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The Cambridge Union Society
9A Bridge Street
Cambridge, CB2 1UB
Email: secretary@cus.org

Cambridge Union Society Emergency Standing Committee Minutes

Dining Room, Cambridge Union Society

08:15, Saturday 10th October 2015

In the Chair

Oliver Mosley PRESIDENT (OM)

Present

William Fitzalan Howard VICE PRESIDENT (WFH)

Fred Vincent EXECUTIVE OFFICER (FV)

Sachin Parathalingam SPEAKERS' OFFICER (SP)

Asia Lambert SOCIAL EVENTS OFFICER (AOL)

James Hutt PRESIDENT-ELECT (JH)

Katherine Reggler EXECUTIVE OFFICER-ELECT (KR)

Joshua Ellis SPEAKERS OFFICER-ELECT (JE)

Charlotte Petter TREASURER-ELECT (CP)

Ash Nandi SOCIAL EVENTS OFFICER-ELECT (AN)

In Attendance

Page Nyame-Satterthwaite SECRETARY (*taking minutes*) (PN)

Daniel Chouchena HOEM (DC)

Leyla Gumusdis DEPUTY HOEM (LG)

Naomi Magnus DEPUTY HOEM (NM)

Louise Bratchie SGL SPEAKERS (LB)

Sarah Sheard SGL DEBATES (SS)

Florian Kressyig HEAD OF AV (FK)

Miranda Stocks DEPUTY HEAD OF AV (MS)

Matteo Violet-Vianello HEAD OF PRESS (MV)

Tim Adelani HEAD OF PRESS (TA)

Eleanor Hegarty HEAD OF PUBLICITY (EH)

Xavier Bisits DEPUTY HEAD OF PUBLICITY (XB)

Gabrielle McGuinness DIVERSITY OFFICER-DESIGNATE (GM)

Helen Dallas WOMEN'S OFFICER (HD)

Anna Walker WOMEN'S OFFICER-DESIGNATE (AW)

Till Schoefer ACCESS OFFICER (TS)

Meeting opened at 08:23

1) Emergency meeting: Referendum on hosting of Julian Assange(OM)

a) OM thanks everyone present for attending this emergency meeting at short notice

b) Referendum on hosting of Julian Assange on 11th November 2015

- The Union has decided as an elect team, after several days of deliberation and over five hours of meetings, to **hold a referendum on the hosting of Julian Assange on 11th November 2015.**
- This decision has been made because the Union is a free speech society and the circumstances are unique. A warrant was issued for Julian Assange's arrest on charges of rape and sexual assault by the Swedish authorities in 2011 and he sought (and was granted) asylum in the



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Ecuadorian embassy in 2012, on the grounds that if he faced trial in Sweden he would be extradited to the US on espionage charges and would not receive a fair trial. The argument of the Swedish authorities is that he is running from justice and evading the law.

- It became clear in meetings on the issue, that the elected officers could not make this decision, which would affect the entire membership, without asking for their input.
- Therefore, it has been decided to hand over the decision to our members, by holding a referendum.
- CUSU(Cambridge University Students' Union) have been informed in advance
 - they take issue with the decision to host this speaker, as it is contrary to their position on no platforming and position on protecting those affected by rape and sexual assault.
- Internally, the decision to hand the decision over to the membership will:
 - avoid creating an internal schism between those who agree and disagree within the Union
 - prevents thirteen people (the Voting Members) from making a decision that is beyond them
- **The vote will be called in the next two weeks**

2) Campaigning by Union committee members(OM)

- OM has a press release with him, which will be released today(10/10/15)
- In recognition of the fact that the committee are still trying to run a term, if everyone on the committee campaigned, it would create division amongst officers and make it more difficult for everyone to carry out their respective roles.
- In the interests of the term, the decision has been made that no one on Full committee or who is working for the Union can campaign or have a policy on this-the Union position is neutral.
- It is being turned over to the membership in the student body

08:26 TA and FK arrive

- The Union will release a policy on past practice. However, this situation is unique and we think it is better for the membership to make the decision.

3) Details of the referendum(OM)

- **There will be a vote on the day of the China debate**
- **9am to 10pm**
- **Online vote**
- **Any member of the Union** will be allowed to vote
- There will be a debate the day before
- Probably four speakers(2 prop/2 opp) to allow for lots of floor speeches
- Student debaters
- There will be proposition and opposition
- It will be a similar format to the way we conduct election hustings
- OM asks for any questions or comments.

4) Questions or comments from Standing Committee

a) TS-How are we choosing speakers for the debate?

- OM explains that there will be two Returning Officers(ROs), just like with a normal election and a ballot for people to apply to speak in the debate, similar to with emergency or reserve debate applications
- Having said that, the electoral officers will be involved with deciding too
- Request that if any SC members have any advice or help they would like to offer, they approach OM
- It is a group issue(choosing speakers for the debate) managed by two figureheads(the ROs)

b) HD announces formal resignation

- Statement redacted to protect privacy of officer involved



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- **OM notes that HD is leaving with the complete thanks of everyone for the term she put together. The forums she organised are incredibly important and will continue.** She is thanked for everything she has done for the building, it is regretted that she has had to leave in these circumstances and she leaves with our sincere thanks and best wishes.
- HD notes that arrangements for the forums and other events can be discussed later.
08:33 HD, AW and CP leave
- OM notes that this underlines the gravity of the situation-he did not know that HD's resignation would happen then, but respects her reasons and it is a difficult situation.
- In regards to HD's comments about being kept out of meetings, OM says he was restrained by the rule of the Union that he must uphold that only the elected officers (VMOs) make decisions on behalf of the Union.
- HD was brought into discussion, but OM regrets that it was not sooner, it was too late.
- Whilst handing it over to the membership can be considered to make it simpler, it also puts us in a difficult position-the referendum decision took over five hours discussion over several days.
- OM underlines that we are a team and this is a good time to speak to him publically or privately afterwards about-this issue is up for the membership to decide
- c) **XB raises that it is not just this event (hosting Julian Assange) that is relevant to this discussion, what is being done, if anything, to rescue the events prior?**
 - OM notes that the women's events have already been fully organised, with speakers and SGLs
 - OM will be asking someone to take over the role to run events and notes that particularly in this time we need a women's officer, otherwise a significant group is not being represented properly. We may open applications up, but do not know yet.
 - XB asks if we are expecting groups/representatives to withdraw from Monday (12th)'s consent forum?
 - OM confirms that it is not expected. All speakers and those involved with this term's events have been written to, explaining that in 200th anniversary as a free speech and debating society, we cannot go against our core principle by issuing a disinvite.
 - When the Oxford Union had a similar issue, most speakers did not drop out. Issues are expected to arise regarding speakers, but not any significant problems.
- d) **SS asks whose decision it was to invite Julian Assange**
 - OM explains that anyone controversial is run by the trustees and must be approved.
 - This happened and then the invite was sent.
 - A week and a half ago his representatives accepted the invitation. The elected officers then agreed (in a split vote) to continue to host him and to hold a referendum so that members could vote on the issue.
 - The results of the elected officers' vote in the secret ballot will remain secret, it is a collective Union decision to continue to host Julian Assange and the elected team act as a unit.
- e) **DC asks about the circumstances when Julian Assange addressed the Union before**
 - OM explains that he came once before, in Lent 2011 and intended to speak in 2012 but the event could not go ahead, in part due to AV difficulties.
 - OM notes that we have never disinvited before and the elected team were being faced with the question of doing something that has never been done before.
 - If speakers that raised such issues had usually been disinvited then it may have been a different situation, it would be more comfortable to say it is not worth the effort and division it causes.
 - OM emphasises that it is the bicentary year and a decision greater than the elected officers, disinviting would effectively undermine our core principle.



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- f) **XB asks about press, raising that both the Editor (SP) and Deputy Editor (XB) are on Standing Committee, as well as others who work for newspapers. On the topic of impartiality, people can be impartial but pieces on this issue will go through them**
- AOL notes you cannot write your own comment piece on the issue
 - OM trusts both to make sensible decisions
 - **Raises to them (and the entire committee) that you can write a news piece, but not a comment piece yourself, which would be considered as campaigning**
 - **KR notes that if anyone would like to say something in this meeting or to the elected officers but does not feel comfortable to say it in person about all these issues, please pass it on through another committee member**
 - OM emphasises that the conversation does not end here and urges anyone to get in contact
- g) **XB asks who to contact if you have suggestions for arguments to submit**
- OM notes that this is still being discussed-the parameters have not yet been set
 - An email will go round to the standing committee about this.
 - This decision must be kept secret in confidence until the event's release (**press release later on 10/10/15**)
- h) **TS asks about voting rights being restricted to members and speakers in the debate who are non-members**
- TS notes that many non-members in Cambridge have strong views on this and would be effective speakers-would the speakership be open to non-members.
 - OM and FV confirm this. OM notes that the CUSU Women's officer (Charlotte Chorley) will be offered the opportunity to select people for the other side, if they want to take part or choose people.
 - MAK (debating officer) has offered to find the best speakers impartially for both sides
 - OM clarifies that he does not mind what the decision is, it is most important for members to decide at this point.
- i) **DC asks about security if the event goes ahead-is this part of the HOEMs role?**
- OM clarifies that all security goes through BB's office
 - The HOEMs will manage the event itself
 - FV notes that if the event goes ahead, **Julian Assange would speak via livestream and not physically in the building, so security would be for crowd control.**
- j) **LG asks if this would be a members only event**
- OM notes that it probably would, as this is an internal decision for members and it is not fair for proposition speakers
 - LG and will there be overflow-OM does not yet know, it is dependent on the reaction and interest level
- k) **KR highlights support for committee members**
- If anyone feels attacked in person, or online (e.g. on Facebook), please let the elected officers know.
 - There have been instances before, where two members of committee who had nothing to do with the invitation to Germaine Greer, were attacked online.
 - It is not fair-especially when you had nothing to do with inviting- and the Voting Members are not prepared to allow that.
 - The Union as an institution will be attacked, but individual committee members should not be. If you are put in an uncomfortable position, let the elected officers know.



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- FV, adding to KR's points, notes that with the debate, referendum and the speaker event, if it were to go ahead, no one should feel that because of their job title they have to take part. Just speak to FV or the other elected officers and they will accommodate your requests.
- SP also notes that publicity will be done differently-you will not be asked to share/invite as usually happens.

08:46 AW and CP return to meeting

- l) **TS notes that if we have competitive debaters dominate the debate, it makes it seem like a theoretical motion rather than a real life referendum with implications in reality.**
- OM acknowledges that this has been raised as an issue with MAK(debating officer)
 - TS emphasises that it should not become some form of debating workshop
 - FV explains that the speakers on each side will be selected because they believe in the proposition or opposition
 - WFH highlights the intention is that most of the debate will be floor speeches, with the aim to get the debate going.
- m) **SS asks about potential for speakers to drop out**
- FV acknowledges the possibility of this happening and explains that a letter has been drafted to go to speakers in all future events speaker telling them the same said here and to members: we do not feel we can make a decision on behalf of all of the members who have the final say. Speakers are encouraged to address any questions or concerns to the Union as well.
 - OM notes that when the Oxford Union disinvented a speaker, another speaker dropped out in protest of this- so there is a risk of speakers dropping out either way.
 - SP confirms that nothing is confirmed-the decision is entirely in members hands when he speaks and it is highlighted by FV that we are talking about him speaking(via livestream), not coming in person.
- n) **LG asks for clarification as to when the event would take place, if he spoke.**
- **SP 11th November at 7pm**
 - OM clarifies that **the referendum itself is taking place in the next two weeks**
 - OM on the event format, notes that Julian Assange and his team have agreed to a referendum, actively agreed to this taking place and have placed no restrictions on questions.
 - We have made it very clear that people can ask anything-as far as he is aware he will not be saying no comment
 - Right of response will be allowed and representatives from the campaigns that condemn the event, including the CUSU women's officer will be invited to attend and ask questions.
 - SP notes that the format would be a speech on a topic to be confirmed, followed by a Q&A.
- o) **DC asks if he had allegations from Sweden against him last time he attended(in Lent 2011)**
- OM clarifies that he appeared in person last time
 - WFH adds that the arrest warrant from Sweden had been issued
 - To outline the situation: An arrest warrant had been issued by the Swedish Prosecutor's Office in 2010. when he appeared in 2011 he said he could not comment on this for legal reasons.
 - SP notes that in 2011 he received a standing ovation from the Chamber, one of only two-the other given to Reverend Jesse Jackson.
- p) **OM reads out statement he plans to make to the press**
- FK asks if in floor speech can you include any part of this discussion, OM confirms that none of this discussion could be included; KR confirms that you should say no comment and talk to the President.



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- OM says to say no comment and the statement he will read will be the Union's line-he also says that saying the Union has decided to give members the decision in the referendum is acceptable as comment.
- JH checks if this applies to on and off the record, OM confirms and emphasises that normal press rules apply-so any approaches from the press should be redirected to Heads of Press.
- OM proceeds to read press statement(the final version was circulated by WFH on 10/10/5 at 15:25pm to Standing Committee)
- XB and TS highlight the issue with wording around 'is not able/is not willing' to be brought to justice-makes it seem as if no one is at fault for there not being a trial yet.

5) Closing remarks

-thank you for attending and the last publicity drive is this Wednesday (14th), with an image on SharePoint

Meeting closes at 08:55

❖ **Next Standing Committee will be on Tuesday 13th October, at 8:15am in the Dining Room**