

Defend the Students Right to Boycott Student Union Motion

This union notes:

1. The government's ' Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) bill' (or anti-boycott bill) has been tabled. If passed, it would prevent local authorities, universities, and pension funds from making ethical choices about spending and investment, unless expressly permitted by the government.
2. Nearly 70 civil society organisations have signed a statement calling on the government to immediately halt this bill, on opposition parties to oppose it and on civil society to mobilise in support of the right to boycott in the cause of justice.
3. The best-known boycott was the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa. Had this legislation been in place, it could have forced public bodies and British universities to do business with the racist, apartheid regime in South Africa.
4. Official statements on the bill imply that it is primarily aimed at campaigns against Israel's violations of Palestinian rights, but other movements who use boycott or divestment tactics will also be impacted.
5. Moreover, opposition to this bill transcends the different attitudes to Israel and Palestinian rights that exist within society. Many diverse Jewish groups and individuals oppose the anti-boycott bill, including those who are actively committed to campaigning for Palestinian rights (such as Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Na'amod: UK Jews Against the Occupation, and Jewish Solidarity Action), and those who are against the tactics of BDS but believe that a ban would curb democracy and undermine debate (such as the Union of Jewish Students).

This union believes:

1. The government's planned anti-boycott bill threatens to erode local democracy, restrict freedom of expression, and undermine campaigns for social and climate justice.
2. This legislation could curtail campaigns against deforestation, environmental pollution, and the exploitation of children and workers, in countries where these practices are tolerated or endorsed by authorities.
3. Campaigns which use the tactics of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) are part of the fabric of democracy: they provide a peaceful way for people to push for justice and pressure regimes, institutions, or companies to change abusive, discriminatory, or illegal practices.
4. Contrary to the government's own stated commitment to free speech on campus, this piece of legislation which prevents universities from making ethical financial choices, or even openly

discussing their potential merits, will seriously curtail freedom of expression and academic debate.

This union resolves:

1. To write as an SU to local MPs urging them to vote against this dangerous bill in parliament.
2. To write as an SU to the Vice-Chancellor calling on them to publicly speak out against this attack on university independence and student campaigning.
3. To write as an SU to the NUS asking it to actively campaign against this bill and its impact on students' ability to freely campaign.
4. To share information with the student body about how to campaign against this bill, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Sharing template letters to email to local MPs
(<https://palestinecampaign.eaction.online/boycottbill>) and our Vice-Chancellor
(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1p-cEiOuXOkI36Y_YJc_JNvDcPx1DWjVna9dWkcn8Ne4/edit)
 - b. Sharing correct information about the bill, to counter misinformation in the press,
 - c. Sharing that this union supports in principle the right to campaign using the tactics of boycott, divestment and sanctions,
 - d. Sharing campaign materials from the national 'Protect the Right to Boycott' campaign
(<https://righttoboycott.org.uk/>)