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May 31, 2007

Sally Hunt
Joint General Secretary
University and College Union
27 Britannia Street
London, WC1X 9JP
United Kingdom

Dear Ms. Hunt:

I write to express my grave concern over the University and College Union's vote to endorse a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. This decision compromises the principles of objectivity, fairness, and dialogue that are at the foundation of all academia.

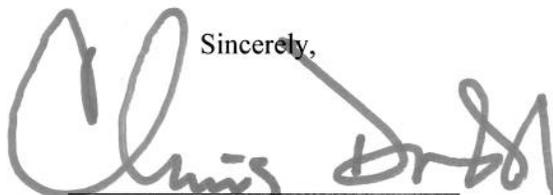
UCU's support of the boycott conflates scholarship and politics to such an extent as to make the two indistinguishable. Whatever one's view of the Arab-Israeli conflict, holding Israeli universities responsible for the policies of their government is as untenable as holding Oxford responsible for the foreign policy of Prime Minister Blair. Universities ought to be institutions of learning—not organs of politics.

That is why I applaud your having spoken out against this boycott. As you stated, "Most of us want to retain dialogue with trade unionists on all sides—not just those we agree with. It's the approach we have in Zimbabwe and Colombia and it's the approach I think we should have here." I agree wholeheartedly. Debates and arguments change minds, not blacklists. It escapes me why the circle of debate should be closed off to Israel alone.

"Neutrality is unacceptable," declared the text of the resolution. On the contrary, for the academic institution, neutrality is required, as is the free and frank exchange of ideas. The UCU's resolution has struck a blow against that exchange, not only by threatening to cut off ties with Israeli academics, but by making participation subject to political tests. It has announced that Israeli scholars who publicly oppose the occupation will be exempt from the boycott. This comes across as an attempt to elicit "correct" views through pressure.

Universities thrive on ideas that emerge from discussion and good scholarship not from those imposed from on high. With this resolution, the UCU seems to have forgotten that lesson. Moving forward, I hope that the UCU general membership will reconsider its ill conceived decision to endorse a boycott against Israeli educational institutions otherwise the credibility and important mission of UCU will be seriously damaged internationally.

Sincerely,



Christopher J. Dodd
United States Senator