Motion 3 – The crisis in the NUS

**Submitted by: Socialist Students Steering Committee**

1. Socialist Students conference notes the extraordinary situation which has developed in relation to the financial crisis within the National Union of Students (NUS).
2. Socialist Students stands for the creation of a leadership of the student movement which uses its resources and authority to mobilise a mass student movement in the fight against tuition fees, student debt, cuts and austerity on campus, and for living grants and decent and affordable student housing.
3. In November 2018, it was reported in multiple media outlets that the NUS faced an unprecedented financial crisis, with cash in hand available to the NUS expected to fall to a £2.9 million deficit by April 2019.
4. Socialist Students believes this poses numerous questions for socialists and activists within the student movement.
5. The current financial crisis which the NUS finds itself in is the result of years of clamp downs on internal democracy by the right wing leaderships of the NUS, and the failure of left leaderships to reverse these attacks. Governance reviews pushed through undemocratically by the NUS’ bureaucracy deliberately side lined the active involvement of students in the internal life of the NUS as a campaigning organisation, and converted it into more of a charity, lobbying politicians without the involvement of its rank and file. The lack of action led by the NUS has meant in the minds of many students, it is not yet clear what their role in building a mass student movement could be.
6. This is summed up by the fact that it was an unelected board of trustees who presented a report to last year's April conference, misleading conference and stating that they had 'no concerns' about the financial state of the organisation.
7. In leaked internal NUS documents, the leadership of the NUS has proposed a strategy to deal with the deficit, which includes cuts to NUS’ full time staff, as well as further clamp downs on democracy within the NUS. This including to further shorten the length of conference to two days and one night, to cut full time liberation officers, and to abolish the elected ‘Block of 15’ on the NEC. In its place, Students Union presidents will be asked to form a national steering committee for the NUS.
8. These proposals, if successfully pushed through by the NUS’ bureaucracy, would see the further transformation of the NUS away from an organisation through which student struggles can be channelled, potentially pushed towards the status of a think tank.
9. It is for these reasons that Socialist Students believes the solution to the crisis which currently grips the NUS is not only to oppose the set of proposals put forward by the leadership of the NUS, but a positive programme linked to the struggle to fundamentally re-found the NUS along fighting and democratic lines.
10. Socialist Students firstly demands an extraordinary conference to discuss the way forward for the NUS out of this crisis. Previous ‘extraordinary conferences’ organised by the NUS involved totally undemocratic selection processes for delegates from Students Unions. Socialist Students demands special delegates elections to this conference from all affiliated students unions.
11. At such a conference, Socialist Students would argue for a democratically accountable NUS leadership that rallies around a clear programme of fighting fees and austerity, for living grants for all students, and an end to marketisation and cuts on campuses. We would also argue for the abolition of any unelected boards or committees, and the opening up of the NUS's books to the democratic oversight of students and elected NUS officials as part of an investigation into the finances and potential financial solutions to the crisis.
12. Socialist Students resolves to campaign for such a conference on the university campuses.
13. The likelihood at this stage however is that the current NUS leadership, strengthened by previous attacks on internal democracy and the resulting alienation of the broad layer of students from its structures, will successfully manage to push through its counter reforms. Socialist Students approaches this crisis with the starting point that the student movement desperately needs to build itself a fighting and accountable leadership which is independent from the pressures and influence of big business and their political representatives. The question of whether achieving this task will require a break from the NUS is still open ended at this stage.
14. As socialists, we also believe that the most powerful agent of change in society is the working class. Under capitalism, working people, because they occupy a particular social position within society – producing and providing all the goods and services in society – have the power to grind the society to a halt, and most effectively challenge the power of the capitalist class and their political representatives.
15. As such, the leadership of the student movement regardless of what formal organisation eventually takes shape, in the fight for free education, must engage in a campaign to use its position and authority to appeal to the rank and file of the trade union movement to struggle alongside it, and put pressure on the leadership of the trade unions to call for working class mobilisations to fight against austerity and for the socialist transformation of society.