

# Charter for Free Speech

## **1) Without free speech and a free press there can be no democracy**

We stand for unrestricted freedom of speech and publication. Open debate and the right to question ideas, conventions, rules and laws are fundamental democratic rights. We oppose any form of blasphemy laws – religious or political. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few billionaire proprietors undermines free journalism. We support the development of an alternative and labour movement media not beholden to a handful of individuals. Free Speech is not an absolute right. It does not include the right to "Shout *fire* in a crowded theater" [Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Schenck v. United States* (1919)]. Free Speech doesn't for example include the right to incite racial hatred or advocate the harm of others because of their protected characteristics (race, disability, sexual orientation, gender etc.)

## **2) An end to state and corporate secrecy**

End the prosecution of journalists and whistleblowers like Julian Assange who expose state crimes and attacks on democratic rights. The imprisonment of Assange for publishing evidence of war crimes is (was) an attack on the most fundamental of democratic rights - the right to a free press. Extend the Freedom of Information Act to corporations and private organisations that provide public services. Abolition of the secret state, such as MI5 and MI6.

## **3) The fake IHRA definition of antisemitism must be rejected**

The IHRA and its examples have been used to conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism and attack pro-Palestinian movements like the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS). Even its principal drafter, Kenneth Stern, has stated that it has been abused in order to "chill" free speech on Israel/Palestine. We reject the idea that the Palestinian struggle against oppression and for basic human rights is antisemitic.

## **4) For free discussion and enquiry in universities, colleges and schools**

Freedom of speech and debate are the lifeblood of education, inquiry and a democratic public life, but are increasingly under threat. This is notably the case with the government's threat to defund institutions that refuse to adopt the fake IHRA definition, and the Prevent programme's attempt to brand ideas critical of the status quo, such as support for Palestine or 'anti-capitalism', as 'extremist', 'unacceptable' or even 'terrorist'.

## **5) For freedom of speech and democracy in the Labour movement**

Open political debate, the right to question ideas and the right to hold union leaders and Labour Party officials to account are vital for a healthy Labour and Trade Union movement. We reject the concept of 'denialism' - ie, merely questioning the claim that there is a huge problem with antisemitism in the Labour Party proves guilt of antisemitism. We oppose demands for 'zero tolerance' and 'safe spaces', including on controversial issues like trans rights. They are the opposite of a culture of open debate. The best way to fight prejudice, misperceptions and misunderstandings is through education and debate. We reject the Equality and Human Rights

Commission's (EHRC) report into the Labour Party as an impermissible attempt by the state to interfere in a political party.

**6) If free speech doesn't include the right to offend it is meaningless**

"Freedom of speech is meaningless unless it means the freedom of the person who thinks differently" (Rosa Luxemburg). Libel and defamation laws should be abolished, because they protect the rich and powerful. The libel courts are inaccessible to the poor and those without means. They are a playground for the rich.