

ארגון הסגל האקדמי הבכיר - אוניברסיטת חיפה

Union of Senior Academic staff

University of Haifa

הר הכרמל חיפה 31905 טלפון: 8240661, 8254118 פקס: 8257013

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16 May 2005

Dr. Angela Roger, President
Association of University Teachers
Egmont House
Tavistock Place
London
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Dear Dr. Roger,

As the chairperson of the Union of Senior Academic Staff at the University of Haifa, I wish to express our members' dismay at the latest resolution of the AUT, which called for the boycott of two Israeli universities, including the University of Haifa. We deeply regret that such a resolution was adopted without the AUT seeking to obtain a response from this University or from our union. We believe that had the members of the AUT been given additional information and a more balanced perspective, they would have rejected such an unjust resolution outright.

The AUT took a decision to boycott the University of Haifa until "it commits itself to upholding academic freedom". Any serious study of the principles and practices upheld by the University of Haifa would have made it clear that the institution is profoundly committed to the exercise of academic freedom, indeed no less so than British universities. The widest possible spectrum of ideas is voiced both in the classrooms and in the many conferences held at the University, and there has never been a case of a staff member whose employment was terminated on political grounds. It is, therefore, hard to understand why the AUT chose to single out the University of Haifa for undeserved

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sanctions, especially given the number of universities in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world where academic freedom or any freedom of expression and thought is a travesty, and against which no measures were considered.

The accusations at the root of the AUT's resolution are based on a campaign launched by a single individual, Dr. Ilan Pappé, a member of the academic staff of the University, who has been trying for years to bring about an international boycott of Israeli universities as an instrument of political pressure. The academic freedom he enjoys at the University of Haifa has allowed him to freely express his political views in his classes and in conferences held both in and outside the University. Ironically, Dr. Pappé is using university research travel grants to attend meetings in which he calls on the international community to adopt draconian measures against his own university and colleagues. Is there a better proof of academic freedom and of the degree of tolerance practiced by the University of Haifa?

Dr. Pappé's claim, which forms the basis of the AUT resolution, relates to an incident that took place in 2002. At that time, an MA thesis containing allegations of a massacre of Palestinian villagers in 1948 was submitted to the University of Haifa. The student was taken to court for libel by those allegedly involved in this event, and it was established that the thesis contained grossly distorted evidence. The revised thesis was then examined by an academic committee and disqualified. It is hardly surprising that Dr. Pappé denounced the committee's findings and conclusions as political, since they did not conform to his own political views or serve his political agenda.

Needless to say, Dr. Pappé's attempt to challenge the findings of the court and the integrity of the academic committee on political grounds was regarded by many as unethical and as a threat to unbiased academic research, and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities decided to lodge a formal complaint against him, seeking his dismissal, on

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the grounds of a breach of academic and professional integrity, **not** on political grounds. However, members of the AUT were presumably unaware that no proceedings were ever started against Dr. Pappe. The Presiding Officer of the Academic Disciplinary Court ruled that the charges against Dr. Pappe should be pursued in a civil court and thereby brought the case to a close. This took place three years ago.

With no threat whatsoever to Dr. Pappe's position, what is the boycott all about? In recent interviews Dr Pappe explained that the boycott was necessary since as long as it was maintained, no attempt would be made to dismiss him. If the AUT had followed this twisted logic, it should have called for a boycott that would last until Dr. Pappe reaches retirement age.

At the moment the nature and mode of implementation of the proposed boycott is unclear. Obviously a boycott of a university is meaningless unless aimed at its staff and students. So who is to be boycotted? The 700 academic staff that I represent? The 800 PhD students? The 4,800 M.A students? The 10,200 undergraduate students? Clearly not all of these people are meant to be 'excommunicated'. Will Dr. Pappe be exempted? Has the AUT established a mechanism for exempting others? Will there be a standard declaration of political allegiance or faith that one has to make before an exemption is granted? Will there be an ethnic line of demarcation that would serve as a filter? Who will monitor this operation? A local tribunal (possibly headed by Dr. Pappe)?

Some information about the University of Haifa may be of relevance. It has the largest proportion of Arab students (nearly 20%, corresponding to their actual proportion in the population), who, contrary to Dr. Pappe's claims, fully participate in the culture of free speech. The University also has the largest number of Arab academic staff in the country, some of whom hold prominent positions. I should like to emphasise that the Union of Senior Academic Staff represents both Jewish and Arab academics and, as Dr.

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Pappe has admitted in a recent interview with *Haaretz* (6 May 2005), he has only two supporters in the University.

We are confident that much of the present crisis is due to the fact that the members of the AUT have been misled by people who are trying to promote a personal or a narrowly political agenda at all costs. We therefore hope that the AUT would see fit to publish and distribute this letter so as to enable its members to get a fuller and more accurate picture in time for the organisation to re-consider and revoke its former resolution.

Yours Sincerely,



Prof. Udi. Makov

Chairperson

cc: AUT local associations