

A Crisis of Representation:

**Antisemitism and Inclusion in
Higher Education Unions**



Executive Summary

Higher education unions are central to academic life. They shape working conditions, advocate for fair treatment, and give members a collective voice in the institutions where they teach, research, and learn. At their best, unions are grounded in solidarity, democratic participation, and the principle that every member deserves representation. It is precisely because unions play this vital role that concerns about exclusion, antisemitism, and failures of representation within them require serious attention.

This report, produced in partnership by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Academic Engagement Network (AEN), examines growing concerns that some higher education unions are not fully meeting their responsibility to represent Jewish members fairly, address antisemitism seriously, and protect viewpoint diversity within their ranks. ADL and AEN undertook this work to better understand how union governance, campus politics, and activist dynamics can create environments in which Jewish faculty and graduate students feel marginalized, silenced, or inadequately represented within their unions.

Drawing on incident reports, member accounts, union materials, and campus developments, the report finds that some higher education unions have become flashpoints for conflicts involving antisemitism, Israel, Zionism, and Jewish identity. In some cases, highly organized activist factions have used low-participation governance processes to advance divisive political positions without broad member consensus. In others, mainstream Jewish voices are subject to such open hostility by anti-Israel activists that they lose the opportunity to meaningfully engage in their union's democratic processes.

These dynamics distract from core labor priorities, including wages, working conditions, academic freedom, job security, and fair treatment. They also erode trust and internal cohesion, particularly when Jewish faculty and graduate students experience exclusion, hostility, silencing, or fear of retaliation for raising concerns about antisemitism or expressing views related to Jewish identity, Israel, or Zionism.

This report is intended as a constructive intervention: not to weaken unions, but to strengthen them as democratic, inclusive, and accountable institutions. With greater transparency, broader member engagement, renewed focus on labor priorities, and serious attention to antisemitism alongside other forms of discrimination, faculty and graduate student unions can better represent the full diversity of their membership.

Testimonials from faculty members within AEN's and ADL's networks are interspersed throughout this report. For confidentiality, we have removed identifying information such as names, unions, and campuses.

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"I understand from many colleagues that they have already left the union in large numbers due in large part to a June 2021 "Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People" of the Delegate Assembly. This highly controversial resolution...labeled Israel an "apartheid" state and encouraged chapters to debate supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement."

"I have been told that I am wrong for being "unwilling" to separate Israel and antisemitism, even though my own feelings of Judaism are connected to Israel."

"The term "Zionist" is applied as a slur if you express an opinion other than full condemnation of Israel"

"A union cannot credibly defend academic freedom while dismissing the life experience of its Jewish members."

"[The] union drafted a letter to the college's president objecting to the presence on campus of a former IDF soldier."

"The climate...has significantly worsened since October 7th."

"A delegate from my union local introduced a very extreme and one-sided resolution promoting the genocide libel against Israel."

"In short, the climate in my union local was quickly becoming toxic for Jewish members...I, myself, was labelled a "Zionist" and ousted from a leadership position. The climate eventually became so hostile...that I resigned from the local."

"The union has...supposedly embraced academic freedom but actually only for those who want to shut down and prevent people who are Zionist from teaching."

"The union has done little to nothing to combat antisemitism within its ranks."

"I no longer feel that the national organization can represent me equally...Union leadership has not addressed antisemitism with any seriousness or clarity."

Introduction

Faculty and graduate student unions have become increasingly important actors in higher education. Across the country, more faculty members, graduate workers, postdoctoral researchers, and other academic employees are organizing to improve wages, benefits, job security, workplace protections, and institutional accountability. This growth reflects legitimate and often urgent concerns about the changing nature of academic labor.

At the same time, higher education has become more polarized. Campus debates over Israel, Zionism, antisemitism, academic freedom, and political expression have intensified, particularly in the wake of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent Israel-Hamas war. These debates have not remained confined to classrooms, student organizations, or public demonstrations. They have increasingly entered faculty and graduate student unions, where labor advocacy, institutional politics, and campus activism now often intersect.

This report comes at a moment when those intersections require closer examination. Faculty and graduate student unions matter because they are not simply bargaining units. They shape institutional culture and affect the terms and substance of campus discourse. Their public statements, resolutions, endorsements, and internal governance decisions can signal who is included, whose concerns are taken seriously, and whether members with differing views feel able to participate fully.

In recent years, some academic unions have expanded their activism beyond traditional workplace priorities into fervent anti-Israel advocacy, sometimes in ways that are perceived as deeply biased and antisemitic. Although unions have long taken positions on broader questions of justice and public policy, this activism has made it harder for many Jewish members to participate in union life when positions on Israel, Zionism, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are adopted without meaningful member consensus, when Jewish members are marginalized or even attacked for speaking out, or when concerns about biased framing and antisemitic rhetoric are dismissed rather than taken seriously. In these circumstances, union spaces that are supposed to represent and protect all members can instead become places where Jewish faculty and graduate students feel pressured to self-censor, withdraw or risk hostility, silencing, and retaliation.

The purpose of this report is to examine these emerging concerns with care and specificity. It focuses on higher education unions, drawing from case studies, member experiences, public actions, incident reports, union materials, and governance practices over recent years. The report does not argue against unionization or collective bargaining. Rather, it asks how academic labor organizations can better fulfill their democratic and representative responsibilities in a polarized campus environment and meaningfully respond to the concerns of their Jewish members.

By identifying patterns, risks, and opportunities for reform, this report seeks to strengthen unions as inclusive institutions. Faculty and graduate student unions are most effective when they protect workers' rights, encourage broad participation, respect viewpoint diversity, and ensure that Jewish members, like all members, are heard, represented, and protected.

Emerging Trends in Faculty and Graduate Union Activity

Recent years have seen a marked increase in anti-Israel activity within faculty and graduate unions. These include boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) initiatives, one-sided statements on Israeli policy, and events and programming featuring anti-Israel narratives.

Perhaps the most significant shift has occurred within the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a union and membership association of faculty and other academic professionals with members and chapters at colleges and universities throughout the US. In 2024, the AAUP [reversed](#) its longstanding policy against academic boycotts, instead declaring that they “can be considered legitimate tactical responses to conditions that are fundamentally incompatible with the mission of higher education.” The newly stated position provides legitimacy to attempts to boycott Israeli academic institutions, despite the clear violation of academic freedom they represent.

The AAUP has also hosted virulently anti-Israel programming, such as a [2025 webinar on “scholasticide in Palestine,”](#) promoting the false narrative that Israel deliberately seeks to destroy the Palestinian educational system. Requests from organizations such as ADL and AEN for the AAUP to broaden its programmatic offerings to include differing perspectives were ignored.

Most recently, the AAUP provoked controversy by [endorsing](#) a political candidate for the first time. The decision to endorse Abdul El-Sayed, known for his virulent anti-Israel rhetoric, in Michigan’s 2026 Democratic Senate primary, demonstrated further insensitivity to the experiences and perspectives of Jewish and Zionist members. In addition, only [about 40](#) Michigan members of the AAUP had attended the July 2026 meeting during which they were polled on whether the national AAUP should endorse a political candidate, leading to questions about the representativeness of the decision to endorse, as well as the specific endorsement of El-Sayed.

The AAUP is not an isolated example. Similar patterns have emerged across faculty and graduate unions nationwide, suggesting a broader shift in how unions engage with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These trends include:

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“I’ve been a lifelong supporter of labor unions...that’s why it has been so painful since October 7 to see what has been happening with the AAUP. The AAUP does not seem to represent members like me anymore.”

“The academic blog that is published by the AAUP published an essay describing October 7 as a revolt and calling the claim of rampant campus antisemitism a big lie.”

Official BDS and Divestment Initiatives

One notable trend is the increasing use of unions to advance official BDS campaigns and institutional divestment efforts.

- Student Workers of Columbia (SWC), a union representing about 3,500 student workers, [voted](#) in favor of authorizing a strike in 2026, where the strike demands included calling for an academic and economic boycott of Israel.
- The California Faculty Association (CFA), representing 23 campuses, [passed](#) a 2025 resolution calling on the California State University (CSU) system to “immediately and permanently” terminate study abroad programs and institutional partnerships with Israeli universities, explicitly citing the AAUP’s revised position on academic boycotts and alleging Israeli “scholasticide,” “apartheid,” and “genocide.”
- At MIT, the Graduate Student Union (GSU) initially required its members to fund pro-BDS groups, before [being forced](#) to drop this policy by Jewish graduate students and their legal advocates.
- In 2024, the City University of New York (CUNY) faculty union [passed](#) a resolution supporting BDS and calling Israel an “apartheid...settler colonial state.”
- In 2024, Rutgers AAUP-AFT passed a [resolution](#) titled “Resolution on Divestment from Genocide in Gaza” that called for academic and economic boycotts of Israel.
- Cornell Graduate Students United [passed a referendum](#) to adopt a statement titled “International Solidarity with the Palestinian Liberation Struggle,” which endorsed boycotting Israeli academic and cultural institutions and divesting from Israeli companies, and also supported “[Palestinians] unequivocal human right to resist oppression by any means necessary,” which many believed was a promotion of terrorism and other forms of violence against Israelis and Jews.

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“At [a union] convention in October 2023 - which began just 17 days after October 7th - a delegate from my union local introduced a very extreme and one-sided resolution promoting the genocide libel against Israel...I led the fight against it and drafted an alternative substitute resolution that the delegates at the convention eventually adopted instead.”

“The first antisemitic, anti-Israel resolution was adopted about a month and a half after the [October 7] massacres...Originally, membership wasn’t told about it and when I brought that to the attention of the membership, I was accused of launching a hate campaign against the union.”

“The union has embraced BDS.”

Union Communications and Programming

Another emerging trend is the incorporation of anti-Israel advocacy into official union communications. As these positions become embedded in union-sponsored newsletters, webinars, conferences, training materials, and public campaigns, they carry the imprimatur of the organization rather than reflecting the views of its individual members. For many Jewish members, this can contribute to feelings of exclusion, marginalization, or pressure to conform to particular political positions as a condition for full participation in union activities.

Examples include:

- The Palestine, Arab and Muslim Caucus of the California Faculty Association [released](#) multiple official [statements](#) about the 2026 Iran war, describing the U.S. and Israel as “the most dangerous, utterly fascist and genocidal force in the world today,” condemning U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran, and calling for “resistance” against an “Imperialist-Zionist agenda.”
- In 2025, the Executive Board of the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union [voted](#) to endorse a statement and press release that stated, in part, “The Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union Executive Board condemns the recent non-reappointment of three adjunct faculty members and termination of a fourth at the City University of New York (CUNY), in what clearly appears to be retaliation for their public opposition to the ongoing Israeli genocide in Palestine...CUNY should defend the rights of its educators and students whose opposition to genocide and the ongoing Nakba is being smeared as antisemitic.” That same year, the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union [called on](#) Chancellor Rodríguez and the CUNY Board of Trustees to repost a job announcement that Governor Kathy Hochul had ordered Hunter College to remove because she considered it to be antisemitic. This followed a 2024 [incident](#), wherein the Rutgers AAUP-AFT Executive Council and Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union Executive Board endorsed the statement, “The IHRA Bills Are a Threat to Academic Freedom and Free Speech.”
- In 2024, the Santa Cruz Faculty Association co-authored Academic Senate resolutions condemning alleged “[scholasticide](#)” in Palestine and defending [anti-Zionist departmental positions and statements](#) as matters of academic freedom.

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“[The] union drafted a letter to the college’s president objecting to the presence on campus of a former IDF soldier.”

Integration with Campus Activism

Faculty and graduate unions have also increasingly partnered with activist organizations and incorporated anti-Israel activism into official union activities.

Examples include:

- The Student Workers of Columbia (SWC) has a long [history of anti-Israel activity](#), choosing to join the Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD) coalition, an anti-Israel campus group that includes Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). While the three groups are not recognized by Columbia and were therefore ineligible to organize protests, the connection to SWC allowed protests to be categorized as union actions. SWC's president was even expelled from campus following his participation in violent anti-Israel protests in 2024.
- The California Faculty Association and Students for Quality Education [reserved](#) campus space for Students for Justice in Palestine's (SJP) mock "apartheid wall" installation at San Diego State University.
- In 2025, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Students for Quality Education at Cal Poly, Humboldt held a protest on campus, where protestors called for divestment. Humboldt California Faculty Association President Ryder Dschida spoke, [expressing](#), "America has provided over \$21 billion in military aid to the Israeli government and [Israeli leader Benjamin] Netanyahu's government's ongoing so-called War in Gaza. Beginning on the seventh of October, 67,000 of Palestinians have been killed in this ruthless genocide... As a peace-loving person, I cannot and will not accept this. I cannot and will not support a genocide and its supporters."

Harassment and Hostility Toward Zionist Members

Faculty and graduate unions have also, at times, become environments in which Zionist members have reportedly faced derogatory rhetoric and hostility from union leaders or in official union communications. These incidents raise concerns about whether members who identify as Zionist can participate fully in union life without fear of intimidation or exclusion.

Examples include:

- At City College of San Francisco, a union leader reportedly called a Jewish instructor a "colonizer" and insulted her name during an interaction. The leader allegedly followed up by sending the instructor an email containing similar derogatory language.
- After Columbia University's Antisemitism Task Force recommended increasing viewpoint diversity by hiring Middle East scholars who were "not explicitly anti-Zionist," the Student Workers of Columbia (SWC) – the graduate student union – became the site of extensive derogatory commentary about Zionists in an official union group text. In a group chat, participants reportedly [mocked](#) the recommendation with comments such as "affirmative action for Zionist academics," referred to Zionism as equivalent to racism,

derided the concept of intellectual diversity on Zionism, and dismissed concerns raised in the Task Force report. Months later, an SWC board member cautioned participants to be careful about what they posted, while adding that they were personally comfortable saying “death to America” and “death to Israel” and describing Zionism as “Jewish supremacy” and “white supremacy.”

“I have been told that I am wrong for being “unwilling” to separate Israel and antisemitism, even though my own feelings of Judaism are connected to Israel.”

“The term “Zionist” is applied as a slur if you express an opinion other than full condemnation of Israel”

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“The climate in my union local [sic] was quickly becoming toxic for Jewish members...I, myself, was labelled a “Zionist” and ousted from a leadership position.”

“The union has...supposedly embraced academic freedom but actually only for those who want to shut down and prevent people who are Zionist from teaching. For example, a union member attacked my classroom...and the union did not defend me, but has rallied behind [the other member].”

Taken together, these examples illustrate the extent to which anti-Israel advocacy has become a prominent feature of many faculty and graduate unions’ public activities. This broader pattern is reflected in a [2026 study](#) of graduate student unions affiliated with teachers’ unions which publicly post information. It found that 76% had taken public positions critical of Israel and/or in support of Palestinians, with dozens and sometimes hundreds of public critical comments about Israel. This is in contrast to the much smaller percentage of public comments about the war in Ukraine or violence against anti-regime protesters in Iran.

Impacts and Effects

Taken together, these examples suggest that many faculty and graduate student unions have expanded beyond their traditional focus on workplace conditions, salaries and wages, employee benefits, professional standards, and academic freedom to take official positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, often adopting vehemently anti-Israel stances. This shift has a profound reputational impact - when union funds, networks, and official messaging platforms are used to support anti-Israel narratives, and when union leadership promotes, amplifies, and even initiates such campaigns, unions are no longer seen as impartial organizations seeking to support the professional and economic interests of their members. Rather, they are perceived - quite rightly - as politicized entities thereby making it easier for anti-union activists to weaken the power of unions.

Of course, in addition to reputational effects, the promotion of one-sided anti-Israel narratives within many unions leaves Jewish and Zionist members feeling marginalized and unrepresented. The singling out of Israel for condemnation, often with demonizing and delegitimizing rhetoric, is perceived by many as an attack on their identity. Some have reported that their concerns have been ignored, minimized, or even derided, and others have expressed reluctance to provide personal information to union leaders known to be radically anti-Israel. They do not feel represented in the union's negotiations with their universities, and many have withdrawn from leadership opportunities or other forms of participation within the union. This combination of hostility and indifference has led some Jewish and Zionist union members to reach out to [legal counsel](#) to ensure that they are not forced to pay union dues to support causes they feel are against their core beliefs.

The professional “homelessness” that has resulted from sustained hostility should be unacceptable to all who wish for an inclusive academy. [Public-sector unions face an additional constraint following the Supreme Court's decision in *Janus v. AFSCME* (2018), which held that nonmembers cannot be compelled to pay agency fees. As a result, unions have a direct financial incentive to ensure that all employees they represent - including those holding minority viewpoints within their membership - feel respected rather than alienated, since members who conclude that a union no longer represents them can withdraw both their affiliation and their financial support].

The adoption of highly polarized positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can have significant implications for internal union cohesion. Rather than fostering solidarity around shared workplace concerns, these campaigns may deepen divisions among members who hold diverse political views and identities. When union leadership prioritizes contentious geopolitical advocacy over traditional representational responsibilities, some members may question whether the union continues to reflect their interests and concerns. This can contribute to reduced participation in union activities, lower engagement in governance and leadership opportunities, and diminished confidence in the union's ability to represent its membership impartially. Over time, declining trust in leadership and weakening member engagement risk undermining the broad-based solidarity and collective purpose that are essential to an effective and representative union.

Reputational harm, declining member trust, reduced participation, and the alienation of Jewish and Zionist members risk weakening internal cohesion and undermining confidence in unions as representative organizations.

Taken together, these developments have significant consequences for unions and the broader academic community. Reputational harm, declining member trust, reduced participation, and the alienation of Jewish and Zionist members risk weakening internal cohesion and undermining confidence in unions as representative organizations. Over time, these effects may diminish unions' ability to effectively advocate for and unite the diverse constituencies they serve.

Why Academic Union Spaces Are Especially Vulnerable

Academic unions play an important role in protecting workers, improving workplace conditions, and giving faculty and graduate students a collective voice. But certain features of academic union governance and culture can also make these spaces especially vulnerable to ideological capture, biased anti-Israel activism, and antisemitism. These risks are particularly serious when union processes allow small groups to speak in the name of the entire membership, while Jewish members who object feel unable to participate without facing hostility or professional consequences.

Structural Features

Many unions, including higher education ones, are governed through systems with which most members rarely engage. Elections, membership meetings, committee processes, and votes on resolutions often have low turnout. As a result, a small number of highly motivated members can exert outsized influence over union priorities, leadership, and public positions. This can allow controversial political campaigns, including anti-Israel campaigns, to be advanced as though they reflect the views of the full membership when, in reality, many members may be unaware, disengaged, or reluctant to participate.

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“[In] May 2024, 21 of 35 union members who were present voted on behalf of our entire union local - at that time roughly 250 members - to endorse a statement in solidarity with student protests. The statement promoted the genocide libel against Israel, but it failed to condemn the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7th, 2023 or call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages abducted by Hamas. The statement also endorsed the demands of the student protestors, including the demand [to] cut all ties with Israeli institutions, which explicitly meant eliminating academic programs in which I was, and remain, actively involved.”

In 2021, the CUNY PSC Delegate Assembly adopted a “Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People” accusing Israel of being occupiers and an apartheid state. The vote occurred in the union’s representative Delegate Assembly – not through a vote of the entire membership – and afterwards hundreds of members objected that the resolution did not reflect the views of the broader union. The Executive Council reviewed this resolution, voted against it and proposed a substitute. PSC later published a forum containing numerous member responses, including criticism that there had been insufficient notice and little opportunity for broader membership discussion.

Rapid resolution processes can compound this problem. Statements or resolutions on Israel, Zionism, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be introduced, debated, and adopted quickly, with limited opportunity for scrutiny, amendment, or consultation with Jewish or other members with opposing viewpoints. When these processes move faster than members can

reasonably respond, they can produce inflammatory positions that dismiss Jewish concerns as merely political objections.

Procedural complexity also creates barriers to meaningful participation. Union bylaws, meeting rules, caucus structures, voting procedures, and amendment processes are likely unfamiliar to many members. Those who understand the rules can use them strategically to shape outcomes, while less versed members may find it difficult to intervene effectively. For Jewish faculty and graduate students, this complexity can make it especially difficult to challenge hostile and derogatory language, oppose biased resolutions, or object to processes that exclude their perspectives.

Cultural Features

Academic union spaces are shaped by the broader culture within academia, where there are often strong ideological pressures to conform to prevailing orthodoxies. In some settings, anti-Israel positions are framed as the only morally legitimate stance, while objections from Jewish members are dismissed as reactionary, privileged or made in bad-faith. This creates a climate in which Jewish members may feel that raising concerns about antisemitism carries professional risk and will lead to suspicion rather than serious engagement.

The blurring of labor advocacy and political activism heightens these risks. Unions exist to represent members in relation to their working conditions, but some academic unions increasingly take positions on global conflicts and political causes far removed from workplace representation. When anti-Israel advocacy becomes embedded in union activity, Jewish members may be forced to confront hostile political messaging in spaces meant to be utilized for workplace protection and collective bargaining.

Social media further intensifies this problem. Controversial and heated union meetings can now be amplified publicly, with remarks often cast in simplified or accusatory terms. Members who dissent from anti-Israel positions may be doxxed and stigmatized online. This creates reputational pressure and discourages open discussion, especially for members who fear being labeled as opponents of social justice simply for objecting to antisemitism, anti-Israel bias, or political advocacy.

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“On [the] delegate listserv, union members frequently speak against Israel, while rarely criticizing other foreign nations, and also promote the toxification of anything having to do with Israel or Jews...One delegate sent notification of a free June 15, 2026 webinar [titled] “Drop the ADL from Schools.”...The next day, [the delegate] sent information about a film detailing the “the nefarious, racist history of the ADL”...During a discussion of...a university-wide program to help such [Black] students, [a delegate] raised the irrelevant issue of a supposed lawsuit brought by a Jewish employer at [the] College alleging discrimination. [The delegate] added that this employee is “a Zionist.”

As highlighted in an earlier section of this report (see p. x), a related cultural problem is the growing expectation that unions should take positions on global issues unrelated to workplace concerns. Once this norm is established, silence on a particular controversial international issue may be viewed as complicity and an endorsement of the status quo. Members may then be pressured to support statements that do not reflect their views.

In the context of Israel and the Middle East conflict, such union activities can quickly become exclusionary for Jewish members, particularly when statements deny Jewish peoplehood, erase Jewish historical ties to Israel, or apply standards to Israel that are not applied to other nations or conflicts. Yet, it is important to also note that the effects of such advocacy are not limited to Jewish union members. When unions adopt official positions on contentious geopolitical issues that fall outside their core representational function, they may also alienate members who believe that the union should remain focused on workplace matters rather than political advocacy. For example, more than 170 members of MIT's Graduate Student Union (GSU) signed an open letter criticizing the union leadership for dedicating "significant time and resources to take a position on the Israel-Hamas war – deviating and detracting from the GSU's core mission of representing collective labor interests of all graduate students." The signatories concluded that this "has served to weaken our union and alienate its members," illustrating that the institutional consequences of mission drift extend beyond those directly affected by antisemitism and anti-Israel bias.

Misuse of Free Speech Frameworks

Free expression, open debate, and peaceful protest are foundational values within higher education and union life. Faculty, graduate students, and other academic employees must be able to criticize the institutions in which they work, organize politically, and express dissenting views without fear of punishment or suppression.

At the same time, protecting free expression does not require unions to tolerate antisemitism, identity-based harassment, intimidation, or exclusionary conduct directed at Jewish and Zionist members. Unions have an obligation not only to protect debate, but also to ensure that all faculty and graduate students can participate fully and safely in union activities without being targeted because of their identity, beliefs, or real or perceived support of Israel or Zionism.

Concerns about antisemitism are also sometimes framed reflexively as attempts to suppress political speech or censor criticism of Israel. This framing can itself become a barrier to meaningful discussion. Jewish members who report exclusion, hostility, or discriminatory treatment are not demanding their unions to prohibit disagreement; they are asking unions to recognize when conduct crosses the line from civil and respectful debate into hateful rhetoric and discriminatory conduct, including intimidation, exclusion, harassment, or retaliation.

Similarly, appeals to academic freedom should not assist union leadership in avoiding accountability for behavior that undermines equal participation within union spaces. Academic freedom protects inquiry, teaching, scholarship, and expression. It does not require unions to tolerate discriminatory conduct, such as targeted harassment or retaliation against members based on their identity or viewpoint.

Protecting free expression and addressing antisemitism are not incompatible goals. Strong unions and healthy academic communities must be able to do both simultaneously: preserve robust debate while ensuring that Jewish and Zionist members, like all members, can participate fully and safely without fear of intimidation, exclusion, or hostility.

Professional Vulnerabilities

Many members of academic unions occupy professionally vulnerable positions. Graduate students often depend on advisors, departments, funding committees, and recommendation letters. If union spaces become hostile to Jewish students and to those who object to antisemitism, they may reasonably fear that speaking up could affect their professional relationships, success in their academic programs, or future career trajectories.

Junior and contingent faculty face similar concerns and more acute risks than full-time, tenured faculty. Tenure, promotion, publication opportunities, and scholarly reputation depend on strong professional networks and are often influenced by the judgments of colleagues and the field's senior academics. A junior or contingent faculty member who challenges antisemitism or anti-Israel bias within their union may worry that they will be seen as "difficult" or out of step with prevailing disciplinary perspectives. Even when retaliation is not explicit, the fear of professional consequences can be enough to silence participation.

These vulnerabilities create a chilling effect. Jewish faculty and graduate students may avoid union meetings, decline to participate in caucuses, remain silent during votes, or withdraw from union life altogether. The result is a cycle in which the members most in need of union support are less able to contest antisemitism and anti-Israel bias, while the union becomes increasingly dominated by those who face fewer risks in advancing radical positions.

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"Following October 7...I quit the organization and canceled my \$50/month support of the chapter."

"I understand from many colleagues that they have already left the union in large numbers due in large part to a June 2021 "Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People" of the Delegate Assembly. This highly controversial resolution...labeled Israel an "apartheid" state and encouraged chapters to debate supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement."

"The climate eventually became so hostile...that I resigned from the local [sic]."

For these reasons, antisemitism in union spaces is not only a matter of individual bias or isolated misconduct. It is also a structural problem. Low participation, procedural opacity, ideological conformity, public reputational pressure, and professional dependency can combine to make academic unions uniquely difficult spaces for Jewish members to navigate. When unions fail to recognize these dynamics, they risk abandoning their core obligation: to represent and protect all members equally.

Conclusion

Higher education unions can be powerful engines of democratic representation. They are strongest when they bring members together across differences and give them a shared voice in the conditions that shape their professional lives.

Fostering and advancing this democratic purpose depends on equal belonging and parity of participation for all, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, or national origin. Jewish faculty and graduate students cannot be expected to participate fully in union life if doing so means entering spaces where antisemitism is tolerated, their concerns are dismissed, or their identities and lived experiences are treated as suspect and illegitimate. When that happens, the problem is not only harm to individual members; it is a union failure.

The task ahead is therefore not limited to responding to particular incidents after they occur in piecemeal fashion. Addressing the problem requires unions to examine the conditions that allow exclusionary dynamics to develop and to ensure that their processes, culture, and advocacy remains accountable to all members.

If unions are to speak in the name of their members, they must ensure that Jewish members are not pushed to the margins of that collective voice. The goal is not special treatment, but equal membership: the ability to participate, dissent, and be represented without fear of exclusion or retaliation.

Addressing the problem requires unions to examine the conditions that allow exclusionary dynamics to develop and to ensure that their processes, culture, and advocacy remains accountable to all members.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are intended for three key audiences: union members, union leaders, and university administrators. While each has distinct responsibilities, all have an important role to play in preventing and addressing antisemitism and anti-Israel bias within higher education unions. Taken together, these recommendations provide practical steps that each group can take - individually and collectively - to promote inclusive union environments, strengthen accountability and ensure that unions remain representative of, and responsive to, all members.

For Union Members

Jewish and Zionist faculty and graduate students who are concerned about antisemitism within union spaces are not powerless. Unions are democratic institutions, and members have meaningful opportunities to shape governance, advocate for change, build support, and strengthen inclusive representation from within. Many of the most effective responses involve sustained engagement with union structures, processes, and leadership rather than disengagement and resignation from the union. AEN's faculty members have often been able to address antisemitism and anti-Israel bias by working within their unions to build coalitions and to field counter-campaigns and materials. ADL's [union toolkit](#) similarly emphasizes that informed and organized member participation is often the most effective way to challenge exclusionary practices and restore unions to their core representative mission.

➤ Know the Union and its Processes

Effective advocacy begins with understanding how the union operates. Members should familiarize themselves with union constitutions, bylaws, committee structures, election rules, and procedures governing resolutions, endorsements, and public statements. These rules often determine where authority resides, how proposals move forward, and what opportunities exist for intervention.

It is especially important to identify where and when major decisions are actually made. Depending on the union, authority may rest primarily with executive boards, delegate assemblies, representative councils, caucuses, committees, or national conventions rather than with the general membership as a whole. Members should also pay close attention to notice requirements, voting procedures, amendment deadlines, and meeting dates and schedules, particularly where controversial resolutions involving Israel, Zionism, or antisemitism are likely to arise.

A working knowledge of procedures and governing rules can significantly improve members' ability to participate effectively, challenge procedural irregularities, and advocate for fairer processes.

➤ Engage Early and Strategically

Concerns are often more effectively addressed before a vote or public action occurs than after a controversial resolution, statement, or policy has already been adopted. Members should engage early when divisive proposals emerge and encourage broader deliberation before the union adopts positions that may alienate portions of its membership.

Where appropriate, members may wish to raise process-based concerns regarding inadequate notice, rushed deliberation, lack of consultation with affected constituencies, procedural irregularities, or the appropriateness of using union resources and authority to advance highly divisive geopolitical advocacy unrelated to core workplace representation.

Arguments grounded in union process, democratic legitimacy, member cohesion, and the union's mission are often more persuasive and less polarizing than are arguments framed solely as ideological disagreements. More on the importance of process-based and union-centered advocacy, including appeals to solidarity, procedural fairness, and the union's representative responsibilities can be found in ADL's toolkit for union members [here](#).

➤ Organize Internally

Individual members often face significant barriers when acting alone. Building organized networks within unions can therefore be critical to ensuring that Jewish and Zionist voices are represented consistently and effectively.

AEN members and those in ADL's networks have found it helpful to form caucuses, affinity groups, employee resource groups, or informal organizing networks focused on inclusion, antisemitism awareness, and fair representation within union spaces. These groups can help monitor resolutions, coordinate advocacy, share information, mobilize participation, support affected members, and build sustained institutional presence within union governance structures. As an example, see the impactful work opposing antisemitism and anti-Israel bias in the PSC union undertaken in recent years by the [CUNY Alliance for Inclusion](#), a faculty group spearheaded by AEN members.

Coalition-building is equally important. Long-term change is more likely when concerns about antisemitism are understood not as isolated concerns for Jewish members alone, but as issues connected to broader principles of inclusion, non-discrimination, democratic participation, and fair representation. Building relationships across ideological, religious, racial, and identity-based communities where possible can help strengthen credibility, reduce isolation, and broaden support for inclusive governance norms.

Members should also encourage broader participation in elections, meetings, and internal governance processes. Low-turnout systems are often especially vulnerable to capture by highly organized activist factions. Increased engagement by a wider cross-section of members can help produce more representative outcomes and strengthen democratic legitimacy.

➤ **Lead With Union Values**

Advocacy is often most effective when framed in terms of the union's own stated values and responsibilities. Concerns about antisemitism, exclusion, or biased anti-Israel activism should be connected to principles such as solidarity, equal representation, inclusion, democratic accountability, and institutional cohesion.

Unions are strongest when all members believe they are represented fairly and can participate meaningfully without fear of hostility, intimidation, or marginalization. Efforts to single out, exclude, or alienate Jewish or Zionist members undermine solidarity and weaken trust in union leadership and governance.

Arguments grounded in the union's core workplace mission may also resonate more broadly across the membership. Many members who do not share identical political views may nonetheless agree that unions function best when they remain focused on workplace representation, member welfare, academic freedom, and fair governance rather than divisive geopolitical activism that fractures membership cohesion.

➤ **Document and Escalate Thoughtfully**

Members who experience or observe antisemitic conduct, such as exclusionary practices, retaliation, or procedural irregularities, should preserve relevant communications, meeting materials, resolutions, public statements, and social media activity where appropriate. Accurate documentation can be important both for internal advocacy and for potential follow-up institutional, legal, or public accountability efforts.

Where available, members may choose to utilize internal complaint procedures, ethics processes, non-discrimination policies, or governance review mechanisms. In some circumstances, outside legal guidance, advocacy support, or consultation with civil rights organizations may also be appropriate.

In cases involving particularly serious exclusionary conduct, harassment, or misuse of institutional authority, members may also ask academic institutions themselves to speak publicly or intervene appropriately, particularly where union activity affects campus climate, equal participation, or institutional non-discrimination obligations.

To report an incident to the ADL, please visit: <https://www.adl.org/report-incident>. If you are interested in accessing legal services, you can file a report via our Legal Action Network, a free national rapid-response system: <https://www.adl.org/adl-legal-action>.

Experiencing hostility within a union can lead to feelings of alienation and isolation and the need to seek out a like-minded network or community. Faculty and advanced graduate students can reach out to the Academic Engagement Network (AEN): <https://academicengagement.org/contact/>

➤ **Seek Representation and Long-Term Institutional Change**

One of the most effective ways to influence union culture and decision-making is sustained participation in union governance itself. Members should consider running for

union office, serving as delegates, joining committees, participating in caucuses, and helping shape leadership pipelines over time.

Increased engagement can also create opportunities for constructive relationship-building across institutions and communities, including stronger professional and academic connections with Israeli scholars, universities, labor organizations, and academic institutions. Personal narratives from Jewish and Zionist faculty and graduate students regarding the real-world impact of hostility, exclusion, or antisemitism within union spaces can also play an important role in changing perceptions and broadening understanding among colleagues.

For Union Leadership

Union leadership bears a particular responsibility to ensure that unions remain representative, inclusive, and focused on the fair treatment of all members. Leadership decisions, governance practices, public statements, and institutional priorities all shape whether Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist members feel fully represented within union life or increasingly marginalized from it.

> Recommit to Representing All Members

Union leaders should recognize that membership is ideologically, politically, and culturally diverse. Highly contentious positions on Israel, Zionism, or related geopolitical issues should not automatically be treated as reflecting broad member consensus, particularly where participation levels are low or substantial disagreement exists within the membership.

Leaders should take seriously the concerns of Jewish and Zionist members who report exclusion, hostility, intimidation, or discriminatory treatment within union spaces. This includes ensuring that members are meaningfully heard during internal deliberations and that standards governing harassment, civility, and inclusion are applied consistently across all identity groups and political viewpoints.

A union cannot credibly claim to represent all members equally if some members believe they must remain silent, disengage, or conceal aspects of their identity in order to participate safely and meaningfully in union life.

> Improve Governance Practices

Union legitimacy depends not only on outcomes, but also on the fairness and transparency of internal processes. Leadership should therefore ensure meaningful notice periods for major resolutions, particularly on highly divisive geopolitical issues that may significantly affect union cohesion and member participation.

Procedures for debate, amendment, and voting should be transparent, orderly, and accessible to the broader membership. Rushed votes, surprise resolutions, procedural confusion, or highly polarized meeting environments can undermine confidence in union governance and create perceptions that outcomes are predetermined or unrepresentative.

Leadership should also avoid scheduling major votes or meetings on the Jewish Sabbath or Jewish religious holidays and should consider whether procedural practices unintentionally exclude observant Jewish members or other constituencies from meaningful participation.

Neutral facilitation practices and consistent enforcement of civility standards are especially important during contentious debates. Members across viewpoints should be able to participate without fear of intimidation, personal attacks, retaliation, or public targeting.

Focus on Core Union Mission

Academic unions exist first and foremost to represent members in matters relating to wages, benefits, working conditions, academic labor protections, professional security, and workplace rights. Union leadership should carefully evaluate whether official union engagement on highly polarizing geopolitical conflicts advances these core institutional responsibilities or instead creates avoidable division within the membership.

This does not mean unions must avoid all public advocacy beyond collective bargaining issues. However, leaders should recognize that repeated engagement in divisive geopolitical activism may alienate substantial portions of the membership, weaken solidarity, and distract from the union's central representative mission.

Unions are often strongest when they focus on the workplace concerns that unite members across differing political perspectives rather than adopting positions on issues that many members view as unrelated to core labor representation.

Strengthen Inclusion Efforts

Antisemitism should be addressed explicitly within broader inclusion and anti-bias initiatives. Efforts to combat discrimination within union spaces should include recognition of contemporary forms of antisemitism, including those that may arise in the context of Israel- and Zionism-related discourse.

Union leadership should also establish clear, accessible pathways for members to report exclusionary conduct, harassment, retaliation, or discriminatory treatment. Complaints involving antisemitism should be treated seriously and consistently rather than dismissed reflexively as political disagreement.

When concerns arise, leaders should engage directly with affected members and constituencies rather than speaking about them without their participation. Meaningful engagement requires listening seriously to members who feel marginalized and taking concrete steps to ensure that union spaces remain inclusive, representative, and safe for all participants. As one union member stated: "Reach out to those who need support. When [my national union president] heard about the difficulties I was experiencing in my union local [sic], she called me...to express support and ask what she could do for me. That call meant a lot to me. It raised my spirits at a time when it seemed like many, many people in my union were taking a stand against me."

For Universities

Although faculty and graduate student unions are institutionally independent organizations, universities nonetheless have important responsibilities when union activities contribute to exclusionary climates, disrupt educational environments, or affect the ability of students, faculty, and staff to participate fully in campus life.

> Protect Campus Climate While Respecting Autonomy

Universities should respect the autonomy of unions and the rights of faculty and graduate students to organize, advocate, and engage in protected political expression. At the same time, institutions of higher education retain independent responsibilities to maintain non-discriminatory educational and workplace environments for all members of their campus communities.

University leadership should monitor situations in which union conflicts spill over into departments, classrooms, hiring processes, advising relationships, student experiences, or broader campus climate. Institutions should enforce non-discrimination and anti-harassment standards consistently, regardless of the political context in which concerns arise.

Protecting free expression and academic freedom remains essential. Universities should avoid suppressing protected expression or political disagreement merely because issues are controversial. However, institutions of higher education cannot ignore conduct that involves harassment, intimidation, retaliation, or discriminatory exclusion affecting students, faculty, or staff. Nor should universities remain silent when rhetoric is antisemitic, and thus inconsistent with institutional values, even if it may not violate a university policy or code of conduct. Universities can and must use their voice to condemn antisemitism, reaffirm expectations of inclusion and equal participation, and make clear that protected expression is not the same as expression that merits institutional endorsement.

> Support Constructive Engagement

Universities can also play an important role in reducing polarization and encouraging constructive engagement during periods of significant campus conflict. Institutions of higher education should consider supporting mediation resources, facilitated dialogue initiatives, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and opportunities for sustained cross-community engagement.

Institutional neutrality may often be appropriate with respect to contested geopolitical topics themselves. However, institutional neutrality should not prevent universities from speaking clearly when union activity contributes to hostile campus climates.

Where unions engage in rhetoric or conduct that reflects bias or hostility toward their Jewish or Zionist members, university leadership should be prepared to reaffirm institutional commitments to inclusion, equal participation, academic freedom, and nondiscrimination. Silence in the face of such union activities may itself contribute to perceptions that antisemitism is being minimized or treated differently from other forms of bias.



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