

Policy Proposal: Decolonisation

Submitted by University of Manchester Students' Union

Content warnings: discussion of eugenics, sexual assault, intentional physical disablement, violence.

Summary

This proposal calls for NUS to provide political education to students on decolonisation, as well as providing the tools, resources, and support to run decolonisation campaigns on their own campuses.

What's the issue?

Decolonisation is essential to all of our liberation campaigns because historical and present day colonialism has shaped the structures of oppression that we live in. It is not only racism which is implicated in colonialism, but misogyny, queerphobia, and ableism as well. This is evident in the role of physical disablement and sexual assault as weapons of war, in the suppression of non-Western queer and trans cultures under colonial rule, in the development of eugenics to target disabled and queer people as well as indigenous people, and much more.

The question of 'decolonising our campuses' is becoming an increasingly mainstream discussion. This tends to misconstrue decolonisation as diversification, and to centre around curricula and universities. It is vital not only that we think beyond reading lists, and re-centre discussions around decolonisation to focus on institutional structures, but that we look beyond HE to FE, and indeed our entire education system.

We know that many of our institutions have historical links with slavery and other colonial exploits. In 2018 the University of Glasgow published research into the university's historic and present connections to slavery and to other colonial exploits. This research showed that through alumni, financial and familial connections, the university had profited more than £20 million from transatlantic slavery, with this being only the tip of the iceberg. Subsequently Glasgow became the first and only UK University to set up a restorative justice scheme.

We also know that our institutions still have coloniality built into their structures. In our institutions, we need to be critical of and dismantle colonial structures of governance, financial investment, research practices, teaching and learning.

What could be the solution?

We need to build accessible political education on decolonisation, though creating resources and creating spaces to share knowledge and be critical of our institutions. This should include education on intersectionality, on the implication of colonisation on various liberation groups, and how and why decolonisation work is our collective responsibility.

We must move beyond 'diversifying reading our lists' and confront the racist, sexist, ableist and queerphobic power dynamics which exist in our classrooms. Our institutions are complicit in modern day colonial violence through investments and institutional links with war and the arms trade.

The current environmental crisis is inherently linked to historical and present day colonialism. Settler colonialism and industrial capitalism have resulted in the destruction of indigenous land and life which made the expansion of empire possible. Today,

indigenous land and life are still under attack, with rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions destroying entire communities in the global south.

In the context of a marketised education system, our institutions are governed like businesses, by people who are detached from the realities and the lives of staff and students.

Ideas for Implementation

The NUS should not only deliver events and visit campuses, but create tools, resources and spaces which are accessible online.

The NUS should provide students with political education on how we can identify, confront, and resist the structural oppression they face in the classroom.

The NUS should support students to build campaigns to demilitarise their campuses, and to lobby institutions to divest from war.

The NUS should provide political education to students on this issue, moving to decolonise the movement for climate justice. The NUS should also support students on their campuses to build campaigns for divestment from fossil fuels.

The NUS should give students on their campuses the tools, resources and support to understand how their institutions are governed, and to build campaigns to democratise their campuses.

The NUS already has a proud history of working with UCU and other trade unions to support strikes, to fight for free education, to hold institutions accountable on the gender and ethnicity pay gap, to fight for pay equity and fair working conditions. We must also support FE strikes, to fight for fair pay and working conditions in FE, and work with other trade unions such as the National Society of Apprentices.