



SFU

UNIVERSITY SECRETARIAT

S.07-101

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ATTENTION Senate

FROM Alison Watt, Director, University Secretariat and
Secretary, Senate Committee on Agenda and Rules

RE Boycott Motion tabled at Senate meeting of 9 July, 2007

DATE 4 September, 2007

At the Senate meeting on 9 July, 2007, Senate voted to table a motion concerning the boycott of Israeli universities. This item will return to the floor at the September 17th meeting of Senate at which time Senator Black has indicated he will move a motion to withdraw the motion. His request is attached for your information.

The motion that Senate will consider will be:

Motion

That the motion concerning the proposed boycott by the University and College Union of the UK be withdrawn.



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
THINKING OF THE WORLD

Procedural Request from Senator Sam Black – August 28, 2007

I would prefer to withdraw the motion that was tabled (re. The Proposed UCU Boycott) at last Senate meeting, subject to approval from the appropriate Senate rules committee.

Rationale:

At the risk of oversimplification two issues appeared to be responsible for the defeat of the amended motion:

- 1) The motion's alleged overbreadth.
- 2) The desire for a detailed discussion of the conduct of the Israeli state.

Regarding (1) overbreadth: the defeated motion was narrower than the tabled motion since the former mentioned academic freedom within the text of the motion (rather than merely in its accompanying grounds) while the tabled motion does not. In fact, I do not believe that I can draft an amended motion that is more narrowly tailored than the amended motion that was already defeated. Moreover, the discussion at Senate provided few clues regarding what kind of amendments (if any) would satisfy the members of Senate.

Regarding (2) I am unwilling to lead a discussion of the politics of the Israeli state.

First, I believe that discussion to be irrelevant to the academic freedom issue at hand.

Second, a discussion of that kind might also precipitate an amended motion that, rejects the proposed UCU boycott on the ground that the Israeli state's policies are not sufficiently egregious to trigger a justified boycott of its Universities. That particular statement of principle is, however, unwanted. For it entails that states, whose policies are sufficiently egregious, ought to have their schools and academics boycotted. That principle would in turn imply (in my view) that SFU ought to extinguish its various cooperative ventures with Chinese universities - at the risk of appearing to apply a double standard to Israel. The policy of ending our present cooperation with Chinese universities would (in my view again) be badly misguided.

A more pragmatic reason for permitting this motion to be withdrawn is that the original motion has been overtaken by events. By now, at least 22 Canadian and 300 US universities have already condemned the proposed UCU boycott, as has President Stevenson. If Senate does nothing that is not news. If Senate rejects the motion now that potentially is news, and news of a kind that presents the University in what is arguably an unflattering light. My preference is to withdraw the motion.

Sam Black

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