

Dear joint signatories

We do understand your concerns. But we're afraid you haven't got what happened quite right.

For ease of reference we append the text of both motions, as well as the emergency motions submitted by the PSC Executive which cover some of the same terrain.

Preamble

Motions at meetings like the PSC AGM have a dual function. These are both to ensure commitment of the organisation for the coming period to policies that the members approve of, and also to serve as a public statement that will signal to non-members the support that this organisation gives to those policies.

Another thing about motions is that it doesn't matter how many admirable things are in the wording of a motion, it only takes one damaging hostage to fortune to potentially turn it into a serious problem for the organisation.

We believe that between us, we clearly explained our reservations about Motions 5 and 6 when we spoke at the AGM.

Motion 5

The key concerns we had were not about the bullet point statements of fact, which we totally accept as relevant and important. Our opposition to passing the motion does not and did not mean that we disagreed with your description of reality. You ask how *"since JVL have been very active (and effective) in giving public support to Palestine supporters under attack" we could oppose "a motion calling upon PSC to do the same"*. The answer is because we disagreed about the means of doing so incorporated in the motion's action points.

About your criticisms of PSC: there have been times in the past when activists now in JVL found PSC to be more of an obstacle than an asset in generating campaigning impetus on Israel/Palestine. But that is now years in the past. JVL, as well as FSOI and JJP, have in recent years found PSC to be a staunch friend and active participant in the struggle to maintain freedom of expression on Palestine and against the malign spread of the IHRA 'definition'.

Working through the informal grouping we call 'the Consortium' we jointly obtained the timely Tomlinson Opinion (effectively paid for by PSC); we repeatedly organised mass mailouts to public bodies (all Vice-Chancellors and Registrars; all local authority Chief Executives and leaders of the ruling group, and then to all Councillors in the country); and we repeatedly lobbied bodies such as Universities UK – who we persuaded to circulate the Tomlinson Opinion to all universities.

None of this is acknowledged in the motion.

Up to now UK universities have mostly held the line – though the pressure on them from government is being ramped up. But quite soon in our campaign we realised that our message to local authorities was failing to influence their decisions. We had almost no

success in stopping their moves to adopt the IHRA document. We therefore adapted our message to those campaigning locally – to say that *if* there was no chance of avoiding or reversing adoption, then attempts should be made to get caveats added to protect freedom of speech. The consortium has produced a comprehensive “Toolkit” for activists attempting to resist the roll-out of the IHRA document, especially in local councils.

We should stress that the advice relating to caveats was based on realism, not defeatism. And if, as has turned out, it is extremely difficult even to get caveats adopted, what chance revocation? Yet for Motion 5 a “high profile public campaign” for reversal of adoption is to be the centre point of PSC’s activities in this area. It is no virtue in politics (or life generally) to go on repeating behaviour or policies that fail to deliver. Our motions urging revocation of the IHRA ‘definition’ would resound loudly down the social media channels which reach our comrades, but nowhere else.

Our contributions to the debate commended the PSC Executive’s Emergency Motion 1 (about the proposed anti-BDS legislation) passed earlier, which committed to “forcefully responding to any instances of public bodies using the IHRA to suppress activism on Palestine”. This is indeed JVL’s policy. PSC pursued it with some success over the Tower Hamlets IHRA-induced banning of the Big Ride. These are winnable battles. They also generate wider publicity, demonstrating tangible negative effects of the IHRA document’s handiwork, which can help to open minds and change opinions.

Motion 6

The problems with this motion were less extreme. However there were two issues that prevented us supporting it:

- Action point 1 calls for ‘a public campaign against the IHRA as a priority’
- Action point 2 calls for a campaign for trade unions to reverse their leadership’s acceptance of the definition

The first of these points repeats, though in more muted form, what we see as the misguided emphasis of Motion 5.

The second point was strongly contested by senior trade unionists present at the meeting.

In conclusion

Your message calls for PSC and JVL to work together in common cause. We believe that our relationship is already both comradely and productive. And JVL, which has been reviewing its strategy, intends to extend this type of working more widely.

Motion 5: Defending Palestine solidarity in an increasingly hostile environment

Proposed by Brighton and Hove PSC Seconded by Hastings and Rye PSC

Palestine solidarity – an inherently anti-racist movement – has long been attacked using the slur of antisemitism. But in recent years that slur has been asserted so often and so prominently that it has achieved the status of accepted fact in many 21 people's minds. The adoption of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism by hundreds of organisations has helped to create an environment in which attempts to silence pro-Palestine advocacy have proliferated with impunity. The motives are clear: to discredit Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, and to neutralise our campaign for Palestinian rights – especially the BDS movement.

Examples of this hostile environment include:

- In response to intimidation by pro-Israel groups, venues have declined to accept our bookings and have cancelled events already booked, for fear of disruption by Zionist provocateurs and of being branded antisemitic.
- Labour Party members with a record of support for Palestine have been investigated, suspended or expelled from the party. They have been dropped from candidate shortlists. They have been vilified in their branches and constituencies. Their 'offence' has been their criticism of the Israeli regime.
- Local councils are increasingly nervous about pro-Palestine activities taking place on council land and property.
- Campaigners for Palestinian rights face increasingly hostile questioning by the media. Our movement weakens with every attack that goes unchallenged.

At a time when PSC collectively should be active, public and unapologetic in our defence of Palestine supporters, we have tended to be silent. This strategy has clearly not worked. This AGM calls for:

1. PSC to launch a high-profile public campaign against the IHRA definition, including lobbying for the definition to be revoked where it has been adopted.
2. PSC to give active and public support to Palestine supporters under attack, where those attacks are clearly vexatious and politically-motivated.

Motion 6: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Proposed by Tony Greenstein Seconded by Rebecca Massey

The IHRA definition of antisemitism, which has been adopted by numerous public institutions, including the police, Judicial College, 150+ local authorities, trade unions, Labour Party and some universities is a threat to freedom of speech on Palestine. We do not believe that there is any incompatibility between campaigning for Palestine and opposing the IHRA. The latter is designed to prevent the former. Combatting it is an urgent priority for PSC. In particular we must prevent any attempts to make it legally binding.

We therefore regret that there was no specific campaigning workshop at the recent trade union conference on Palestine. We call on national PSC to:

1. Launch a public campaign against the IHRA as a priority.
2. Campaign within trade unions, who have a major input into the Labour Party, to reverse the acceptance by their leaderships of the IHRA.
3. We also instruct PSC to highlight the attempts by the Board of Deputies and the Zionist movement to prevent meetings on Palestine a priority. We must defend free speech on Palestine in conjunction with other civil society and civil liberties groups.
4. In particular we must take up with the churches these attempts to insinuate that Palestine solidarity or anti-Zionist meetings, often with Jewish speakers, are somehow 'antisemitic'.