June 2006.

[9] For more information, see www.academics-for-israel.org/.

[10] For more information, see www.engageonline.org.uk/home/index.php.

[11] For more information, see www.foi-asg.org/.

[12] For more information, see www.biu.ac.il/academic_freedom/.

[13] For more information, see www.spme.net/.

[14] For more information, see www.iafi-israel.org/.

[15] Manfred Gerstenfeld, "The Academic Boycott against Israel," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 15, Nos. 3-4 (Fall 2003): 25. At the United Nations World Conference against Racism at Durban in 2001, the South African NGO Committee (SANGOCO) promoted a proposal to impose a sports, telecommunications, academic, scientific, and military embargo on Israel and to act against Israel, similar to the antiapartheid campaign conducted against South Africa. SANGOCO has a close relationship with the PLO.

[16] Julie Henry, "Outrage as Oxford Bans Student for Being Israeli," *Sunday Telegraph*, 29 June 2003.

[17] Bernard Josephs and Leon Symons, "Blair: 'Drop the Boycott-It's No Good for Peace,'" *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 June 2007; Jeremy Last, "UK Education Minister Slams Academic Boycott of Israel," *European Jewish Press*, 11 June 2007.

[18] The Stop the Boycott campaign to call for a ballot was launched on 14 June 2007. See www.stoptheboycott.org/Your-Help.aspx.

[19] IAB Press Release, "UK Vice-Chancellors Visit Israel to Enhance Scientific Cooperation," 22 October 2007, www.biu.ac.il/academic_freedom/.

[20] For the statement by the Russell Group on the UCU motion on an Israeli boycott, 30 May 2007, see www.russellgroup.ac.uk/2007/boycott.html.

[21] For the National Postgraduate Committee's statement, see www.npc.org.uk/features/NPCresponse2007UCU.

[22] SPME Petition by 23 Nobel Laureates and 22 College Presidents: An International Call to Academics and Professionals to Stand in Solidarity with Our Israeli Academic and Professional Colleagues, www.spme.net/cgi-bin/display_petitions.cgi?ID=9.

[23] AJC Press Release, "U.S. Colleges Declare: 'Boycott Israeli Universities? Boycott Ours, Too!'" 8 August 2007, www.ajc.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=ijlTI2PHKoG&b=849241&ct=4247489.

[24] The 2007 UCU Congress approved motion 30, "Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions" (University of Brighton, University of East London) and motion 31, "European Union and Israel" (University of Birmingham). They can be read in full at www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2569.

[25] Nathan Jeffay and Melanie Newman, "Boycott Backlash Begins," *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 8 June 2007.

[26] For full details of why the boycott was illegal and cannot be implemented, see UCU Circular 41, 1 October 2007, www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/ucu41.html.

[27] UCU Circular 31, "Congress Resolution on Israel/Palestine: Arrangements for Implementation," 4 July 2007, www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/ucu31.html;

UCU Circular 34, "Guidance on Circulation and Debate of a Call to Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions," 7 August 2007, www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/ucu41.html.

[28] For the UCU Left's statement on the boycott, see www.uculeft.devisland.net/israel-boycott-statement.html.

[29] The rules of the UCU, section 2, "Aims and Objects," rules 2.4 and 2.5, www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1685.

[30] Henry, "Outrage"; Donald Macleod, "Oxford Professor Suspended for Discrimination," *The Guardian*, 27 October 2003.

[31] Ronnie Fraser, "The Academic Boycott of Israel: Why Britain?" *Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism*, 36, 1 September 2005.

[32] Author's interview with Hugh Mason, who was chairman of the AUT International Committee, 2005.

[33] "NATFHE and the AUT: Where Do We Go from Here?" *AFI Digest*, 1 June 2005, www.academics-for-israel.org/.

[34] "Boycott of Israeli Academics," 30 May 2006,

[www.politics.co.uk/news/education/higher-education/higher-education/boycott-israeli-academics-\\$441487.htm](http://www.politics.co.uk/news/education/higher-education/higher-education/boycott-israeli-academics-$441487.htm).

[35] Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), www.pacbi.org/campaign_statement.htm.

[36] Author's interview with Yaacov Hadassi, Histadrut European representative in Brussels, 1978-1981.

For further information, see Ronnie Fraser, "The TUC, the Left and Israel to 1982," unpublished master's thesis, University of Southampton, November 2005.

[37] TUC Congress proceedings, 1982, International Committee debate, 615-17.

[38] TUC Congress proceedings 2002, International Committee debate, 75-84.

[39] BICOM (Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre), www.bicom.org.uk/.

[40] Tom Wilson, head of the Universities Department of NATFHE, published an article supporting a boycott: "Is It Time to Take Sides?" *The Independent*, 18 April 2002. The NATFHE NEC emergency resolution on Palestine, issued 13 April 2002, stated that: "NATFHE NEC further resolves that all UK institutions of Higher & Further Education be urged immediately to review-with a view to severing-any academic links they may have with Israel...."

[41] For example, Paul Mackney spoke at the Justice for Palestine Rally, Trafalgar Square, 18 May 2002; Yaakov Lappin, "Calls for Israel's destruction in London," *Jerusalem Post*, 22 May 2005.

[42] "The UCU and an Academic Boycott of Israel," *AFI Digest*, 19 November 2006, www.academics-for-israel.org/.

[43] The Stop the Boycott Campaign to Call for a Ballot Was Launched on 14 June 2007, www.stoptheboycott.org/Your-Help.aspx.

[44] For her full statement, see http://docs.google.com/View?docid=dmzhrnw_10cgjz2v.

[45] In her election address for the post of UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt wrote on her website in January 2007 that "an academic boycott of Israel is likely to be an issue again at first UCU Congress in 2007. The issue is highly divisive and overshadows our other international work and any final decision to boycott should be made by full membership ballot not conference alone," http://docs.google.com/View?docid=dmzhrnw_10cgjz2v.

[46] "Israel Boycott Illegal and Cannot Be Implemented, UCU Tells Members," UCU statement, 28 September 2007, www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2829.

[47] The UCU held a seminar on 3 May 2007 titled "Building a Positive Policy in Support of Palestinian Academics." Among those invited were representatives of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Jews for Justice for

Palestinians, the National Union of Teachers, the Friends of Birzeit University, War on Want, and Education Action. See also Bernard Josephs, "Academics Hone Israel Boycott Plan," *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 April 2007.

[48] Stuart Winer, "Government, Universities Unite against Academic Boycott," *Jerusalem Post*, 27 November 2003.

[49] The most prominent campaigners during the period 2002-2005 were Ronnie Fraser who founded Academic Friends of Israel, Edward Beck who founded Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, and Andrew Marks who founded International Academic Friends of Israel. They were assisted in their campaigning by Manfred Gerstenfeld of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

[50] Ruthie Blum, "One on One: Debunking Dastardly Debate," *Jerusalem Post*, 12 December 2007.

[51] JC Reporter, "Fair Play Leaders Plan Their Strategy," *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 February 2007.

[52] Manfred Gerstenfeld, ed., *Academics against Israel and the Jews* (Jerusalem: JCPA, 2007).

[53] It was announced at an international conference on "Palestinian Academic Freedom and Support for Universities of Palestine," held in London on 13 October 2007. Modi Kreitman, "The Return of the British Boycott against Israel," *Yediot Ahronot*, 14 October 2007.

[54] The Palestine Solidarity Campaign held an international conference on 6-7 October 2007 in London with representatives of solidarity movements from Europe, North America, South Africa, and the Middle East.

[55] The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) called off the boycott on Israeli goods after asking the TUC if they thought a boycott was a good idea. The TUC responded negatively. The NUJ Executive then passed a motion saying they regarded the TUC's response as final and they would not pursue the boycott issue any further. See also "NUJ Abandons Israel Boycott," *The Guardian*, 10 July 2007.

[56] Bernard Josephs, "T&G Urges a Ban on Israeli Goods," *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 June 2007.

[57] UNISON, the UK's largest trade union representing over 1.3 million members working in the public sector, voted at its annual conference in

Brighton on 20 June by approximately a 4-1 majority to support the campaign to boycott Israel, asserting: "Conference believes that ending the occupation demands concerted and sustained pressure upon Israel including an economic, cultural, academic and sporting boycott." Other statements in the motion include: "Conference continues to consider that a just solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict must be based upon international law and Israel should allow the refugees of 1948 to return home." The motion can be found at:
<http://cms.unison.co.uk/MotionText.asp?DocumentID=997416>.

[58] For the text of a letter from the general secretary of UNISON to the Histadrut saying they did not support a boycott, see www.forward.com/articles/11344/.

[59] Alex Calinicos, "Israel Boycott Plan Has Potential Pitfalls," *Socialist Worker*, 25 September 2007, www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=13103.

[60] UCU 2007 Congress motion 31: "European Union and Israel" (University of Birmingham). It can be read in full at:
www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2555.

[61] Ibid.

[62] UCU Circular 41, 1 October 2007,
www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/ucu41.html.

[63] "Israel Boycott Illegal and Cannot Be Implemented, UCU Tells Members," 28 September 2007, www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2829.

[64] The EUMC Working Definition states that: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." It also states that:

such manifestations could target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong." It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

For the full EUMC definition, see
<http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/AS/AS-WorkingDefinition-draft.pdf>

[65] Jonny Paul, "British UCU Votes in Favor of Boycott on Israeli Academics," *Jerusalem Post*, 30 May 2007.

[66] For the Zionism on the Web site, see www.zionismontheweb.org/academic_boycott/.

[67] Jonny Paul, "Poll: UK Elite Oppose Academic Boycott," *Jerusalem Post*, 27 June 2007.

[68] Author's interview with Hugh Mason. For details, see Open letter, *The Guardian*, 24 May 2005.

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