

1980 Motion to Support #ShutDownYarlsWood Demonstrations passed 3 November 2016

(Content notes for rape, self-harm and sexual violence)

Proposer: Abbie Mulcairn (Women's Officer)

Seconder: Lucy Auger (Momentum UEA)

Union Notes:

1. Yarls Wood is an immigration detention centre in Bedfordshire which detains refugees (mostly women) for an unlimited period of time without them having committed or been convicted of any crime.
2. In 2010, women at the Yarls Wood detention centre went on hunger strike in order to protest their detainment and the conditions in which they were being kept. They were subjected to physical violence and verbal abuse as a result.
3. Over 70% of the female detainees at Yarls Wood are survivors of rape and are ill and vulnerable¹
4. Movement for Justice, alongside a range of different activist groups organize mass demonstrations outside the detention centre, the next of which is due to occur on the 3rd of December
5. The demonstration will run under the slogan 'Surround #Yarlswood' or '#ShutDownYarlsWood' and aims to force the government to close this detention centre and ultimately the system of immigration detentions entirely.
6. The demonstration aims to bring together activists, organisers and asylum seekers from across the country to help build a network of campaigners and create links between movements. It is also an opportunity for detainees (many of whom are not native English speakers) to contact campaigners and access legal counsel.
7. Theresa May, the Prime Minister, has been accused of state sponsored violence against women after an investigation found guards at Yarls Wood ignoring self-harm and using racist terms to address detainees²
8. Last year, one man died while being detained in Yarls Wood³
9. Britain is the only EU member state with no limit on the time that asylum seekers can be detained.
10. That the detention centre is run by private contractor Serco, who won a new 7-year contract from the government in November 2014 worth over £70 million
11. A Human Rights Watch report states that women are held in detention for administrative convenience, have very little time to prepare a legal case, and if refused, only have a few days to appeal. Their claims often involve sexual violence, female genital mutilation, trafficking and domestic abuse.

¹ Cristel Amiss – Black Women's Rape Action Project - <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/feb/08/hunger-strike-women-detention-yarls-wood-protest>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/03/yarls-wood-may-state-sanctioned-abuse-women>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/apr/20/detainee-dies-yarls-wood-immigration-centre>

These are all things which take women time and trust to disclose and lawyers time to verify.⁴

12. In August of 2015, the chief prison inspector Nick Hardwick called Yarls Wood detention centre a 'place of national concern'⁵
13. The UN's special rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, was refused access to Yarls Wood detention centre by the government and raised concerns about what they were trying to hide⁶
14. New legislation has been released making university compliance with Prevent obligatory, and students, especially international and BME students are at risk of being reported to the Home Office and UKBA for supposed "extremist views."
15. Earlier this year, Teresa May was found to have wrongly deported over 48,000 students⁷

Union Believes:

1. That women are being unfairly detained and mistreated and subjected to physical abuse, at Yarls Wood and other detention centres across the country
2. That a culture of rape and sexual coercion is never acceptable, regardless of the legal status of the women involved.
3. That refugees, women, migrants and fellow students are being unfairly locked up indefinitely for no crime other than to seek freedom, safety or to escape poverty and build a future for themselves and their families
4. Universities should be spaces where students are able to express themselves without fear of detention or persecution by the government.
5. That as a Student Union we have a duty to protect all students, especially international and BME students who may be at risk of being unfairly deported or detained.
6. That one of the most effective ways of resisting detention centres is through direct action like the #ShutDownYarlsWood movement organised by MFJ
7. That women who are often fleeing from violence and sexual abuse in their home country, arrive in detention centres only to be subjected to ongoing abuse
8. That detention centres are unjust and inhumane and are used to generate profit for private companies while ignoring a number of serious allegations of physical and sexual abuse⁸
9. That as a Student Union, we have an obligation to protect our students, especially vulnerable

⁴ <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/melanie-mcfadyean-the-scandal-that-is-yarls-wood-1913692.html>

⁵ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/home-office-refusing-to-reveal-whether-women-in-yarls-wood-have-been-raped-to-protect-the-commercial-a7077736.html>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/theresa-may-wrongly-deported-48000-students-after-bbc-panorama-exposes-toxic-scam-a6958286.html>

⁸ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/home-office-refusing-to-reveal-whether-women-in-yarls-wood-have-been-raped-to-protect-the-commercial-a7077736.html>

Union Resolves:

1. To release a public statement condemning Yarls Wood and its treatment of women
2. To mandate SOC to fully support the #ShutDownYarlsWood demonstrations organised by Movement for Justice and all other future demonstrations and direct action for the closure of detention centres
3. To mandate SOC to actively campaign, in line with NUS policy⁹ against all detention centres and support students being unfairly detained
4. To fund all transport to future Yarls Wood demonstrations including the upcoming demo on the 3rd of December
5. To mandate SOC to use all available resources to promote the demonstration to students

⁹ https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/21268/CD6_motions_0.4.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJKEA56ZWKFU6MHNQ&Expires=1475707433&Signature=d6TfRz4JQrexWM6eu4qHzDWzvFs%3D