



## UNISON CONFERENCE 2007

# WORKERS' LIBERTY

**Unison, solidarity with the Palestinians, and boycotting Israel**

# Solidarity yes, boycott no!

*We must do something to support the Palestinians?*

YES, WE MUST. UNISON needs to be seen to be campaigning forcefully on the issue and protesting loudly — with effective action that fits in with the goal of creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

A boycott of Israel wouldn't do that. It cuts against the process of mutual recognition that is required to create two states. It means turning our back on the Israeli workers and democrats who are the key allies of the Palestinians.

If UNISON were seriously to take up the idea of a boycott we would be asking our members not to work with Israeli products or engage in activity with Israeli institutions.

Are we really going to say that health workers should refuse to use drugs developed on the basis of research in Israel? Or, that our members in the libraries should remove all books written by Israelis? It doesn't make sense. It wouldn't help the Palestinians.

For the union to seriously campaign to boycott Israel would effectively mean treating all Israelis as the enemy. It would be counterproductive to the goal of two states.

If all that is proposed is a token boycott, then it will not bother the Israeli government. What it will do, though, is license and encourage among a minority of activists in Britain an attitude of treating everything Israeli or linked to Israel as abhorrent. In the 1980s that attitude led to bans or attempted bans on student Jewish societies on many campuses. We do not want that again.

Let us be militant against the Israeli government — not against Israeli workers, or against Jews in Britain.

*But the Palestinians (and even some left-wing Israelis) are asking for a boycott?*

THE DEMAND FOR a boycott has grown out of the same sense of hopelessness that has fostered the growth of Hamas. UNISON and the broader trade union movement have never supported the goal of Hamas, which is the destruction of the state of Israel and the creation of an Islamic state. A boycott makes sense for Hamas, but it makes no sense for us.

Boycotting Israel means boycotting an entire people. The kind of boycott proposed in motion 53 would first and foremost hit against trade unionists and Israeli supporters of Palestinian rights, because those are the people that UNISON presently has links with.

If a boycott were not going to hit the Palestinians' allies within Israel it would require the setting up of an inquisition to interrogate Israelis to establish their views, and to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Israeli Jews, with the presumption that they are "bad" until proven "good". The idea of doing such a thing should make anyone with knowledge of the Holocaust shudder.

There are many oppressive regimes on earth, but trade unionists who believe in the mutual recognition of rights and international working class solidarity never hold the people guilty for the policies of their rulers, no matter how vile those policies may be.

The boycott proposal in motions 53 and 54 is based on desperation, not hope. There is no link in it between the means and ends, between boycott and our goal of mutual recognition and two states. Do not support it.

**Contact us: [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) — [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)**

# Solidarity yes! Boycotts, no!

**It would be too easy to let the leadership and others get away with making a gesture toward the plight of the Palestinians instead of pursuing solidarity with Palestinian and Israeli workers alike. As on pay, pensions and the like, what is called for is meaningful action, not empty left-wing phrases. Please read and sign the statement at our stall, and join us in the debate.**

AS democrats, socialists, critics of the policies and actions of the Israeli government, advocates of Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, and supporters of the right of both the Palestinian and the Israeli Jewish peoples to an independent state, we, the undersigned members of Unison, reject Resolution 54 to the union's National Delegate Conference, which calls for a "a union-based campaign of boycott and sanctions against Israeli institutions".

At first glance the idea of a boycott answers the need we all feel to "do something" in response to the seemingly endless carnage. But in fact a boycott would do more harm than good.

A boycott of Israel would at best exert only the most marginal pressure on the Israeli state. The movement to boycott South Africa continued for more than three decades, with only the most marginal effects on South Africa. Apartheid did not begin to crumble until the new black-majority workers' movement and the population of the townships rose up.

Moreover, boycotts of whole nations and their institutions are the crudest political weapons. They hit opponents of the government being boycotted, those who share the viewpoint of the boycotters as well as supporters of what the boycotters object to.

This objection had far less weight for South Africa because everyone saw it as pressure towards majority rule rather than aimed at crushing the whole country.

Apartheid was the exploitation by a small white oligarchy of a black majority deprived of rights. The Israeli-Jewish state in its pre-1967 borders did not depend on the exploitation of Arabs, and does not now depend for its existence on exploitation of the Occupied Territories.

A boycott would contribute to strengthening the sense of being under siege in a world of enemies which is a strong element in the power of the Israeli right, and weaken those in Israel who want a just settlement with the Palestinians.

The boycott brands all Israeli Jews (or all who do not pass some prescribed political test) as beyond talking to.

In Britain, a boycott-Israel movement would, inexorably, become an anti-Jewish movement, directed against those closely linked to Israelis, i.e. Jews.

Resolution 54 calls for a "boycott against Israeli institutions". Does that include such "Israeli institutions" as the Israeli trade union federation, the Histadrut? Or Israeli anti-occupation groups?

We understand and strongly sympathise with the desperation which has driven the Palestinian trade unions and some other civil society organisations to call for a boycott, but we do not believe it will help.

Much better, a positive labour movement campaign of soli-

arity with the Palestinians, with the Israeli peace movement, and with workers on both sides.

• For more information see

<http://links-not-boycott.blogspot.com>

## Signatories so far

**Alexander Hay**

**Alison Brown**, Yorkshire Ambulance and National Executive Committee-elect

**Anita Downs**, secretary, Guys & St Thomas' Hospital, London

**Bryan Edmands**, Southwark Local Government

**Caroline Henry**, shop steward, Sheffield Local Government

**Chris Allen**, Political Officer, Leicestershire Health

**Chris Leary**, Surrey Local Government

**Corinne McCullough**, Islington Local Government

**Dan Nichols**, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

**Derek Muse**, Deputy Branch Secretary, Newcastle City Local Government

**Dion D'Silva**, Wandsworth Local Government

**Ed Whitby**, Newcastle City Unison Campaigns Officer; Northern Regional Committee

**Eleanor Steele**, Islington Local Government

**Erica Anatol**, Islington Local Government

**Heenal Rajani**, Housing Convenor, Lambeth Local Government

**Jacky Offord**, Suffolk Local Government

**James Anthony**, University Hospital Birmingham; Vice Chair, National Young Members Forum

**Jane Emanuel**, Bristol

**Jean Lane**, Tower Hamlets Local Government

**Jenny Bailey**, Haringey Local Government

**Jenny Mackley**, Islington Local Government

**Jill Mountford**, Lewisham Local

Government

**Jim Kearns**, Glasgow Local Government

**John Gray**, Finance Officer, London Region

**Kate Ahrens**, Leicestershire Health and NEC-elect

**Laura Rogers**, Westminster Local Government

**Lawrie Coombs**

**Lesley Smallwood**, Leeds Metropolitan University

**Lynne Moffat**, Islington Local Government

**Mark Catterall**, Lancashire County Council

**Mark Nevill**, Leeds

**Mike Fenwick**, Airedale Health

**Mike Perkins**, Hampshire Local Government

**Monika Schwartz**, Islington Local Government

**Nick Brereton**, Newcastle City

**Nick Holden**, Leicestershire Health and Health Service Group Executive

**Paul McGarry**, Manchester Local Government

**Pete Allen**, Manchester Local Government

**Rob Hope**, Cardiff

**Ron Montgomery**, Wandsworth Local Government

**Ron Strong**, Leeds University

**Rosie Woods**, Westminster Primary Care Trust

**Stephen Lintott**, Chair, North West Anglia Health

**Steve Mitchell**, Manchester City Council

**Stuart Jordan**, Haringey Local Government

**Tina Day**, Guy's and St Thomas's

**Valerie Higgins**, Islington Local Government

**Vinathan Sangarapillai**, Camden Local Government

*all in personal capacity*

# Solidarity yes, boycott, no!

**Organising meeting for solidarity with the Palestinians' right to a genuinely independent state of their own, alongside Israel and against boycotting Israel.**

**Tuesday 19 June 12.45pm**

**Upstairs at the Quadrant pub**

**(near the Clocktower, just off the road to the rail station. 13 North Street).**

**Speaker: Alison Brown (Unison NEC-elect, personal capacity)**