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Britain & free-speech principles: Maryam Namazie - secularist, human-rights campaigner - barred from speaking at The University of Warwick

Sunday 13 March 2016, by [DAVID Benjamin](#) (Date first published: 25 September 2016).

Dear supporters

As President of WASH, I feel that it is important that I comment about the recent controversy regarding the decision taken by The University of Warwick's Student Union to prohibit Maryam Namazie from speaking on campus. For those unfamiliar with Maryam, she is a secularist, a human-rights campaigner, and leader of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain - as well as being a friend of mine.

After submitting a guest-speaker application to the SU, I received the following response explaining their decision to bar Maryam:

"...after researching both her and her organisation, a number of flags have been raised. We have a duty of care to conduct a risk assessment for each speaker who wishes to come to campus.

There a number of articles written both by the speaker and by others about the speaker that indicate that she is highly inflammatory, and could incite hatred on campus. This is in contravention of our external speaker policy:

- *must not incite hatred, violence or call for the breaking of the law

- *are not permitted to encourage, glorify or promote any acts of terrorism including individuals, groups or organisations that support such acts

- *must not spread hatred and intolerance in the community and thus aid in disrupting social and community harmony

- *must seek to avoid insulting other faiths or groups, within a framework of positive debate and challenge

- *are not permitted to raise or gather funds for any external organisation or cause without express permission of the trustees.

In addition to this, there are concerns that if we place conditions on her attendance (such as making it a member only event and having security in attendance, asking for a transcript of what she intends to say, recording the speech) she will refuse to abide by these terms as she did for Trinity College Dublin:

<http://freethoughtblogs.com/maryamnamazie/2015/03/23/tcd-2/>"><http://freethoughtblogs.com/marya>

As a student of the University, I must confess that I cannot but help feel an element of embarrassment - as well as feeling that my society has been vitiated in light of the encroachment on the strong secular and free-speech principles that the society espouses. We have appealed the decision and we will submit a further post detailing the outcome in due course. The restriction of free-thought and non-violent free-speech is the most dangerous of all subversions, a subversion that is only amplified in light of the fact that Maryam has always campaigned against violence and discrimination and has done so passionately for many years - something that should have been taken on board when the SU's assessment was made. Maryam often describes the true facts concerning her own experiences and those of people she works with in relation to radical forms of Islam - not all forms of Islam, just those pernicious, radical strands of the religion - things that most peaceful Muslims would also condemn. I must profess that if those facts are an incitement of hatred - which I most definitely believe they are not - then the solution is to change the way people are treated in certain faith communities, not to insist Maryam lie about her life through censorship. As Maryam stated in her blog [1]:

"The Student Union seems to lack an understanding of the difference between criticising religion, an idea, or a far-Right political movement on the one hand and attacking and inciting hate against people on the other. Inciting hatred is what the Islamists do; I and my organisation challenge them and defend the rights of ex-Muslims, Muslims and others to dissent."

And, what is more:

"The Student Union position is of course nothing new. It is the predominant post-modernist "Left" point of view that conflates Islam, Muslims and Islamists, homogenises the "Muslim community", thinks believers are one and the same as the religious-Right and sides with the Islamist narrative against its many dissenters [...] This type of politics denies universalism, sees rights as 'western,' justifies the suppression of women's rights, freedoms and equality under the guise of respect for other 'cultures' imputing on innumerable people the most reactionary elements of culture and religion, which is that of the religious-Right. In this type of politics, the oppressor is victim, the oppressed are perpetrators of "hatred", and any criticism is racist."

The infringement of free-speech is becoming insidiously ubiquitous, and many universities, including The University of Warwick, are circumventing the freedom of speech in pursuit of inoffensive, sanitary narratives. As many of those at Warwick University know, few universities have sullied its free-speech as much as our university has. Spiked-Online's 'University Free-Speech Rankings' [2] recently imputed the university with their infamous red-ranking, stating that:

"The University of Warwick and Warwick Students' Union collectively create a hostile environment for free speech. The university, which has received an Amber ranking, restricts material that is 'likely to cause offence'. The students' union, which has received a Red ranking, has instituted bans on the Sun and the Daily Star, launched a campaign to have 'offensive' wallpaper in a local bar removed and banned 'prejudiced' entertainers from performing in the union. Due to the severity of the students' union's actions, the institution's overall ranking is Red"

I believe that we at the University of Warwick need to come together, as secularists, as students, revering the intellectual suffusion of ideas and dialectics, to construct a truly formidable voice of opposition for the sake of those beloved principles that we promote. Lest we forget: *"censorships exist to prevent anyone from challenging current conceptions and existing institutions. All progress is initiated by challenging current conceptions, and executed by supplanting existing institutions. Consequently, the first condition of progress is the removal of censorship"* - George Bernard Shaw

Benjamin David

(President of Warwick Atheists, Secularists and Humanists)

P.S.

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<https://www.warwicksu.com/news/article/WarwickAtheists/Maryam-Namazie-barred-from-speaking-at-The-University-of-Warwick/>

Footnotes

[1] <http://freethoughtblogs.com/maryamnamazie/2015/09/25/warwick-university-student-union-th-e-islamists-incite-hatred-not-us/>

[2] <http://www.spiked-online.com/free-speech-university-rankings/profile/warwick#.VuSkdTaof4d>