

## **BRICUP Document**

# **National and International Condemnation of the Sacking of Professor David Miller by the University of Bristol**

**Below are selected extracts of some of the letters to the Vice-Chancellor, senior management and Trustees at the University of Bristol that have been copied to BRICUP. These were copied to BRICUP (British Committee for the Universities of Palestine) in response to our national and international notification to colleagues. We have received scores of such copies but have no knowledge of the actual number of protests that have been sent to the University.**

**Colleagues will register not only the geographical breadth and the educational and intellectual intensity of these concerns but also their focus on the threat to debate and scholarship, free of corporate or state interference, that Bristol's action represents.**

### **From Guelph, Canada**

I am writing to urge to you to reverse the grotesquely unjust dismissal of Professor David Miller, and to reinstate him immediately.

As you must be aware, the accusations of antisemitism levelled against Professor Miller were wholly spurious. He is a scholar of high international standing whose research - ironically enough - includes scrupulous analyses of precisely the kind of neo-McCarthyist pressure campaigns that have been directed against him. You and the rest of the administration of Bristol University have ignominiously succumbed to those pressures: I call on you and your colleagues to find the courage to act according to the principles of academic freedom and justice, and the easily ascertained facts of the case. I call on you to reverse a decision that has brought Bristol University into international disrepute. ...

It is important that your administration - and the members of your Board of Trustees - should understand that there is a well-established correlation between the acknowledged excellence of a university and its administration's readiness to defend faculty members from precisely the kind of campaign that the UK's Israel lobby directed against Professor Miller. Your administration's treatment of David Miller has done serious damage to Bristol University's international reputation.

Professor Miller will have recourse to the procedural and legal remedies at his disposal. But what can the members of the wider "republic of letters" (as Renaissance humanists called it) do when our fundamental principles are so flagrantly violated? We can make the shameful facts widely known, and we can refuse any participation in the university's activities (in such matters as external examinations and external assessments of promotions). ...

I hope you will have the good sense to behave more expeditiously in reversing your dismissal of Professor David Miller. Until I hear that he has been reinstated, with due compensation for the expenses he has incurred in resisting his dismissal, I will be supporting any movement among British academics toward a full boycott of your university.

**From Manchester, UK,**

To deprive a colleague of his livelihood is a very serious matter, as is the contravention of the basic principles of academic freedom. Ostensibly it seems as though Professor Miller has been sacked because he is an effective critic of Israel and its attempt to demonise Palestinian supporters as anti-semitic. ...

In the name of rational and evidential debate, I hope that you do not give in to the various political interests that want to silence one voice of critical reason.

**From Northridge, California,**

... and to apologize to him for the shabby treatment he has received from Bristol University. The fact that no unlawful or hate-speech was found in this case, and that the University's own legal expert cleared Professor Miller, makes it clear that the actions against him were undertaken solely for the purpose of censoring legitimate analyses and criticisms of Israeli policies.

It is unconscionable that university administrators would sacrifice fundamental principles of academic freedom ... Failure to rectify this situation will likely undermine Bristol University's credibility as an academic institution.

**From Israel,**

As an Israeli citizen concerned about my country's systematic dispossession, oppression and discrimination of the Palestinian people, I deplore the attempts at labelling criticism of Israel as antisemitism.

I read about the dismissal of Professor David Miller, and both in the name of truth and in the name of freedom of speech, especially in the academic field, I would like to request that you reverse the decision to dismiss Professor Miller.

**From Long Beach, California,**

It is at times like this that institutions such as yours need to stand up even more forcefully for the academic freedom and just plain free speech rights of your faculty. Please reverse your decision and make a clear statement condemning this attempt to censor one of your professors for speech which is lawful.

**From Perth and Kinross, Scotland,**

I am writing to you to protest in the strongest possible terms the disgraceful decision by the University to fire Professor David Millar. Such an action represents a threat to academic freedom and denial of the rights of academics to study and freely express themselves, not just on Palestine but on other issues relating to freedom and justice. ...

... The only plausible interpretation of your deliberately obscure reasoning for firing Professor Millar is that Professor Miller's forthright description of the ways in which Israel and its supporters manage and limit the news agenda had disturbed some students and powerful institutions. ...

**From San Francisco, California,**

I write in shock over the contract termination for Professor David Miller. It is my understanding that no unlawful speech was found in this case, according to Bristol's own legal experts. The attack on academic freedom that this represents is quite simply appalling. Dismissing him seems intended to impose a gag rule over all of academia, in which nothing critical can be said about Israel and especially its propagandistic activities in other countries such as the UK. Bristol should recognize that in the end, it will not achieve its intended aim of silencing thoughtful, incisive, and well-evidenced work on Israeli criminal activities, and will have the effect of damaging the credibility of your university across the world. ...

**From Waterloo, Canada,**

I am writing to ask you to reconsider the decision to fire Professor David Miller. Prof Miller is a respected scholar in his field whose work is valuable to advancing the democratic goals of British, and all, societies. The University has provided no reasonable explanation for his firing, ... It is truly a sad day for your students, faculty and staff, as they witness such arbitrary action taken against a member of their community who has contributed to nurturing critical engagement with important world issues. You have an opportunity to reverse this travesty of justice. ...

**From London, UK,**

I write to say how appalled I am at your decision to sack Professor David Miller for his exposé of the Zionist lobby. Counsel had advised he had no case to answer in law and that nothing he said was anti-Semitic (which you did not mention in your statement). So the charge of anti-Semitism against him is baseless and your decision to dismiss him amounts to a blatant attack on the very same academic freedoms you purport to defend and hold so dear. ...

**From California, USA**

I write as a fellow academic ... to protest at your University's treatment of Professor Miller. As I understand the situation, Professor Miller has been fired for unspecified reasons, following an investigation by your own legal experts which cleared him of racism in his critical comments about Israel. As I'm sure you would agree, it is essential that academics should feel free to discuss and debate controversial issues without fear of arbitrary punishment, but, at least to this outsider, his dismissal smacks of a witch-hunt which reflects badly on Bristol's reputation.

**From La Paz, Bolivia,**

... While I understand fully how powerful and persuasive certain arguments and threats can be, I also believe it is incumbent upon education leaders such as yourselves to adhere to principles of fairness, equity, and inclusion. It's critical that academic leaders champion not only academic freedom and freedom of speech, but also the rights of those who are unrepresented, silenced, downtrodden, and oppressed. ...

### **From Pennsylvania, USA**

I find it astonishing and reprehensible that the University of Bristol has chosen to sack Professor David Miller, even after your own enquiry found that he had not said anything that might be understood to be anti-Semitic. ...

Universities need to defend academic freedom and the responsibility of their faculty to investigate and comment upon manifest wrongs in the world; that Bristol has chosen to cave in to demands made by politicians and lobbyists reflects very poorly on your commitment.

### **From Brighton, UK**

I am writing ... to protest the sacking of Professor David Miller announced by the University of Bristol on 1st October. ... I see from your University's statement that (your) investigation has concluded, on the basis of independent legal advice, that Prof Miller's utterances "did not constitute unlawful speech". I am, therefore, shocked and deeply concerned that the University has decided nonetheless to terminate his employment on the nebulous grounds that his "standards of behaviour" have fallen short, in an unspecified manner, of your University's "codes of conduct" and "duty of care", which also lack specificity. ...

... You should be in no doubt that, as Vice Chancellor of the University of Bristol, your institution's actions in this case effect the very opposite and constitute a significant attack on these very principles, both in their general intent to defend the right of academics to teach and research free from any political pressure that would silence dissent, and in particular with respect to those many reputable academics like Prof Miller who speak out in support of Palestinian human rights and national rights, and whose research uncovers demonstrable truths about the State of Israel and the functioning of its legitimating ideology in opposition to those rights.

... Rather than encouraging this kind of open and informed debate on these issues, the University of Bristol has, by its action in sacking Prof Miller, sought to stifle this necessary debate and profoundly damaged the culture of academic freedom and freedom of speech essential to it. It has thereby encouraged similar complaints and campaigns of vilification designed to silence certain kinds of critical enquiry, argument and debate on other university campuses. This can only bring the University of Bristol into national and international disrepute. I urge you to reconsider this damaging course of action and rescind the sacking of Prof Miller.

### **From Berkley, California,**

Like many free thinking academics, I am appalled that the University of Bristol would dismiss an academic like Professor Miller. ...

Your bureaucratic actions undermine Bristol University's credibility as an academic institution, and harm freedom of speech and academic freedom in general, and especially in the UK. ...

### **From Lewes, East Sussex, UK**

I am writing to you and your colleagues to register my shock and concern at the recent news that the University of Bristol has sacked Professor David Miller.

The decision to dismiss an academic simply for expressing ideas seems to me both illiberal and censorial and to have ominously McCarthyite overtones. It represents a serious undermining of traditions of free speech and the openness of academic debate and sets a worrying precedent for British Universities at a time when rational public discussion of complex issues is becoming ever more difficult to achieve.

... with forty years of experience as a teacher in higher and adult education ... I have always held to the view that education worth the name is about fostering - not silencing - critical intelligence. ...

**From Canada,**

As a former University President, I am appalled by the dismissal of Professor Miller from Bristol University. Here on the continent the historical precedents for dismissing university professors are so grave that we feel that it should be done only with the utmost reluctance and after a well-documented and open process. We find that the argument given by Bristol University, namely that "Professor Miller did not meet the standards of behaviour we expect from our staff", do not meet the standards of behaviour we expect from universities. Indeed, the charge is so vague and unsubstantiated that it can apply to anyone, and opens the door to all kinds of wrongful dismissals. We are aware that there is an ongoing campaign to accuse Professor Miller of antisemitism, and the dismissal of Professor Miller without further explanation can only be understood as confirming the antisemitism charge. ...

It is in the long-term interest of all universities, including Bristol, that you rescind the dismissal of Professor Miller.

**From UK,**

... The university statement says only that that the hearing "found Professor Miller did not meet the standards of behaviour we expect from our staff". Nothing more. The only plausible interpretation of this deliberately obscure remark is that Professor Miller's forthright description of the ways in which Israel and its supporters manage and limit the news agenda had disturbed some students and powerful institutions. Paradoxically what has happened to David Miller is thus a case study in the sort of influence that he has analysed. The essence of this case is that a faculty member has been dismissed – not for improper behaviour, not for unlawful speech, but because enough powerful people have made the University too frightened to stick to its principles. ...

**From London, UK,**

As an Israeli human right activist, I am appalled by the abrupt sacking of Professor David Miller on the elusive **and inexplicable** grounds that "he did not meet the standards of behaviour we expect from our staff". ...

I urge the renowned University of Bristol not to bring its name into disrepute. Please listen to the eminent academics who strongly support the freedom of speech and academic expression and reinstate Professor David Miller without further delay.

**From Brighton, UK,**

I wish to express my outrage at the sacking of Professor Miller by the University of Bristol.

... an academic of 40 years standing at the Institute of Education (UCL), University of Sussex, and University of Brighton ... I cannot recall such an unsupported attack on academic freedom of speech at a UK institution, and one of such appalling misjudgement as the one shown by your University.

I say this as someone whose family were political refugees from apartheid South Africa, and who experienced similar attacks ... . We were welcomed into the UK where the values were clearly an acceptance of the importance in a liberal democracy of the freedom of speech not only of individuals, but especially, those of University academics. ...

**From Burlington, Vermont, USA**

... Scholars such as Professor David Miller have provided me and my students with a deft critical lens for untangling claims and for exploring standpoints, such as the standpoint of Palestinian dispossession, largely excluded from mainstream political reporting.

I am thus writing to urge you to overturn the inexplicable decision to dismiss Professor Miller from the University of Bristol. Nothing in Professor Miller's scholarship, public intellectualism, and teaching has been found to support claims of anti-Semitism - unless all forms of open scholarly inquiry into the nature and practices of the Israeli state are to be conflated with "hate speech" and banned.

The dismissal of Professor Miller is a stain on the reputation of the University of Bristol and an assault on academic freedom. ...

**From Leeds, UK**

I am writing to protest at the recent dismissal of the eminent sociologist Professor David Miller. I note that the University of Bristol has not detailed the reasons why Professor Miller has been dismissed. Moreover, the senior council employed to investigate Professor Miller found that he was not guilty of anything unlawful, including the spurious accusation against him of hate speech. This case has already seriously undermined Bristol University's credibility, and it poses an immense challenge to institutions of higher education that try to deliver learning and teaching with protection of academic freedom and freedom of speech.

### **From Exeter, UK**

1. British universities pursue knowledge in teaching and research. That pursuit is only possible through academic freedom, which you appear not to have respected. This freedom is valuable beyond price, ...
2. Pressure groups exist to exert pressure; universities exist to pursue knowledge. If universities cave in to pressure groups, then they are reduced to the shouting matches on social media. As I understand it from *The Guardian*, Sussex University recently stood by a philosophy professor who offended a trans pressure group. Sussex is right; Bristol is wrong.
3. There are many pressures on British universities. I was a member of the Senior Management Group for a time and am well aware of the challenges ... faced at that time. Nothing that arose in the period, which included closing departments and academic jobs, comes remotely close to Professor Miller's right to conduct his research and to teach within the constraints of UK law and peer review.

### **From Jerusalem,**

I have been to Bristol University on several occasions and was quite impressed not only with the campus (especially Wills Tower) but with the programs offered.

I am writing, though, with concern of the recent firing of Professor David Miller. The case against him seems to not be one that has any merit. It also seems to negate the Professors' academic freedom. Should the ruling hold it would not be a good reflection on the University.

### **From Cape Town, South Africa**

... It is with great dismay that I heard of the news of the termination of the employment contract of Professor David Miller, in a chilling violation of his Academic Freedom and freedom of speech.

The actions of Bristol University merely confirms the research findings of Professor Miller that powerful interest groups exert inordinate influence on public life in the UK, and elsewhere. ...