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The Guardian (1959-2003); Apr 5, 1974; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer
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At the end of a generally constructive conference the National Union of Students yesterday took a lunge in the wrong direction. By a narrow majority it passed a resolution which for the first time commits students to the denial of free speech. It is hard to quarrel with the motives behind the resolution: they are to oppose racialism and fascism. But the method of doing so is borrowed from extremist groups themselves. Whatever measures are necessary, including disruption of meetings, are to be used, and the definition of Fascists and racialists is left so vague—as it has to be—that anyone whose views are unpopular with a majority, or in any way out of line may be denied a hearing at university meetings. The delegate from Zambia at a Commonwealth conference once described Mr Wilson as a racist.

Professor Eysenck was the victim of disruption—then deplored, now encouraged—when he tried to lecture at the London School of Economics

last year. It was a mindless attack on a scholar because of the unpopular results of his research; whether the results are right or wrong is not material because the only way knowledge advances is by claims and counter-claim. On that occasion there was physical violence against the professor himself, and a similar incident occurred at Sussex. NUS officials declared after the vote yesterday that future disruption would not entail violence. That is good to hear but hard to believe.

What is most dismaying about the NUS position is that it devalues reason. If students are likely to be swayed towards fascism or racialism by any demagogue who comes along then arguably they have no right to be at university. If they are not likely to be swayed by any demagogue there is no good reason for not letting the demagogue have his say. If the amendment which pushed the NUS into its present stance had been better thought out the union would have saved itself from advocating censorship and preaching an illogicality.