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EDITORIAL

Malicious Boycotts

The University and College Union, a newly formed British union of college teachers, shamefully called last week for a boycott on contacts and exchanges with Israeli academic institutions. That follows on the shameful call in April by the National Union of Journalists in Britain to boycott Israeli goods.

It is hard to imagine two organizations that should be less given to such nonsense. Who would respect the judgment of a scholar who selects or rejects colleagues on political grounds? Who would trust the dispatches of a reporter who has been openly engaged against one side of a conflict? The unions argue that they have an obligation to demonstrate labor-union solidarity with the oppressed, as they did in opposing apartheid. That is absurd.

First, Israeli journalists and academics are among the most dedicated critics of their own society. Second, the lack of similar "solidarity" by these unions with any other oppressed or suffering people in the world, and there are plenty, reduces these gestures to an exercise in hypocrisy, or worse.

It is good to see that most respected British journalists, scholars and students — including the preponderance of British editorial writers and the heads of Oxford, Cambridge and 20 other top universities — as well as representatives of all major political parties condemned these malicious gestures.

Critical thinking and well-thought-out criticism are intrinsic to good scholarship and good journalism. These boycotts represent neither. Posturing like this only alienates the very forces in Israeli society that should be encouraged and offends the calling and honor of journalism and academia.

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