

1 June 2011

for 250 years

Dear

We write to you about troubling developments in the University and College Union, most recently at last weekend's Congress. Following these developments, and in light of UCU's history of behaviour, we now believe it to be an institutionally racist organisation.

Since its formation in late 2006, UCU has been obsessed with Jews and Israel. One of its earliest acts was to write a stinging attack on the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry Against Antisemitism, a report that was later accepted by the Government.

In 2007, UCU's Congress passed policies to promote a boycott of Israeli academics; this policy was suspended after UCU's own legal team advised them that it might contravene anti-discrimination law and the UCU's Equality policy. However, despite this admission, UCU has gone on to pass boycott-Israel motions every year.

The boycott debate has poisoned the atmosphere inside UCU and led to many Jewish members feeling harassed for their beliefs and identities. When this discomfort has been raised with Union officials, both informally and in formal complaints, the Union has ignored these complaints, summarily rejected them or victimised the complainants.

Over the last few years, dozens of Jewish academics have publicly resigned from the union citing the atmosphere of hostility against them. UCU has consistently refused to look into the resignations or respond to them seriously. A motion at UCU Congress in 2009 calling for such an investigation was voted down after a speech from the floor which argued that such an investigation might interfere with UCU's Israel campaigning.

A number of comments posted to UCU's closed "activists list", an email list of several hundred members, have made sweeping generalisations about 'Zionists' and Jews which other members have found offensive. On one occasion, a UCU member circulated a link to an article the website of ex-KKK Grand Wizard David Duke to make a point about Israel. UCU members rallied round her to defend this action.

In 2009, a senior local union official, speaking at a fringe meeting claimed that opponents to the academic boycott were being supported by "*bank balances from Lehman Brothers that can't be tracked down.*" This remark, which echoed the conspiracy theory that Jews had taken Lehman's money to Israel, was admitted by the UCU official but defended. The union branch passed a motion supporting him, and the Union nationally did not act or comment.

Last year, UCU brought Bongani Masuku, a South African trade unionist, to the UK for a conference on boycotting Israel. Masuku had called for "Zionists" in South Africa to be stripped of their citizenship for disloyalty, and had supported attacks on "Zionists", remarks that were recorded. He was found by the South African Human Rights Commission to have made racist statements. Nevertheless, UCU funded his visit and publicly supported him, saying that Mr Masuku denied that the remarks were racist – though he did not deny making them. A motion to UCU's 2010 Congress calling for the Union to distance itself from Masuku was massively voted down, leading to more resignations.

On Monday, UCU Congress debated a motion proposed by the National Executive Committee. The motion claimed that a particular understanding of antisemitic activity, proposed in 2005 by the European Union Monitoring Commission (now the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) and adopted by the National Union of Students, "is being used to silence debate about Israel and Palestine on campus" and resolved to not use this understanding of antisemitism in its own internal complaints procedures and to campaign against its use by others. The motion carried, with only four votes against it.

Rather than honestly relating to legitimate complaints from members who feel that they are experiencing antisemitism, this motion automatically prejudices any complaint that could be linked in any way to UCU's aggressively-pursued Israel policy. It represents a total refusal to accept that the Union might have a problem with antisemitism and will affect the ability of Jewish members of UCU to address antisemitic incidents and activities. From now on, when a Jew claims to be a victim of racism inside UCU, there will be a presumption that the victim is only "using" their complaint in bad faith to "silence debate", making it even harder for Jewish victims of racism to complain about it without having to be subject to political tests.

It also affects students on campus, who may feel less able to report antisemitic incidents to members of a union that has officially decided (and educated its members) that antisemitism cannot occur in the context of Israel-related activity and which specifically criticised the NUS for having a contrary view.

This motion is the final straw. UCU has passed up every opportunity to address concerns about institutional racism and is now altering its own internal procedures to make it harder for such concerns to be addressed in the future.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry defined institutional racism as "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin", and says it "can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour, which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping, which disadvantages minority ethnic people". This is a perfect description of UCU's treatment of its (ever fewer) Jewish members over the last five years.

As an institution, you are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty in the 2010 Equality Act to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and foster good relations, in addition to your own Equality policies.

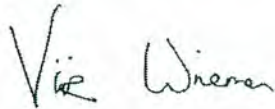
We urge you to consider whether maintaining a normal relationship with UCU is compatible with these statutory obligations. Business as usual should not be an option with an institutionally racist organisation. In this light, we refer you to the statement by Equality and Human Rights Commission Chair Trevor Phillips that the new UCU policy, if fully implemented, could place the Union in contravention of its obligations under the Equality Act.

We hope you would conduct an Equality Impact Assessment of your relationship with UCU, and to urge your local UCU branch to investigate the claims of institutional racism. We also suggest that you put in place procedures to ensure that UCU's institutional racism and perverse definitions are not allowed to pollute your institution's own processes for handling reports of antisemitism on campus.

Ultimately, if UCU refuses to address claims of institutional racism, then we would ask that you reconsider whether formal Union recognition of UCU is appropriate at all.

Thank you for considering this important matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vivian Wineman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "V".

Vivian Wineman
President



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7 June 2011

Dear

Letter from the Board of Deputies of British Jews

A number of UCU branches have copied to me a letter from the President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, dated 1 June 2011, which seems to have been sent to all vice-chancellors.

The Board of Deputies and Jewish Leadership Council wrote to me in similar terms on 25 May. The letter was prompted by an upcoming debate at our annual Congress on the subject of a 'working definition' of anti-Semitism that was produced by the European Union Monitoring Commission in 2005.

I replied to the letter on 27 May. I said that whatever the outcome of the debate, it would not affect the union's complete and implacable opposition to anti-Semitism itself. The UCU has consistently expressed its abhorrence of anti-Semitism and all forms of racism and will continue to do so.

Speakers in the debate, including National Executive Committee members, made that position absolutely clear.

I ended my letter by expressing my wish to meet with the Board and Council to hear their views and advice. I am in the process of setting up such a meeting.

On 27 May 2011 the Board and Council wrote to the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. I have not seen that letter, but I am enclosing a copy of the response from Trevor Phillips.

You will note his statement that:

'...neither we nor the EUMC has ever considered the EUMC's working definition to be wholly definitive; therefore its retention or abandonment should not be seen as an indication of what should be regarded as anti-racist or anti-Semitic conduct.'

He goes on to emphasise the importance of the principles established in the Macpherson Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

In my letter to the Board and Council I pointed out that the UCU's predecessor unions, AUT and NATFHE, were among the first to endorse the recommendations of the Macpherson Report, particularly its definition of racist incidents and of institutional racism. UCU has carried forward that commitment and I am very happy to take the opportunity to reiterate it now.

In his letter, Trevor Phillips suggests that we discuss with him the outcome of our debate at Congress. I hope to set up a meeting with him shortly.

If you have any concerns or questions about any of the matters raised by the President of the Board of Deputies, please let me know. I am copying this letter to the chair/president of your local UCU branch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Sally Hunt
General Secretary