

Motion for Re-affiliation to Stop the War

Proposer: L McCafferty (Socialist Worker Student Soc)

Seconded: Matthew Taylor (PSI YR2 UG)

Union Notes:

1. The rise of the BNP and the EDL has been fuelled in large part by a growth in mainstream Islamophobia associated with the War on Terror. On universities this has included vicious media crusades against Muslim students and Islamic Societies, and the use of the "Preventing Violent Extremism" initiative (PVE) to set up "anti-extremism" meetings and discourage anti-war meetings.
2. NUS has disaffiliated from the Stop the War Coalition, and explicitly advised universities to consult the government's PVE guidelines when deciding what events to authorise on campus.

Union Resolves:

1. To support the United Against Islamophobia statement (attached).
 2. To oppose any PVE initiatives on our campus.
 3. To send the attached amendment (Amendment to Motion 706) to NUS National Conference in the Society and Citizenship Zone.
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Amendment to motion 706

Add new Believes:

5. The rise of the BNP and the EDL has been fuelled in large part by a growth in mainstream Islamophobia associated with the War on Terror. On universities this has included vicious media crusades against Muslim students and Islamic Societies, and the use of the "Preventing Violent Extremism" initiative (PVE) to set up "anti-extremism" meetings and discourage anti-war meetings.
6. Terrorism has its roots in the wars on Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, not in the mosques and debating chambers of our universities. The use of anti-terror initiatives to clamp down on Muslim students' freedom of expression amounts to a racist witch-hunt in the tradition of McCarthyism.

Add new Resolves

4. Support the attached statement against Islamophobia and the principles it outlines. Reaffirm the right of Muslim students to political expression and organisation. Oppose PVE and similar initiatives on our campuses.
5. Recognise the role of the War on Terror in legitimising a racist clampdown on civil liberties and feeding the growth of fascist groups. Re-affiliate to Stop the War Coalition and actively campaign against the War on Terror in its various fronts.

United against Islamophobia

Every university should be a multiracial and multicultural institution, where students from diverse backgrounds and nationalities can feel safe, welcome and free from prejudice and bigotry. Several developments this month, however, indicate a worrying level of hostility directed towards Muslim students.

In the wake of the attempted Detroit bombing on the 25th December the national press has run a series of hysterical articles describing universities as “breeding grounds for Muslim extremism,” publishing unsubstantiated allegations against named individual students linking them to terrorism, and demanding close scrutiny of student mosques and Islamic societies by university authorities and the police.

This comes on top of a series of attacks on academic freedoms and civil liberties in our universities in the name of the war on terror. University staff have been pressured to “do their bit in tackling extremism” by spying on Muslim students. In 2007 this resulted in a student and a member of staff at Nottingham University being arrested for downloading public-domain literature for a dissertation on political Islam. In April 2009 the North West armed police went onto campus to arrest students in so called anti-terror raids -all were released.

Now the government’s Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) initiative is curtailing the freedom of Muslim students to organise and express themselves politically. Local authorities are granted PVE funding according to the size of the local Muslim population, which they can use to identify individuals with such “indicators of extremism” as opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and occupation of Palestine – leading to peaceful protestors and children as young as 13 being branded as “potential terrorists”.

This puts particular pressure on university Islamic societies to be moderate and avoid taking overtly political positions or to risk becoming a target for PVE investigation. It amounts to a racist clampdown on the right to organise in the tradition of McCarthyism.

These measures are being justified in the interests of “our security”, but the threat of terrorism has its roots in the War on Terror, not in the mosques and debating chambers of our universities. Shutting down the opportunity to debate these issues on campus is no solution.

The demonization of Muslims is fuelling a frightening rise in anti-Muslim racism. In 2001 the Observer published a major survey on race in Britain which showed some 52% of people thought that the ethnic community with the most positive influence on British society was Asian. Yet by 2007 – 6 years into the war on terror - 30% of people in Britain thought it was impossible to be a Muslim and a Briton.

The result? We have seen four Muslim students stabbed and others attacked at City University, the burning to the ground of a mosque in the West Midlands on Boxing Day, a vicious Islamophobic campaign to remove a prominent anti-racist from the presidency of Staffordshire SU, electoral breakthroughs by the fascist BNP in the European elections and anti-Muslim demonstrations by hundreds of thugs across the country under the banner of the “English Defence League”.

As students and university staff we stand united against Islamophobia and all racism on campus. We welcome the statement by the provost of UCL, defending the principle of academic freedom against the “quite disturbing Islamophobia” of the right-wing press, and the Universities and Colleges Union’s opposition to requirements for monitoring international students as “racist, an example of attempts to witch-hunt and an attack on academic freedom of expression”.

We reject the scapegoating of Muslim students and hounding of our Muslim colleagues. We oppose attempts to constrain the freedom of expression of Muslim staff and students, and defend the right of

Islamic societies to organise independently of the police and the security service. We call on all universities to refuse to participate in anti-Muslim witch hunts in the name of the war on terror, and on our fellow students and university workers – and the unions that represent them – to stand in solidarity with their Muslim colleagues.

Signed (as of 15/02/2010)

Estelle Cooch (Stop the War Coalition Student Officer)
Faisal Hanjra (President, Federation of Student Islamic Societies)
Bellavia Ribeiro-Addy (NUS Black Students' Officer)
David "Daf" Adley (NUS LGBT Students' Officer)
James Haywood (NUS National Executive Committee)
Tara Hewitt (Labour Students LGBT officer and Welfare Officer,
Liverpool Guild of Students)
Junaid Ejaz (President, University of Huddersfield Students' Union)
Ben Sellars (President, SOAS Students' Union)
Tom Wills (President, University of Sussex Students' Union)
Hilary Aked (Editor, *London Student* newspaper)
Mark Bergfeld (Campaigns Officer, University of Essex Students' Union)
Simon Englert (Entertainments Officer, University of Sussex Students' Union)
Hanif Leylabi (Chair of Welfare Assembly, University of Leeds)