



EFF STATEMENT ON WITHHELD STUDENT QUALIFICATIONS AS A RESULT OF STUDENT DEBT

Wednesday, 24 March 2021

The EFF notes with shock and awe, the number of students who have had their qualifications withheld from them as a result of debt owed to institutions of higher learning. In a response to a question written for oral reply by the EFF, Minister of Higher Education Blade Nzimande indicated that for the past ten years, 106 494 students, as reported by 21 out of the 26 public universities, are unable to get their qualifications as a result of student debt. The total amount owed by these students according to the Minister is R10 403 730 362.60.

The institutions that are responsible for the highest debt have a predominantly black in student populous, and the amounts that they expect from students who have completed their qualifications is staggering.

The Central University of Technology demands an amount of R1 782 552 433.72 to give 12 985 students their qualifications, while the University of Fort Hare demands an amount of R285 977 088 from 5 922 students and the University of Johannesburg demands a shocking amount of R537 674 00 from 7 722 students who have completed their qualifications.

The implications of these students not having access to their qualifications has far reaching implications not only on themselves as individuals, but on national and continental developmental prospects.

These range from their own employment opportunities being stifled, bad credit ratings, to the broader and critical developmental areas that require transformation such as the post-graduate sector and academia.

The fact that these students cannot access their qualifications, means that they struggle to gain access to post-graduate studies as a result of their debt, and this means that critical high-level research remains conducted by the privileged who may not encompass the entire South African experience as they are able to study due to their ability to pay.

This undoubtedly has an impact on the nature of research outputs by our higher education sector, and implicitly, means that those who teach as lecturers and Professors will remain those who have money, by consequence those who are white in skin colour.

If we are to have any appreciation of what it means at the level of pedagogy who represents thought and education, we would understand that to have black people, who are majority poor and cannot afford to pay for education, as part of the academic fabric of this country will do wonders for what is taught, how it is taught and how black people interact with knowledge and knowledge systems.

Student debt therefore is a direct obstacle to development and transformation. The EFF demands that all of these debts to be scrapped so that these students are able to receive their hard earned qualifications and make meaningful contributions to society.

The EFF will be presenting a Students' Debt Cancellation Private Members Bill, to ensure the cancellation of all student debt as the most workable solution to a crisis that hampers knowledge production and commodifies education. For people who have exhibited their capacity to complete their qualifications to have them withheld from them is cruel, inhumane and represents a deep-seated hatred for progress.

All education loving people must oppose this as part of the broader call for free, well-resourced and decolonized education.

ISSUED BY THE ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS

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