

PSC OPPOSES NYS SENATE BILL S.6438 AND NYS ASSEMBLY BILL A.8392

The PSC joins the American Association of University Professors, NYSUT, the City University Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the New York State AAUP Conference and the New York University AAUP chapter in opposing New York Assembly Bill A.8392. The PSC also opposes a nearly identical New York Senate Bill, S.6438, passed by the New York Senate on January 28, 2014.

The two bills would prohibit colleges and universities in New York State from using State funding to support employees' participation in academic groups or associations that have passed resolutions or taken official actions to promote boycotts against certain countries or their higher education institutions. The proposed legislation would also prohibit colleges and universities in New York State from using State funding to pay membership dues to those associations or to reimburse travel or lodging for an employee attending any meeting of such association. Colleges or universities that act in violation of the prohibition would not be eligible for any State funding for that academic year.

In announcing the proposed Assembly legislation, Speaker Sheldon Silver cited the recent resolution passed by the American Studies Association endorsing a boycott of Israeli academic institutions and supporting the protected rights of scholars and students everywhere to engage in research and public speaking about Israel-Palestine. The proposed legislation, if enacted, would mean that if any CUNY college paid for travel for a faculty member to present an academic paper on, for instance, labor history at a regional meeting of the American Studies Association, CUNY would lose its entire New York State funding for that year. Had such legislation been in place in 1980, any New York college or university funding an employee to attend any academic entity sponsored by the United Nations would have lost its eligibility for State funding—because the U.N. had enacted a boycott of “all cultural, academic, sports, and other exchanges” with South Africa.

PSC members hold a variety of positions on the Israel/Palestine conflict, and hold such positions deeply. PSC members also hold a range of positions on the efficacy and legitimacy of academic boycotts as a strategy. We stand together, however, in opposing legislation that would subject New York State funding for colleges and universities to this political litmus test. Such legislation is dangerous to all members of the academic community, whatever our political positions.

Academic freedom is meaningless if it does not protect those who hold unpopular positions, including those who advocate academic boycotts. In its statement on the proposed New York State Assembly bill, the AAUP writes that such legislation, if enacted, “could impose greater restrictions on the academic freedom of faculty members in New York than are threatened by the ASA boycott resolution.” The bills purport to oppose collective punishment of countries or their academic institutions, yet they would impose a collective punishment—denial of State funding for a college's students, faculty and staff—when neither collective nor individual punishment is warranted. Universities may limit funding for scholarly travel and participation in professional

organizations, but such funding decisions should be made by representative faculty bodies based on professional standards, and not on political criteria dictated by elected officials.

The PSC will work with its membership and all of its affiliates to oppose S.6438 and A.8392. We call on all adherents of academic freedom to join us.

Passed unanimously by the PSC Delegate Assembly, January 30, 2014