



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

SPECIAL CONFERENCE 2012

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

FBU RELATIONS WITH THE HISTADRUT

INTRODUCTION

At the Fire Brigades Union's (FBU) Conference in May 2011, an emergency resolution moved by Strathclyde advocated that the FBU and unions in the UK sever all ties to the Israeli Histadrut Trade Union Federation. The motion was remitted on the condition that the FBU's Executive Council investigate the case for severing ties.

The Executive Council took the emergency resolution as its starting point and asked whether the FBU should sever its ties with the Histadrut. Head Office looked at FBU policies and asked whether severing ties was consistent with them. Officials examined the reasons given for severing ties and the purpose it is designed to serve. They also looked at the consequences of the FBU severing ties, both for the Palestinian people and their organisations, for Israeli people and their organisations, and for our Union.

FBU officials spoke to a number of important parties and campaigners to solicit expert opinion. A report was prepared for the Executive Council, which outlined the assessment. After a thorough evaluation, the Executive Council concluded its work.

FINDINGS

Severing links with the Histadrut is not in the best interests of the FBU at the present time. It is not in the best interests of the Palestinian people struggling for self-determination. Nor does it help those Israelis who support the Palestinians, including firefighters and other workers within the Histadrut.

The Histadrut merits criticism for aspects of its history and for elements of its current politics in relation to the Palestinian people. However, on balance, the Executive Council considers these criticisms are not sufficient to lead the FBU to sever links.

For more than three decades, the FBU has supported Palestinian self-determination as part of a democratic solution for all peoples in the region. The Union has rightly had links with both Palestinian and Israeli Trade Unionists over many years.

Trade Union internationalism involves worker to worker solidarity, Union to Union direct links, solidarity with oppressed people and opposition to Governments, not least our own. In this case, severing ties with the Histadrut in the name of Palestinian solidarity would undercut vital firefighter to firefighter and Union to Union links: links that can beneficially assist Palestinian firefighters and Palestinian Trade Unions in their daily struggles and their longer term aims.

The reasons suggested to sever ties are not sufficient. They do not account for changes in the Histadrut in recent years, or for the difference between the Histadrut and the Israeli state. The investigation did not find sufficient evidence of "collusion" by the Histadrut with the ongoing violation of human rights of Palestinians. Nor did it find that Histadrut policy positions "endanger regional peace".

The stated purpose of severing ties is to isolate the Israeli state. However the emergency resolution is not clear what political solution is proposed. It is not clear what the Histadrut would have to do to renew links, if they were severed on this basis. The demands on the Histadrut are unique, no other legitimate Union Federation is subject to such derecognition.

The experience of the FBU's humanitarian convoy in 2011 shows that it is possible to make solidarity with the Palestinians and utilise relations with Histadrut to help with that solidarity. Our delegation was able to raise its political concerns directly with Histadrut, whilst still maintaining relations to the benefit of all sides, particularly the Palestinians. Making links, not severing relations was the policy that worked best in this case.

RECOMMENDATION

The FBU Executive Council recommends that links with the Histadrut are maintained on the basis of critical engagement. Conference agrees the FBU should continue with its proud tradition of solidarity with all the peoples of the Region and its support of the Palestinians' right to their own state within a two state framework.
