

Israel Outraged by British Boycott Calls

Wed Jun 13, 2007 4:57 PM EDT

Lindsay Toler, AP Writer

LONDON — The clubby staff lounges of British universities and the raucous meeting halls of labor unions have long shared a sympathy for the Palestinian cause that has found expression lately with a series of calls for professional unions to boycott Israel.

Any boycotts would almost certainly be a long way off. They are minority initiatives strongly opposed by the union leaderships. But they have outraged Israelis and American Jews.

The increasingly strident statements threaten to escalate into a diplomatic row despite British leaders' attempts to play them down.

The latest furor erupted after the University and College Union decided on May 30 to consult members on halting funding, visits, conferences and joint publishing with Israeli institutions.

The motion accuses Israeli scholars of being complicit in the 40-year occupation of the Palestinian territories, which it claims has denied education to Palestinians through invasions, checkpoints, curfews, and shootings and the arrests of teachers, lecturers and students.

The National Union of Journalists approved a boycott on Israeli products in April and the public services union, Britain's largest, will discuss a similar motion next week.

Many Israelis feel it's unfair to criticize them and not the Palestinians, and to single out Israel when so many countries commit far worse acts.

Such boycott calls have come up in Canada, Sweden, Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, South Africa and other democracies, but none has drawn such attention as the British actions.

Britain has long-established ties and interests in the Arab world. Now Prime Minister Tony Blair is embattled at home over a foreign policy that critics say is too closely aligned with Washington's staunchly pro-Israeli view.

Blair has condemned the boycott calls, and this week he sent Higher Education Minister Bill Rammell to Israel to show solidarity with universities there. Britain's House of Lords was to debate the academics' motion next Tuesday and issue an appeal for calm.

Israel has responded sharply to the latest boycott threat, with Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni saying: "We must fight the boycott on every level and with all the means at our disposal. This is an act of hypocrisy and hatred that must not be allowed to raise its head, even if it comes from marginal bodies."

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In the United States, Harvard University law professor Alan Dershowitz, a strong Israel backer, told Britain's Guardian newspaper he had lined up a 100-strong legal team ready to "devastate and bankrupt" anyone who boycotts Israeli universities.

The New York-based Anti-Defamation League placed newspapers ads decrying the motions as anti-Semitic, arguing the academics' union unfairly singled out Israel while ignoring human rights violators such as Iran, Sudan, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

Boycott proponents say they are targeting Israeli universities for failing to take a stand on the occupation.

"If academic freedom is indivisible, it is time Israel spoke out for academic freedom for their neighbors just across the border," said Steven Rose, secretary of the British Committees for the Universities of Palestine who initiated the boycott calls.

But the University and College Union's general secretary, Sally Hunt, said most members will reject the motion and that any boycott would be unenforceable. Students' unions have denounced the boycott call, while academics at Britain's leading universities have already signaled they would not participate, just as British journalists have ignored their union's boycott.

"We see that as punishing academics for the political actions of their governments," said Oxford Physiology Professor Dennis Noble.

Some warn a boycott would set back peace efforts.

"By their actions, the UCU will embolden the Israeli right, who will be able to say: 'Look, the world hates and isolates us: This is exactly why we have to be militarily strong,'" British Jewish columnist Jonathan Freedland wrote in London's Evening Standard.

Many note that Israeli academics have tended, if anything, to back the Palestinian cause and oppose the occupation.

"The best ways to promote Jewish-Arab coexistence are education projects, projects fighting poverty — actions that promote Arabs in Israel and in the territories," said Haifa University President Aaron Ben-Zeev, "and we are doing it every day, every week."


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[Gideon Polya](#)

Violent, racist, human rights–abusing, war criminal Apartheid Israel may be "outraged" by the calls for non–violent boycott – but the anti–violence, anti–racism, pro–humanity boycotters are no doubt **utterly outraged** by the 40 years of illegal, violent kidnapping of (presently) 3.7 million Palestinians (half of them children, three quarters women and children); the 0.3 million post–invasion excess deaths (avoidable deaths , deaths that did not have to happen); the 0.2 million post–invasion under–5 infant deaths (75% avoidable and due to Racist Zionist war crimes); the 7 million Palestinian refugees (4.2 million registered with the UN); appalling living conditions in Apartheid Israel's Concentration Camp for 3.7 million Palestinians with 1/3 of Palestinian children traumatized according to UNICEF (see the **absolutely shocking** latest UNICEF report: [link](#)).

Apartheid Israel passively murders 2,400 under–5 year old captive Palestinian children EACH YEAR due to its Sanctions and Boycotts of its victims and specifically due to its deliberate, racist, war criminal non–provision of life–sustaining requisites unequivocally demanded of Occupiers by the Geneva Convention (see Articles 38, 55 and 56 of the Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war: [link](#))– this certainly deserving Sanctions and Boycotts of those responsible and indeed the **arraignment, trial and punishment** of the Racist Zionist psychopaths responsible for this continuing mass murder of Palestinian Children.

Those who **knowingly** deny, support, ignore, excuse, minimize, obfuscate, support, advocate or are otherwise complicit in gross abuse of Children have crossed the line separating decent humanity (who believe "thou shalt not kill", "thou shalt not kill Children", "thou shalt not abuse Children") and those who think otherwise.

#2 - Wed Jun 13, 2007 8:22 PM EDT

REPLY 

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REPLY 

Gideon Polya

Readers of this thread – mass murder of Palestinian infants (2,400 annually by Racist Zionists in the Holy Land; check out UNICEF and do the math: [link](#)) is appalling **anti–Arab anti–Semitism**.

False, defamatory, ad hominem abuse of anti–racist humanitarians such as myself objecting to such mass murder is profoundly obnoxious and offensive – but is unfortunately now routine on Newsvine.

Of course, as previously noted elsewhere on Newsvine, false, defamatory abuse of such Jewish critics of Israeli human rights abuses can be perceived as **anti–Jewish anti–Semitism** – just as ugly, repugnant and objectionable as anti–Arab anti–Semitism – and of course **cowardly** when done with the courage of anonymity.

#3 - Thu Jun 14, 2007 3:26 AM EDT

REPLY 

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REPLY 

I was going to parody Gideon, but I can't bring myself to do it. However, since one of his favorite techniques is to present a list of "fine, upstanding, moral, anti-racist, humanitarian, blah blah blah," I will offer one:

Perhaps the one to trump all others, Palestinian Sari Nusseibeh, President of and professor at al Quds University, has repeatedly argued against boycotts. But also: Sally Hunt, voted into the leadership of the UCU because of her position on the boycott, is opposed. She's also noted a few times that the vast majority of members of the UCU are probably also opposed. Israeli Arab Amir Hanifes testified, as a graduate of Haifa University, before the boycott/McCarthy Commission. He described the "debate" in appalling terms. University of Toronto law professor Ernest Weinrib, "named one of Ontario's most outstanding university teachers in a province-wide competition adjudicated by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) Awards Committee." I had forgotten "outstanding" in my list of hyperbolic, blind praise above. But here, professor Weinrib was actually awarded the description "outstanding." He calls the boycott proposal a "betrayal of the teaching profession." Robert J. Birgeneau, chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley and Lee C. Bollinger, President as well as professor at Columbia University, have both asked to be included in the boycott.

I join in solidarity with President Lee Bollinger of Columbia University in support of Israeli scholars and institutions, and I join him in saying this to those members of the British UCU who would pursue this reprehensible action: if you seek to isolate Israeli universities then you must also include Berkeley, along with Columbia, in your boycott. We stand with all — including Prime Minister Tony Blair and British higher education officials — who have rightfully and strongly condemned this effort.

Professor Yaron Matras resigned from the UCU in protest. Professor Shalom Lappin has called for the formation of a distinct union that will better represent its membership. The British Academy is opposed. The Russell Group, an organization representing 20 of Britains most prestigious research universities is opposed. From Malcolm Grant, President and Provost of UCL and Chairman of the Russell Group:

We reject outright the call for an academic boycott. It is a contradiction in terms and in direct conflict with the mission of a university. It betrays a misunderstanding of the academic mission, which is founded squarely on freedom of inquiry and freedom of speech. Any institution worthy of the title of university has the responsibility to protect these values, and it is particularly disturbing to find an academic union attacking academic freedom in this way. The Russell Group universities will uphold academic freedom by standing firm against any boycott that threatens it.

The International Union of Psychological Science writes

Such boycotts are discriminatory, contrary to all principles of academic freedom, contravenes the International Council of Science Principle of the Universality of Science and free circulation of scientists, and misguided.

The American Federation of Teachers is opposed. And of course there are plenty of others.

Here, though, we get to something beyond that. Sean Matgamna calls the boycott a "withchunt" that won't help the Palestinians. In that article he details one way in which the boycott is obscene. Also, here, he notes how a similar boycott has already targetted outstanding labor and human rights activist Eric Lee. Eric Lee has also called the boycott a "witchhunt." As I said in my post on that article, any boycott that targets Eric Lee is a boycott against Jews. It has nothing whatsoever to do with "violent, racist,

human rights-abusing....." It's entirely about the people who hold such stereotypes. And it is a stereotype, and a nasty one. It is, in itself, a disgusting bigotry.

Anyone remotely supportive of the boycott should read this [article of mine](#) on the strategy and aims of the boycott. Further, it would also be a great idea to [read this](#).

[#4](#) - Fri Jun 15, 2007 5:24 PM EDT

REPLY 