



MICKELODEON

Arrete de branler les couilles et au boulot

State of the Union

Having got bored of boycotting their own work in this country, lecturing über-Union NATFHE have gone international.

Don't worry, I'm not going to bleat on about the assessment of our exams again. Who needs to criticise the union for that, when it is lining itself up for criticism with their boycott of sections of Israeli academia that won't publicly distance themselves from 'Israeli apartheid policies'? Blimey. Good to see that isn't an emotionally loaded proposition that was put before the conference. It's pretty much the same as insisting that British academics have to proclaim their opposition to the War in Iraq to not be ostracized from their peers.

Is this really the academic way to get things done? To bar one side from even taking part in the debate on the future of the region goes against the principles they profess to be protecting. Barring one side of the debate means there is no debate at all.

The importance of freedom of expression is not an abstract concept; it is the concrete basis for peace

Even while freedoms may be curtailed on the ground, the benefit of academia is that it comprises its own self-contained realm of discussion - and freedom of expression is essential to make that work. The Oslo peace process, for example, was kickstarted by links between Israeli and Palestinian academics. The importance of freedom of expression is not an abstract concept; it is the concrete basis for peace.

Instead, the union is trying to introduce politics into academia. Was I the only person who thought the point of a union was to represent their members' interests in employment matters?

Anyway, in a thoroughly unusual piece of timing, the union doesn't actually exist any more. My favourite inept unions NATFHE and AUT merged last Thursday to create the UCU, so this is the last chance they had to create such a hate-filled



FENCE: Lecturers not fans

message.

Interestingly it is almost exactly a year since a boycott of Israeli academics by the AUT was overturned in the name of freedom of speech.

But the topic is muddled somewhat as there is more than one debate going on. There's the question of freedom of expression; but underlying it there is also a debate going on about the validity of the state of Israel.

Regardless of what you think of the unions choosing to boycott Israeli academics, there is little doubt that the real arguments going on here are about the political hue of the unions rather than a great defence of freedom.

I'm not going to suggest that there is something anti-Semitic underlining the action. But why has Israel been singled out? Why not Russia or China?

It has been argued that Israel is different as Israeli academics are in a unique position of being free to criticise the creation of the security fence. An academic in China is not going to have the same freedom to criticise the state. But the AUT also supports the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, in defence of the socialist state. Cuba is hardly world-renowned for upholding academic freedom.

Instead the dividing lines of what the unions are willing to support or criticise are arguments professing a concern for freedom of expression, when all they really do is reinforce casual stereotyping of the political spectrum.

Still, every cloud has a silver lining. With the unions fighting themselves, their united front on negotiations over pay here stands a greater chance of collapsing.

Lending patriotism

Celtic head-scratching ahoy for the next couple of weeks, as Wales and Scotland have to decide whether or not they support the ol' enemy of England in the World Cup.

This may sound like a rather minor thing, but in the minds of politicians, football seems to be perceived as a chance to connect with the 'working man'. Think Gordon Brown's revelation that his underwear all comes from M&S, or David Cameron's choice of Benny Hill to play on *Desert Island Discs*.

They're all about the grand political gestures, appealing to an electorate that politicians appear to think consists entirely of working men's clubs and bored housewives, flicking through *Bella* and *Pick Me Up*.

It's Rhodri Morgan's turn next, with Wales's First Minister announcing that while he'll support England, he's going to support their opposition if the fans

start causing trouble.

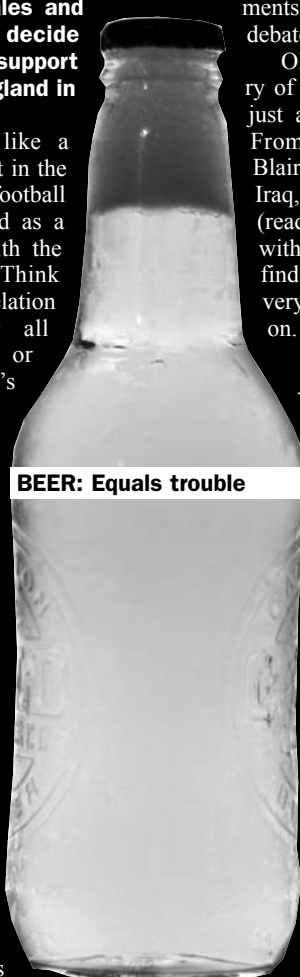
Hardly the most constructive comments to be making on the debate, is it?

Old Rhodders has a history of sitting on the fence on just about any topic going. From whether to support Blair and the invasion of Iraq, to the lecturers' boycott (read next week's interview with the First Minister to find out more), the fence is very much there to be sat on.

So why couldn't he just keep his trap shut now as well?

There was no gain to be made from making such a ridiculous statement about England fans making 'trouble'.

All it's done is ignore the enormous efforts that the authorities have gone to here to prevent hooligans travelling to the event from England, as well as reinforcing the impression that England fans are a bigger problem than their violent counterparts in countries such as the Netherlands.



BEER: Equals trouble

LEARNAGE

THIS IS the last Mickelodeon; apparently the 'odeon' suffix is too tabloid for next week's fancy effort. So I'm taking this last opportunity to impart what I've learnt in my time here.

- There is nay a boy in this university who hasn't used hair straighteners at least once.
- It takes exactly two years to plan how to open a burger bar.
- If you took all the Bob Marley posters from first years' bedrooms and laid them end to end, you'd probably get arrested.
- You never really made it to the second year unless you completed the Blackweir Tavern Challenge (39 minutes - have it). Its end was the biggest loss to Welsh culture since the passing of Owain Glyndwr.
- If you're going to crap yourself and lie outside the front of the Union, don't wear white trousers (fortunately not from personal experience).
- Need to ask IT about a problem? Don't bother, they really do not care.
- You will never again live somewhere with so many greengrocers.



MARLEY: Big in Talybont

- Friday nights may come and go but Factory is for life.
- There isn't a famous person alive who the Welsh won't try and lay ownership to. My favourite from famouswelsh.com: 'Cilla Black, one Welsh grandparent'.
- That whilst there may be departments for Japanese, Archaeology or most fantastically Astrobiology, you will never meet anyone who studies them.
- If you miss Mr Scruff now, he'll probably be on again within the fortnight.
- Without departmental secretaries, the uni would probably collapse within 15 minutes. Now THAT'S a strike people would notice.
- That after four years here, the only Welsh words I know are for: disabled, fire exit, people of the valley, free word, Wales, Cardiff, Monmouthshire. This has, or will never hinder me in life.
- No-one really knows what the All Nations Centre or the Temple of Peace and Health actually do, but they have lovely names.
- However ropery our university may be at times, our Union beats 14 kinds of crap out of every other one in the country.