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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

ELIZABETH HOUSE YORK ROAD LONDON SE1 7PH

TELEPHONE 01-934 9000

FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

*Prime Minister* (w)  
*So Keith's letter was reported in the press today. The full text is attached.*  
*15* May 1986

Joan MacNaughton  
Lord President's Office  
68 Whitehall  
LONDON SW1

Dear Joan,

FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I attach a copy of a letter the Secretary of State has sent today to the President of the NUS and released to the press.

I am sending copies to Private Secretaries to all Cabinet Ministers, to Lord Swinton and to Lady Hooper.

*yours sincerely,*  
*R L Smith*

R L SMITH  
Private Secretary





## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

ELIZABETH HOUSE YORK ROAD LONDON SE1 7PH

TELEPHONE 01-934 9000

FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

14 May 1986

*Dear Mr Woolas,*

I write to you about the policy which some student unions appear to follow of denying any invited speakers whom they brand as racists or fascists the right to argue their point of view. I believe that such a policy is wrong, misguided and harmful. I hope that by writing to you - and sending copies of this letter to the press - my arguments will reach many of those involved.

Let there be no doubt that racism and fascism are evil. Both involve the denial of human individuality.

The racist does not judge his fellow human beings by the moral, intellectual and practical attributes which constitute their personalities; he ignores their personalities entirely, and judges them by their colour or ethnic origin.

The fascist obliterates personality in another way: he does not recognise that, in any society, different people will have different views and conceptions all of which deserve to be treated with some respect; he despises these individual differences and insists on a single set of views, a single 'national consciousness' for all.

Both racism and fascism are obnoxious to those of us dedicated to the continuance of a democratic state in which each individual counts regardless of his colour or ethnic origin, as a citizen.

But racism and fascism are not the only creeds that deny individuality. By a cruel irony, there is a new breed of 'anti-racists' and 'anti-fascists' who are as sure of their own superiority, as unwilling to respect the rights and views of others, as any racist or fascist.

/The

P Woolas Esq  
 President  
 National Union of Students  
 461 Holloway Road  
 LONDON N7



The saddest aspect of this new relapse into the dark ages is that it manifests itself in our universities and polytechnics - the institutions of advanced learning that should be the crucibles of debate and discussion. In a university or polytechnic, above all other places, there should be room for the discussion of all serious issues, for the willingness to hear and to dispute all views including those that are unpopular or eccentric or wrong. But the new barbarians are not interested in such discussion. Any views which meet with their disapproval are apt to be labelled - often with grotesque intellectual sloppiness - 'racist' or 'fascist'. And any proponents of those views are apt to be debarred from speaking.

Of course, life in a democracy - whether inside an institution of higher education or outside - depends on the existence of peace and order : not the order of Auschwitz or the Gulag, but an order within which each individual can exercise his individuality within the law unimpeded by attacks from others. Our law therefore prohibits all attempts to disrupt the peace. It prohibits all incitements to violence. Specifically the law prohibits incitement to violence on racial grounds.

Students who are genuinely concerned about such incitement do not need to ban speakers themselves. They can apply to the police, and ultimately to the Courts, if on any occasion such incitement occurs.

But the new barbarians are not genuinely concerned with incitement to disorder or the denial of individual freedoms. On the contrary, they are concerned to prevent the orderly and serious discussion of those views with which they themselves do not happen to agree. But in our democracy it is not an offence to discuss views of which some, even many, disapprove. So these new barbarians set up their own fascist policies : they ban that which they disapprove by adopting "no platform" policies.

What is the result of this illiberal arrogance? It is the prevention of debate about intensely serious subjects which need to be openly and calmly discussed : subjects such as our own immigration policy; whether or not to apply sanctions to South Africa; whether or not sports should be played with South Africa.

These subjects need to be discussed: they are far too important to be settled without understanding each side of the argument. It is no service to the blacks to suppress discussion.

Those students who align themselves with the new barbarism may not relish these arguments. Some of them support philosophies in which open discussion is no more valued or respected than by fascism.

But I do not believe that this is true of all - perhaps not even of many - of these students who institute or support 'no platform' policies. There may, I believe, be a large number of

/them



them who are sincere proponents of democracy, but who have temporarily been swept away by their own distaste for racism and fascism, and have forgotten that our protection of free speech is not designed merely to allow that which is popular to be said, but also - far more importantly - that which is unpopular or wrong. They seem to have forgotten that a good argument can always beat an unsound argument provided the debate is open and rational.

It is to these, well-meaning but misguided students that I appeal. Remember now, before you do lasting damage to your institutions and to our political life, that serious free, and orderly discussion of controversial issues is the hallmark of any society which is worth living in. I plead with you to remember that the denial of such discussion is a denial of respect of individuals, an attitude morally equivalent to that taken by the fascists and the racists whom you wish to oppose.

*Your sincerely,*

*Ken Joseph.*



