



NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST FEES AND CUTS

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT, THE LEFT, AND NO PLATFORM

We believe that open discussion and free expression are the lifeblood of left-wing and liberation struggles. We want to change the world for the better, and that means confronting, tackling and defeating a host of bigoted, right-wing and regressive ideas. Parts of the student movement think that one way to do this is through the use of “no platform” policies on our campuses and in our unions, to shut out the people who believe those ideas. We think that instead, we need to beat those ideas through argument and protest, and change hearts and minds to change the world.

WHAT IS “NO PLATFORM”?

No-platforming is a tactic adopted originally by activists against fascist organisations. It means refusing, as a general blanket rule, to permit a specified group any platform to organise, promote their ideas, or act on them. This could mean everything from turning over a street stall, to disrupting a meeting, to denying them an invitation to speak in a student society event. It also includes refusing, again as a blanket rule, to ever have representatives of your organisation or movement share a platform with that group.

THE LEFT AND LIBERATION STRUGGLES NEED TO FIGHT A BATTLE OF IDEAS

Our movements exist precisely because reactionary ideas and bigotry are not marginal but dominant and widespread across our society. So changing minds – billions of minds! – is therefore completely vital to what we want to achieve.

There is no shortcut and we can't proceed by hoping to gain control of various little pockets of society (like student unions) and make them ideologically pure through imposing regulations from the top down. No regulation or speaker policy can change hearts and minds. The left has to confront the world as it is, and debate and discuss with people to win them over.

At worst, attempting to apply no-platform policies to widely-held ideas means denying ourselves a platform. When we refuse to share a platform with people who hold bigoted or right-wing views, very often our opponents get a free ride. It is our job as a movement to go out and compete against them to spread our ideas.

It can be exhausting and distressing to go out into a hostile world and confront dominant ideas that attack our freedom and our very right to exist. But that's why we build a collective movement. No individual can or should be expected to fight every battle, but organised together with everyone contributing as much as they are able, as a collective we can meet those challenges.

Open discussion within the left and liberation movements is also vital – it's the only way to ensure that our movements are democratic, and that we constantly challenge ourselves to re-examine, refine and improve the ideas that drive them.

ATTACKS FROM THE AUTHORITIES

More broadly, progressives and the left always face attempts to silence us. Political freedoms on our campuses are already under attack from the

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government, from education bosses, and from the marketisation of education.

We need to stop these attacks, and an argument about defending free enquiry, free debate and free speech is essential to winning that fight. There are differences between restrictions imposed by the state and those by student unions, but we can't win the argument for the value of open discussion if we are inconsistent, if we are simultaneously imposing our own regulations of which ideas can and cannot be expressed. Our best defence depends on building, and embedded as widely and firmly as possible, a consensus in favour of defending open discussion and free speech.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT FASCISTS?

We don't think that fascist ideas cross some arbitrary line of being too distressing or offensive to be heard: we don't want to ban fascist texts from libraries. Nor do we think that policies attempting to silence fascists would be sufficient to beat fascist ideas anyway – we will never beat ideas with anything other than different, better ideas.

Instead, we are committed to no platform as a physical self-defence tactic – part of a militant anti-fascist strategy. Fascist groups are an organised movement of physical violence in the streets, fighting to terrorise, crush, and ultimately murder oppressed groups, the workers' movement and the left. Antifascists are forced to respond by doing whatever we can to disrupt fascists and their efforts.



Mural depicting the Battle of Cable Street: anti-fascist Londoners faced down the police in 1936 to physically block a march by Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts

Importantly, this is a tactic that the left and student and workers' movements can use to fight fascists from the grassroots up. We don't, for instance, call for the state to step in and ban fascist organisations and demonstrations for us. We know we can't trust the state in the fight against fascism, and experience also shows that state-imposed restrictions on the far-right are easily turned against the left too.

In certain circumstances, we may apply similar tactics to other physically threatening and violent groups and individuals which confront us. Again, this is about physical self-defence.

RECLAIMING THE BANNER OF POLITICAL FREEDOM FROM RIGHT-WING HYPOCRITES

Recently, right-wingers and bigots – from Conservative student campaigns to press outlets like Spiked! – have draped themselves with the banner of free speech against the left of the student movement. This has been possible, in part, because of the abandonment of that banner by parts of the left. But the right's defence of political freedom has, in most cases, been deeply hypocritical and inconsistent. These commentators rail at student union no platform policies – too often because they actually support the bigoted and reactionary ideas that are usually the targets of these policies – but have little or nothing to say about Prevent, university and college managers cleansing campus spaces of visible politics, or the victimisation of student protesters and trade union organisers.

NCAFC is setting out to show up these hypocrites, and build a consistent, left-wing campaign to defend and extend freedom of speech, debate, organisation and action on campuses, in order to facilitate a flowering of student and workers' organisation and struggle. Join us!

For more information on NCAFC's campaign to defend and extend freedom of organisation and expression on campuses:

anticuts.com/righttoorganise