

7.4.2 Should the Union denounce the organisation *Student Rights*?

Proposed by: Redwan Shahid (Vice-President Education)

Seconded by: Ahmed Mahbub (President), Ella Harvey (Vice-President Welfare), Joe Vinson (Commercial Services Officer), Hassan Habib (Disability and SLD rep), Hassan Taleouine (Islamic Society President)

What do you want?

SU Officer(s) to release a public statement/open letter addressed to Student Rights criticising their lack of transparency, sensationalism, divisive and counter-productive activities and disproportionate preoccupation with Muslim students and calling on them to drastically change their approach and mentality. The statement should also outline the SU's commitment to challenging Islamophobia along with all other forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Why do you want it?

1. That Student Rights is an organisation claiming to support 'freedom from extremism' [1] on UK university campuses and mostly criticises speakers it sees as 'extremists' who have been invited by Islamic and Palestinian societies [2, 23], but has in the past expressed opposition to student union 'no-platform' policy for the BNP [3].
2. That Student Rights was established in 2009 as a reaction to what it calls 'increasing political extremism' [1] on campus – which director Raheem Kassam is reported to have said is a reference to a wave of peaceful occupations that took place on UK campuses to protest Israel's bombing of Gaza in Operation Cast Lead [2].
3. That Student Rights' Director Raheem Kassam was also the Executive Director of the controversial right-wing website, The Commentator, until recently [4] – known for publishing disturbing articles such as this [5]. He is the founder of Trending Central [6], another controversial right-wing "news" website, and has held various positions in the controversial neoconservative think tank The Henry Jackson Society [7]. Press reports that he was setting up a UK arm of the Tea Party have so far failed to realise [8].
4. That Student Rights has only recently admitted that it is a project of The Henry Jackson Society – a neoconservative think tank whose associate director, Douglas Murray, has argued that "conditions for Muslims in Europe must be made harder across the board" and "all immigration into Europe from Muslim countries must stop" [9] – but is not transparent about its origins or funding on its website or materials.
5. That Student Rights' most recent report on gender segregation [10], focusing on Islamic society events, has been shown to be deeply flawed in its methodology [11], and failed in almost every case to determine whether segregation was enforced or if people were voluntarily choosing to sit where they want to, and presented the phenomenon as 'part of a wider, discriminatory trend' on campuses [10, p. 17] which resulted in headlines in the mainstream media associating gender segregation with 'extremism' [12].
6. That the Institute of Race Relations has noted with concern [13] that Student Rights' work and reporting has been used by far-right groups to target a Muslim student event [14] which led to reported threats of violence and the event subsequently having to be cancelled by the university [15].
7. That LSE, Goldsmith's, Birkbeck, UCL and Kingston Student Unions have voted in favour of condemning Student Rights for its overwhelming focus on Muslim students, the way its approach tends to bypass students themselves and its lack of transparency about its links to The Henry Jackson Society (16, 17, 18, 19).

8. That NUS President 2011-13, Liam Burns said that we need to “challenge the right wing bile that is spouted by groups like Student Rights and people like Douglas Murray”; and that NUS VP Welfare 2012-13, Pete Mercer, condemned Student Rights’ approach as a “witch-hunt” [20].

9. That the grassroots student campaign ‘Real Student Rights’ which aims to expose and oppose Student Rights is supported by NUS Black Students Officer (2013-14) Aaron Kiely; ULU Black Students Officer (2013-14) Maham Hashmi-Khan; NUS VP Welfare Officers for 2012-13 and 2013-14 Pete Mercer and Colum McGuire; and ULU President (2012-14) Michael Chessum among others [21].

What impact will this have?

This will highly enhance the student experience of Muslims on campus knowing that the Students’ Union support them and will be act as reassurance. It will show our students that we do not recognise this organisation who seek to create divisions within our diverse communities.

References

- 1) http://www.studentrights.org.uk/about_us
- 2) <http://www.studentrights.org.uk>
- 3) <http://content.yudu.com/Library/A1nkge/LondonStudentissue10/resources/index.htm>
- 4) http://www.thecommentator.com/author/raheem_kassam_executive_editor/6
- 5) http://www.thecommentator.com/article/2076/why_there_are_no_bomb_shelters_in_gaza
- 6) <http://www.trendingcentral.com/about/>
- 7) <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/people/professional-staff/>
- 8) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01s4s4sbj/profiles/raheem-kassam>
- 9) http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/mehdi-hasan/douglas-murray-edl-dodgy-videos-me_b_3675193.html
- 10) http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/141019975?access_key=key-8swxo6lwrn6wnxkqm9&allow_share=true&view_mode=scroll
- 11) http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/hilary-aked/student-rights-campus-extremism-study_b_3277503.html
- 12) http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/hilary-aked/student-rights-claims-media-mistakes_b_3303703.html
- 13) <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/far-right-targets-islamic-events/>
- 14) <http://casualsunited.wordpress.com/2013/01/04/he-reckons-does-he-i-think-this-retreat-is-gonna-run-into-a-few-problems-edl-casualsunited/>
- 15) <http://www.reading.ac.uk/news-and-events/releases/PR490014.aspx>
- 16) <http://llesu.tumblr.com/post/68783866301/ugm-motion-llesu-says-no-to-islamophobia-and-calls>
- 17) <http://goldsueducation.wordpress.com/2013/12/18/why-we-wont-work-with-student-rights/>
- 18) <http://www.birkbeckunion.org/representation/2013-14/papers-for-december-2013/CDecember2013MotionStudentRightsandIslamophobia.pdf/view>
- 19) <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/students-unions-hit-back-at-group-monitoring-campus-extremism/2010074.article>
- 20) <http://realstudentrights.wordpress.com/quotes/>
- 21) <http://realstudentrights.wordpress.com/who-supports-rsr-motions-passed/>
- 22) <http://realstudentrights.wordpress.com/2013/12/18/students-branded-fools-by-director-of-student-rights/>
- 23) <http://electronicinfada.net/content/how-front-group-student-rights-undermines-palestine-solidarity/12991>