

STUDENT LEFT NETWORK

@ NUS TRANS STUDENTS' CONFERENCE 2019

SAVE THE NUS TRANS CAMPAIGN: VOTE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE CUTS!

BY NATALIA CASSIDY

The NUS UK Board has voted to abolish the NUS Trans Campaign's officer, committee and campaign budget. The International Students' Officer has also been abolished, alongside the LGBT Women's Place, the Society and Citizenship Vice President and all of the Nations' Vice Presidents.

All of this was done with no chance for input from the members of those campaigns, nor any NUS members. NUS say that the LGBT+ Officer will cover campaigning for trans students. But we deserve better than hoping that other NUS officers, the majority of whom are cis, will speak for us; that's why trans students spent years campaigning for an autonomous campaign.

These cuts are being made to address a £3 million deficit. The leadership say these cutbacks are necessary in order for NUS to survive, but the few financial figures available tell us that the financial crisis has nothing to do with overspending on democracy, campaigning or officer pay, but on mismanagement of the NUS Extra discount card scheme. If NUS want to prune officer expenses, surely a better place to start would be the CEO's salary of £100k.

It's disgusting that trans students are being made to pay for the mismanagement of NUS' finances.

NUS are now consulting SUs on a whole series of drastic reforms to its democratic structures. Proposals include creating a 'single NUS manifesto' in place of individual officers' manifestos to drive the NUS officer team's work, who will serve two year terms. Instead of a motions debate setting NUS policy, caucuses for specific topics are proposed, where decisions will be made via 'consensus building'. Potential changes to how delegates to conference are elected are also mentioned: cross-cam-



pus elections could be replaced by SU execs instead choosing who they want to send.

It's clear these reforms aren't about saving money; they're driven by the current leadership's vision for NUS as a slick, think-tank style operation unobstructed by the student left. The reforms will make NUS even more of a conveyor belt for careerists and even less capable of running radical campaigns.

We need to put forward a radically different vision for NUS, a National Union with real rank-and-file control which links up and spreads the student activism happening on campuses around the country, fights for students on a national scale alongside the labour movement, and builds campaigning student unions with full independence from management in every college, school and university.

If the student left hopes to have any chance of defending and expanding NUS democracy, we must work together and unite around a set of shared political demands. We need a culture of cooperation and unity in action on the central political demands where we agree, and of open discussion and debate where we have political differences.

The question must be asked, as it so often is historically: which side are you on?

The student left must either rally around the campaign to stop the gutting of NUS democracy and liberation, or stand by and do nothing.

SLN is calling for a vote of no confidence in Shakira Martin to stop the antidemocratic cuts.

We can have no confidence in a President who allows the Trans Campaign to be cut behind the backs of its members. If the motion of no confidence passes at 25 Student Unions, an extraordinary conference will be called, where the SLN will run left candidate Justine Canady for President to challenge Martin.

This conference should be used as a stand by the left to call for an alternative vision for the future of NUS.

Pass the motion in your SU:
tinyurl.com/noNUScuts

Follow Justine's campaign:
www.facebook.com/JCfor-Pres/

Join the speaker tour



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NO PLATFORM FOR FASCISTS- BUT SHOULD WE NO PLATFORM TERFS?

BY CHRISTIE NEARY

This article is a reponse to the amendment submitted to the motion "No Platform for Fascists."

There has been increasing discussion on the left of using a tactic of "no-platform" against particular groups. The groups often targeted by this question include fascists, certain right-wingers, transphobes as well as some left-wing groups. This is however, an arbitrary selection of groups that represent nothing collectively other than holding views that some find distasteful. Those pushing for a no-platform policy imposed on these groups don't, for example, call for a no-platform policy against university Conservative associations, despite the reactionary views harboured within them.

There is a reason fascism is to be dealt with using every tool at our disposal. Fascism is not simply a collection of viewpoints that are reactionary enough to cross a line of what we consider to be in good taste. It is not simply because of these vile viewpoints, but also the tactics that are used to organise. Fascism is a movement directly counterposed to the interests and the existence of the labour movement and those that are marginalised due to race, gender, ethnicity, disability etc. It is because of this, the way fascism seeks to violently destroy marginalised groups: immediately and with physical force, that we must oppose it by any means wherever it rears its head.

Transphobic feminists (often referred to as TERFs), those with a political worldview that could broadly be defined as feminist in its outlook, whilst at the same time holding reactionary and harmful views in relation to trans people, particularly trans women, are quite simply, not fascists.

There are many reactionary strains of thought both within society-at-large and within the labour movement: the view of many in the labour movement veer into anti-Semitism, sexism, racism and transphobia. How we approach this is part of a broader question of rooting out reactionary ideas within the labour movement. We cannot hope to, through the use of bureaucratic manoeuvring such as a no-platform policy, hope to confront these reactionary ideas effectively. All this serves to do is push these ideas out of the immediate public view, offering a veneer of progression whilst allowing those that hold reactionary views to uphold themselves as victimised. This can be easily seen with the way transphobic feminists gained traction in the UK with the idea that they have been silenced for standing up for women.

There is of course, no moral equivalence between transphobic feminists and trans people. It is not the case that trans people's right to exist should be a subject of debate, but the grim reality is the only way to effectively side-line reactionary viewpoints to the point of irrelevance is to engage with them squarely and democratically. If we rely on bureaucratic manoeuvring, we on the left are ultimately self-sabotaging. Bureaucratic methods of retaining left-wing control of Trade Unions have historically undermined the strength of the union as a whole and later been used against the left by its opponents.

One line of argument contends that whilst TERFs aren't fascists, they should be dealt with in the same way due to 'fascistic methods'. This usually refers to the abhorrent practices of leaking the personal information of prominent trans activists or engaging

in prolonged campaigns of often quite personalised harassment against trans people.

Whilst these methods are contemptible and should be roundly condemned and opposed both through protest and confrontation as well as through the implementation of existing wellbeing policies for the protection of students. This does not however represent the core threat that fascism poses to the left or to minority groups: that is, an immediate, physical threat to the continued existence and ability to organise. As such we should not obfuscate our understanding of anti-fascism by extending how we relate to fascism as a political phenomenon to an arbitrary set of views that we find distasteful.

In order to fight for liberation and liberty, it is crucial that the left champion the right to free speech. This, by necessity, means fighting for the right of free speech for those who hold ideas we do not agree with. Does this mean that we must resign ourselves to sit passively and ignore reactionary ideas as they show themselves?

Of course we must say, no. It is the democratic right of protest against ideas just as much as it is the right of to espouse these ideas in the first place. We should, of course, organise ourselves in opposition to those that espouse transphobia. We should leaflet their meetings and engage with those in their milieu.

Only through democratic rather than bureaucratic techniques can we hope to make a lasting, meaningful impact on the values and ideas present in the wider movement and in society as a whole.



AGREE? DISAGREE?

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TOWARDS A MORE EFFECTIVE TRANS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

BY STEFF FARLEY

Mainstream trans discourse seems to be dominated by either a liberal, purely identity-based interpretation of sex and gender, or by biological essentialism. We don't equate these two sides, as only one is virulently transphobic, but we must critique both of them for the trans rights movement to progress. What is it about these two opposing perspectives that has allowed them to monopolise mainstream discourse on gender? And how do we get to a materialist understanding of the issue that can aid both women's and trans liberation movements?

The abstract, liberal strain of trans discourse is understandable. It makes gender much less restrictive, and it supports the idea that how we identify internally defines our gender. The problem isn't that this narrative is too open or that too much weight is put on identity; it's that it tries to explain everything through identity. It fails to consider the identity of an individual in motion in the material world interacting with other individuals and, crucially, it lacks a thorough class analysis. Identity alone is insufficient in explaining our experiences or offering everything that is needed for an effective liberation movement. Abstracting gender to the point where we lose material considerations of the notions of sex and gender and forget the lived experiences of peo-

le, our different material needs and the different combinations of obstructions, restrictions and violence by the state that we may face is not helpful. It makes it more difficult to work towards helping the particular needs of each woman and fighting against the particular forms of oppression that not all women may experience at the same time, but that still need attention for the protection of those women that do. Ultimately, an effective liberation movement must remember and acknowledge these material particularities, the increasingly popular abstraction of gender makes this harder.

We have to be careful making this critique because some people misuse and misappropriate this materialist way of thinking to argue that trans women and cis women are physically different, with disjointed lived experiences, and therefore trans women can't really be considered women. This misappropriation of materialism is a natural reaction to the liberal abstraction of gender. Its proponents may say that trans women have materially different experiences to cis women so, while trans women are trans women, we're not women. But this is a cynical misrepresentation of the diversity of women. We do have materially dif-

ferent experiences. Material sexual characteristics lead to social responses, for example FGM or reproductive restrictions. When we're older, there are social responses to other similarly material parts of us, like how much we conform to a gender, how we present, how we perform, our mannerisms, even down to how we walk; these are all external expressions of gender. But the oppression and violence that all women face, while sometimes varying in form, is consistent in that it's a product of the same ideological structure: the patriarchy. It happens for the same reasons; for being women. Identity is central to understanding gendered oppression, but it's not enough by itself. Of course, cis women face particular forms of violence targeted at them, such as reproductive rights. It's certainly not transmisogynist or cisnormative to treat these as women's issues. Nor does it mean that women that don't face this attack on their reproductive rights aren't women. (cont. on back page)



WHAT IS THE STUDENT LEFT NETWORK?

Founded at the Student Activist Weekender in September 2018, we are a broad coalition of students involved in campaigns to transform our universities, colleges, education and society.

Some of us got involved in activism through the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. Many of us organised to defend our staff in the 2018 Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) strike over pensions, and want to continue fighting to democratise our institutions, which continually place our education, mental health and staff working conditions in jeopardy. We want to reverse the creeping marketisation of our universities, which is shackling staff into insecure and exploitative contracts and burdening students with a worsening mental health crisis, alongside unjust levels of debt.

But we can't fight marketisation solely through isolated, defensive, local campaigns. As a national problem, it requires a national-scale reaction and solution. That's why we decided to launch the Student Left Network - so we can link up our campaigns and struggles, share skills and debate ideas, and organise democratically together on a national scale.

We also aim to organise together to transform the NUS and Labour Students so that they are radical, democratic bodies focussed on supporting and amplifying the key struggles grassroots student activists are currently organising around. If that sounds like something you'd like to get involved with, join here: www.studentleftnetwork/join



STUDENT ACTIVIST WEEKENDER WHERE THE STUDENT LEFT NETWORK WAS FOUNDED, SEPTEMBER 2018.

STUDENT LEFT NETWORK NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2019 // SHEFFIELD UNI // 2-3 MARCH

On 2-3 March students from campuses across the UK will be gathering to coordinate action on a national and regional scale, share activist and campaigning skills and debate and discuss political ideas.

You'll meet students from across the UK and get involved in coordinating student left activism for the coming year. There will be workshops, discussions, debates as well as votes on motions (and socials). We will also elect a National Committee to coordinate things for the coming year. Accommodation will be provided in activists' houses.

Workshops include: fighting the far right and racism on campus; organising at work: lessons from the Deliveroo strikes; Divestment and the Fossil Fuel industry; How is our education system making us ill? + lots more. A section of the Saturday will be dedicated to discussing SU democracy and NUS cuts, what they mean for the student left, and how we can fight them to build a democratic, campaigning National Union that supports, links up and spreads local struggles on campus and fights for students and alongside the labour movement on a national scale.

See the full agenda and register for your free place here: tinyurl.com/y9cxr7uc

(cont. from p.3) The most liberating form of gender will come predominantly through the dismantling of gendered oppression and a movement that prioritises this will be the most effective one for all women. To do this, we must recognise all forms of oppression against women that differ with material conditions but all exist on the same basis of gender. Resistance based only on sex-based oppression or an abstraction of gender is not sufficient to fully combat the systems that cause our oppression.

Any discussion of a united women's liberation movement is incomplete without talking about capitalism; otherwise we don't move past basic invocations of intersectionality. Gendered division of labour and the patriarchal family reproduce the conditions of capitalism upon which our situation as trans and cis women rest and are connected. When the means of production, the infrastructure and equipment needed to produce commodities, are predominantly owned by men, then women's labour is more likely to be underpaid (or unpaid) and their exploitation felt more sharply. This is what we really mean by the gender pay gap. We must search for alternatives to this system. The Marxist feminist analysis of women's exploitation under

capitalism is incompatible with limited sex-based or abstract analyses, and is the only analysis capable of unearthing the true nature of our oppression.

Presently, on one hand, we have this much less restrictive, but overly-abstracted and simplified, notion of sex and gender, and on the other we have a 'materialism' that actually ends up becoming immaterial. We must take the truly radical liberatory freedom of the former and integrate the materialism that the latter pertains to provide. To recognise that the violence all women face is from the same place but acknowledge that the modes of this violence vary among women and all forms need to be addressed to end gendered oppression.

This materialist synthesis helps to solve a lot of the difficult contradictions that a lot of people have with gender. It helps to bridge a divide that exists between many trans and cis women. It would lead to more direct resistance and solutions, and a more successful women's and trans liberation movement.

STUDENT-WORKER SOLIDARITY - VOTE YES IN UCU REBALLOT



Help UCU members at your uni get a yes vote for strike action over pay and equality - let staff know students support them. Find leaflets, model motions, open letter, ideas for actions at tinyurl.com/ybvkw4x

GET IN TOUCH!

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