

Sid Ryan, you have disgraced our union

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An open letter to Sid Ryan and the CUPE Ontario leadership:

We, the undersigned academic members of CUPE Ontario, wish to express our outrage at the recent actions taken by Sid Ryan and other CUPE Ontario officials. These actions, which approve a boycott of Israeli academic institutions, both violate the authority with which they have been entrusted and, worse, undermine academic freedoms.

CUPE national, as well as the University of Toronto Education Workers, CUPE local 3902, have disapproved of this motion and decision, and for good reason. The most urgent matter of concern to the union is the ratification of reasonable contracts across Ontario. The primary mission of the union is to ensure the fair employment and treatment of its members. The current leadership has overreached its mandate, recklessly and irresponsibly dabbling in complex international politics. This leadership has demonstrated its resolve to continue in this fashion even though it is not competent to do so, it has not been elected to do so, and it is not in its jurisdiction to do so. These actions have harmed our union.

As is widely known, Sid Ryan, pictured, and the current leadership have decided to boycott Israeli academic institutions, based on their readings of events in the Middle East. In doing so, Sid Ryan and other CUPE Ontario officials are using union dues to forward a one-sided political agenda. This constitutes a misappropriation of union dues for partisan purposes.

This misguided political agenda was never put to the vote of the total membership, and demonstrates the degree to which CUPE Ontario policy is the expression of an autocratic minority that has disregarded the tenets of the democratic socialist tradition; namely, the freedom of discussion, votes involving all members and transparency. The leadership, headed by Sid Ryan, grandiosely claims to represent "civil society." But Sid Ryan represents only himself and like-minded colleagues -- civil society has not been consulted.

Surely Mr. Ryan knows that had he consulted his constituents, he could not claim that union members would support a focus on boycotting academic institutions. But of course, none of us has had the opportunity to express any opinion on the use of our dues for his partisan political preferences.

Many have pointed out that singling out predominantly Jewish institutions for this boycott suggests a discriminatory policy. The experience at York University campus only last week demonstrates how

quickly anti-Israel positions can translate into anti-Semitic slogans. Whatever the intent, the question arises: "Why is the leadership doing anything that could be remotely construed as anti-Semitic?" This accusation of anti-Semitism shames our union. Such policies are an inept and disgraceful abuse of the authority vested in this leadership.

It is ironic that this censorial activity is led by a man who is quick to claim for himself the mantle of human-rights activist. Freedom of thought is a most fundamental human right, yet it seems to be a right that Sid Ryan has no trouble trampling on. Sid Ryan seems to think that he and his closest colleagues have the right to determine which academics we ought to listen to and which ought to be censored. That tells us all we need to

know about Mr. Ryan's estimation of his own moral and intellectual capacities, and how little he values those of others.

To Mr. Ryan, we say this: We are academics. Without academic freedom, there is no civil society. The boycott he champions in our name undermines civil society by weakening the very freedom on which it depends. The freedom of thought is arguably the most important foundation and fruit of civil society. The boycott of academic institutions is an attack upon this freedom, which an enlightened union should be supporting, rather than limiting. For Mr. Ryan's boycott limits the freedom not only of the academics he wishes to prevent from speaking (in this case, Israeli academics), but also of those who might wish to listen (Canadians).

For all of the above reasons, we, as Ontario academics, call on Sid Ryan to resign for undermining our union.

We do not consent to have our wages used to support resolutions on which we have not been allowed to vote, which violate the spirit of the union's constitution and which compromise our integrity at a most fundamental level.

Signed by members of CUPE 3902, University of Toronto:

Paul Nahme, Jenn Cianca, Carolyn Reimer, Ian Richards, Callie Callon, Lindsay Ann Cox, Jonthan Newman, Sarah Kleeb, Shari Goldberg, Jade Weimer, Tim Langille, Emily Springay, Matt King, Amy Fisher, Zvi Halpern, Aldea Muldhern, Tema Smith, G. Anthony Bruno, Kathleen Gibbons, Nicholas Dion, Benjamin W. Carter, Jason McKinney.

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