



Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

July 5, 2011

Re: University and College Union: resolution on antisemitism

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is the democratic, representative body of Jewish communities in Scotland. SCoJeC is concerned by the conduct of the University and College Union, which at its recent Congress adopted a policy to redefine antisemitism. Their resolution is at

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5540#70>

The focus of the resolution is a rejection of advice from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (the FRA), available at

<http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/material/pub/AS/AS-WorkingDefinition-draft.pdf>

The document, prepared by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, defines antisemitism and gives several examples. The resolution states that UCU will make no use of this definition of antisemitism, and that the union will dissociate itself from it. It instructs UCU members to stand back while racist abuse of the kind identified in the FRA document is vented, as it has been on Scottish campuses recently. The second sentence of the preamble further implies that racist statements of this sort are considered acceptable if made while attacking Israel; it complains that the effect of objecting to antisemitic comment is to "silence debate". In other words, UCU is claiming a licence to vilify Jews in service of its political aims.

Antisemitism is often presented covertly – holocaust denial is an example – and it has become common for antisemitic comments to masquerade as comments about Israel. The advice which the UCU has resolved to reject gives several examples, while explicitly stating that this should not be taken to prevent criticism of the state of Israel. It also warns against "holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel", a problem which has been at the root of intimidation and harassment of Jews in Britain.

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities takes no position on Israel; our role is solely to represent the interests of Jewish people in Scotland. It is those interests we write to defend. Racist propaganda against Israel has exposed Jewish people in Scotland and the UK to a wave of hostility. From a recent survey, more than half the Jews personally witnessing antisemitic incidents attribute those incidents to anti-Israeli sentiment. There have been disturbing incidents in Scottish universities, and we are hearing reports that the hostility and stridency experienced by Jewish students are being reflected in their participation and engagement in communal activity while at University.

The problems identified in the FRA definition are issues which the Jewish community in the UK is acutely aware of, and the denial of those problems is a denial of their concerns and experience. You are presumably familiar with the criterion proposed by the Macpherson report for identifying racist action: "a racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person." In those terms, the UCU resolution, which is now the policy of the Union, is racist.

We doubt that the duty to promote good race relations is compatible with maintaining a relationship with an organisation that has formally adopted a racist policy. We are writing, in consequence, to ask you to consider your own relationship with UCU, and whether your duties under the Equality Act can be reconciled with continued contact.

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Chair

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