

Freedom of Speech and the Right to Protest at Lancaster University

This Union Notes:

1. That students often feel the need to protest against the actions of their University.
2. Articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act 1998 granting Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Assembly and Association and that all Universities also have a Code of Practise on Freedom of Speech as required under the Education (No. 2) Act 1986.
3. That on 10th September 2004 Lancaster University Management School ran a 'Corporate Venturing' conference where the major themes were to discuss 'spinning in' and 'spinning out' of ideas between academia and multinational corporations.
4. Companies and organisations taking part included arms companies BAE Systems, the Carlyle Group, DuPont and Alvis, as well as the Ministry of Defence.
5. Four Lancaster University students, one Lancaster alumnus and a student at St. Martins College (an affiliated college of the University) entered the lecture theatre with banners, asked Lord Sainsbury (Science Minister) a question, spoke to the audience and answered questions from them, including receiving an offer from an employee of a PR firm of advice on how to communicate their views.
6. Two of the protesters then left voluntarily, the remaining members of the group were removed from the room, moving to the outside of the building where Police officers advised them that they were allowed to be, continuing to display banners, leafleting passers by and beating a drum.
7. After some time the drummer was ordered to stop, leading to a debate between the protesters and the two Police present about their powers to intervene in such a way. This resulted in one protester being manhandled to the floor, threatened with being CS sprayed and arrested and removed for allegedly swearing after told not to do so (technically Disorderly Behaviour under Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986). The remaining protesters stayed for about another hour, with no intervention from the police or campus security.
8. All six have now been issued with a summons for Aggravated Trespass, an offence punishable with a fine of up to £2,500 or three months imprisonment.
9. None of the students have been approached regarding the University disciplinary system.

This Union Believes:

1. That it is not necessary to take a view on whether the specific views of the protesters were right in order to defend their right to peacefully protest.
2. That there are many times when individual students, and we as a Students' Union will wish to engage in protest, elements of which may be disruptive to the operation of the University.
3. That to ensure students are not discouraged from expressing their voices in this way it is important that protesters are not punished for

merely being present on their own campus in a place where the University find it disruptive for them to be.

4. That any precedent set in this case may be exploited by our own University.
5. That the students and others in question should not be punished for utilising their freedom of expression.
6. That it is highly offensive to the Quakers to host arms companies in a building named after their pioneering pacifist George Fox.

This Union Resolves:

1. To support the Lancaster protesters right to protest on campus.
2. To support campaigns for the charges against them to be dropped.
3. To write to the Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University stating our view, copying the letter to Lancaster University Students' Union and to representatives of the protesters.
4. To support campaigns for Universities to uphold the highest ethical standards in their expanding 'Fourth Mission' programme of links with companies and other third parties.
5. To inform our students of the Union's position.

Proposed by: The Union Executive