

Amendment to the motion: “Academic Freedom and the Sacking of Professor David Miller”

Delete all and insert:

This branch notes that:

1. David Miller said that his aim is “to end Zionism as an ideology, as the functioning ideology of the world. And that’s the thing that worries me most about the idea of freedom of speech, is that it diverts our attention from ... the material realities of the jackboot on the neck of the Palestinians.”

He said this on 15 February 2021 and a recording of his speech is here, on Youtube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrAII73NCQ>.

2. jackboots are military leather boots which extend above the knee. They were worn by the Sturmabteilung, the military wing of the National Socialist Party in Germany and by the Totenkopfverbände (Death’s Head Units) of the Waffen-SS, which ran the extermination camps and the other infrastructure by which six million Jews were selected for their alleged racial impurity, and murdered. Jackboots were also worn by the forces of the USSR and the DDR, both of which enforced antisemitic policies in the name of socialism.
3. Israeli forces have never worn Jackboots.
4. the Supreme Court of Israel (Levi v. Southern District Police Commander [May 13, 1984]) ruled that freedom of speech is recognized as belonging to the freedoms that characterize Israel as a democratic state.
5. Israel is about 415Km long by 15Km at its narrowest and 115Km at its widest. Its population is less than 7 million, which is about 0.09% of the world’s population.

This branch believes that:

1. saying Zionism is ‘the functioning ideology of the world’ is to inflate the allegedly malevolent influence of Israel in a way that is reminiscent of the antisemitic practice of inflating the allegedly malevolent influence of Jews into a globally dominating force.
2. because of the use of the word ‘jackboots’ in this context, David Miller’s audience may come away with the idea that Israel is comparable in its evil to the big twentieth century totalitarian movements.
3. Israel is not comparable in its evil to the big twentieth century totalitarian movements.
4. it is not a material reality that there is a jackboot on the neck of the Palestinians.
5. refugees from the big twentieth century totalitarian movements and refugees from anti-Jewish movements across the Middle East and North Africa played a significant part in building Israel and defending it against attempts to invade it and to drive out its Jewish citizens.

6. the idea of freedom of speech, as embedded in UK law and as articulated in the preamble to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a material reality that UCU fights hard to extend, guarantee and preserve, and that freedom of speech does not divert attention from other material realities.

This branch notes further that:

1. on the same occasion as David Miller said the words quoted above, he also said that we will be faced with a “Zionist case for suggesting that there is a serious problem of antisemitism or Judeophobia in this country when there isn’t a serious problem of antisemitism or Judeophobia.”
2. the Union of Jewish Students, the Jewish Labour Movement, the Chief Rabbi, the President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Community Security Trust have all said that there is a serious problem of antisemitism in this country, and that David Miller’s work and teaching practice is an example of it.
3. a principle was established by the Macpherson Inquiry that if members of a racialized group report that they have experienced racism then any investigation should begin with the assumption that the report of what has been experienced is made in good faith.
4. David Miller says that the organisations named in (2) above should not be recognised as representative Jewish communal organisations but as “Zionist” and therefore racist institutions; that they should be regarded as “Israel’s assets in the UK”¹ whose job is to promote Islamophobia and racism at Israel’s behest.²
5. in its report on Labour antisemitism, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission described the following as “types of antisemitic conduct that amounted to unlawful harassment:
“Labour Party agents denied antisemitism in the Party and made comments dismissing complaints as ‘smears’ and ‘fake’. This conduct may target Jewish members as deliberately making up antisemitism complaints to undermine the Labour Party, and ignores legitimate and genuine complaints of antisemitism in the party.”
6. David Miller, in the same speech in February claims that the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs is “behind the whole antisemitism crisis”.
7. The Ministry of Strategic Affairs was closed down this summer by the new Israeli Government.

This branch believes further that:

1. the organisations listed in (2) above are pluralist, inclusive, Jewish, cross communal institutions.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/oct/01/bristol-university-sacks-professor-accused-of-antisemitic-comments>

² <https://electronicintifada.net/content/we-must-resist-israels-war-british-universities/32391>

2. it is a violation of the Macpherson principle to assume that when Jews say they have experienced antisemitism that they are really lying because they are secretly assets of Israel, in Britain to silence criticism of Israel and secretly to promote racism and Islamophobia.
3. the way in which David Miller talks about Jewish communal organisations, including the Jewish Society at his own university, of which some of his own students are members, is similar to the conduct described as 'unlawful harassment' by the EHRC, quoted in (5) above.
4. usually, when Jews say they have experienced antisemitism, the reason they're saying it is that they genuinely believe that they have experienced antisemitism.

This branch notes further that:

1. in the same video referred to above, David Miller said that there is an "all-out onslaught by the Israeli government... on the left globally" adding "it's not something to do with the Labour party really, the Labour Party is a mere detail of this attempt by the Israelis to impose their will all over the world."

This branch believes further that:

1. no Israeli Government has ever had the power or the political and organisational talent to successfully organise an all-out onslaught on the left globally.
2. Labour's failure to win the 2017 and the 2019 General Elections was not engineered by Israel.
3. the quotes by David Miller in this motion are a tiny but genuinely representative sample of Miller's discourse about Jews in Britain and about Israel.

This branch notes further that:

1. the Organisation for Propaganda Studies, of which David Miller is a leadership figure, has repeated conspiracy fantasies as though they are true, about the September 11 terrorist attacks, the shooting down of the airliner over Ukraine in 2014, the White Helmets humanitarian rescue group in Syria, the antivax movement and the origins of the coronavirus.
2. Syrian refugee and journalist Oz Katerji has said that David Miller is part of campaigns to support President Assad of Syria and his backers in Russia and Iran. Katerji and many other refugees from Assad's human rights abuses in Syria have spoken out against David Miller's demonization of the 'White Helmets' as al-Qaeda affiliates.

This branch believes further that:

1. antisemitism is a conspiracy fantasy that it is based on false information and it is often embraced by those who are also attracted to other conspiracy fantasies that are based on

false information.

2. to blame the sacking of David Miller on “external political pressure”, to say that it is based on “malicious and unfounded allegations”, or to claim that Miller’s criticisms of Israel and of Zionism have been portrayed in bad faith as antisemitic, would not be an accurate description of what has happened or why.
3. it would be unwise for a UCU branch to assert unequivocally that none of David Miller’s “professional judgments” constitute antisemitism or other hate speech.
4. there is no reason to believe that report of the QC who investigated the David Miller case for Bristol University, which has not been published, says that Miller has not written or said antisemitic things. The university has said that the QC reported that “Professor Miller’s comments did not constitute unlawful speech.”
5. there is agreement between supporters of the IHRA definition of antisemitism and many of its opponents that Miller’s work is antisemitic. In the video above, Miller denounces the “Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism” as itself a “liberal Zionist” plot to pretend that criticism of Israel is antisemitic.

Sheffield Hallam UCU:

1. reaffirms its commitment to the principles of academic freedom as outlined in the 1997 UNESCO recommendations here: <https://en.unesco.org/news/protecting-academic-freedom-relevant-ever>
2. reaffirms its commitment to the principles of academic freedom as outlined by UCU in January 2009 here: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/academicfreedom>
3. reaffirms UCU’s commitments to opposing antisemitism as well as all other forms of racism. This helpful advice from our union reminds us that: “UCU members should:
 - avoid language that might be well meaning but could actually be patronising; respect a person’s religious, non religious or belief structure but do not treat people as ambassadors for their religion or ethnic group
 - not make assumptions about an individual’s beliefs, religious practices or belonging based purely on their nationality or background
 - make sure you think about the balance between the right to freedom of expression and sensitivity to individuals’ religion or belief
 - acknowledge the diversity among people who identify as Jewish – a wide range of cultures, experiences, religious (and non-religious) beliefs and practices, traditions and lifestyles......
Antisemitism, whether it is intentional or not:

- undermines confidence and self-esteem
- is offensive
- makes work an unsafe place
- means treating someone differently and unfairly
- can be viewed as a potential or actual hate-related offence
- is unlawful and contrary to the rules of UCU.

Employers have a duty to prevent harassment and provide remedies if it occurs...

Managing freedom of speech within the law: the right to freedom of expression must be balanced with sensitivity to an individual's religion or belief"

4. reaffirms that two key UCU principles may sometimes require some difficult balancing and negotiation:
 - a. we must remain vigilant to ensure that campuses never become hostile environments for groups of students or staff on the basis of any protected characteristic

and also
 - b. we must defend and protect freedom of speech and academic freedom on campus and we will defend members of the scholarly community if they are harassed or fired on the basis of their scholarly or scientific work or research, or their political opinions.