

Committee & AGM Minutes - Minutes of the Annual General meeting of the Utopian Studies Society, Plymouth, 7 July 2007

The Utopian Studies Society is an interdisciplinary society that aims to co-ordinate and encourage the diverse work currently taking place on the subject of utopianism.

Present: Fátima Vieira (Chair) Jim Arnold (Treasurer), Lorna Davidson (Secretary), Amanda Cole, Greg Claeys, Laurence Davis, Jorge Bastos Da Silva, Pere Gallardo, Vince Geoghegan, Alex-Alban Gomez, Ruth Levitas, Lyman Tower Sargent, (Committee Members) and 69 ordinary members.

Fátima Vieira welcomed all present to the AGM, and thanked Malcolm Miles and his Plymouth colleagues for their hard work in organising the conference, which she felt was going extremely well. She extended a special welcome to those who were attending the USS conference for the first time.

1. Present.

Apologies: Tom Moylan, Susan McManus, Nicole Pohl, Lucy Sargisson.

2. Minutes of last AGM.

Held in Tarragona, 7 July 2006 (Posted on website and circulated at meeting). On a motion proposed by Fátima Vieira and seconded by Ian Donnachie, the minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Matters arising.

None.

4. Finance.

Treasurer's Report. Jim Arnold referred members to the Financial Statement, which was circulated at the meeting. As usual, most of the expenditure had been in connection with the annual conferences, including transfer to the bank account of the USS levy on registration fees from the 2006 conference, and payment of grants, which in 2007 were awarded to 8 individuals. The balance of funds stood at £3,142.48. There were no questions. The Treasurer's Report and Financial Statement were approved unanimously.

5. Election of Office Bearers and Committee.

Chair referred members to the list of current office-bearers and committee members, circulated at meeting, and noted that they had been elected at the 2006 AGM to serve for a period of three years. No-one had indicated a wish to stand down from the committee. Accordingly it was agreed that no action was required at this time.

6. Conference Plans.

a) 2008. Joachim Fisher confirmed that the Ralahine Centre at the University of Limerick in Ireland was preparing to host the 2008 conference, and announced that the dates would be 3-5 July 2008. Special themes identified by the Steering Group so far will be Architecture/Music/Irish Utopias, but proposals on a wide range of Utopian topics will be welcome. JF advised that the University was easily accessible via Shannon Airport, and confirmed that University accommodation would be available as well as local Hotels. Some optional excursions to sites of interest were being investigated; it was suggested that these should be arranged for the days immediately preceding or following the main conference programme.

b) Fátima Vieira proposed that the 2009 Conference should be hosted by the University of Porto, and organised by FV in association with colleagues from other universities in the Portuguese Utopian Research Group (Coimbra, Lisboa, Aveiro and Tras-os-Montes). She hoped to have a venue in the historic centre of Porto. This proposal was met with general approval, and it was agreed to proceed.

7. Website & Mailing List.

Lorna Davidson referred members to the list of e-mail addresses printed in the Delegate Pack. She advised that anyone attending the conference who was not already on the USS e-mailing list would be added to it. She appealed to members to let her know of changes/errors in e-mail addresses.

8. Invisible Islands Project.

FV gave a short presentation about this project which has been successfully piloted with High School students in Portugal. It aims to be interactive, international and multi-lingual, and funding has been received from the Portuguese Ministry of Education, Science & Technology, to support the employment of a Research Assistant for 2 years. The British Council have also agreed to promote it through their networks. Contributions could be accepted in any language, provided that a suitably qualified native speaker of the language was available to review the content. FV sought approval for the Invisible Islands project to be supported by and associated with the Utopian Studies Society. Discussion ensued about some complex issues, and practical difficulties which would need to be overcome, relating particularly to developing a policy on what type of material would be inadmissible for inclusion on the Invisible Islands website. It was noted by G Claeys and several other members that Universities normally have very strict policy guidelines for the content of websites. The elimination of material deemed unacceptable would rely on editorial review and control, while avoiding any suggestion of undue censorship. After discussion, Ruth Levitas moved that FV's proposal should be approved in principle, subject to an appropriate policy for editorial review and control of contributions being agreed by the USS Committee. L Sargent seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously. FV agreed to prepare a draft policy and circulate it to the Committee for further discussion/ approval. If all went well, FV hoped to have a presentation on the Invisible Islands project included in the 2009 conference programme.

9. Any Other Competent Business.

a) Henry Near referred to possible boycott of Israeli academics by UK universities, and expressed appreciation that he was welcomed as a USS delegate. M Miles clarified the position of the University and College Union which was proposing only to debate this issue; he stressed that opinions were much divided, and in any case a boycott would affect institutions rather than individual academics.

b) Announcements were made relating to forthcoming conferences/meetings:

NEMLA Convention Buffalo, New York 10-13 April 2008 – see www.nemla.org

Society of Utopian Studies Toronto 4-7 Oct 2007.

Utopia, Dystopia & Science Fiction: Melbourne Australia, 5-6 Dec 2007. For more info see www.arts.monash.edu.au/lcl/conferences/utopias3/

Communal Studies Association, Kirtland, Ohio 27-30 Sept 2007 for more info see www.communalstudies.org.

c) The meeting ended with a lively discussion about the inclusion in future of sessions which addressed the relevance and application of Utopian theories to everyday life; some of P Gallardo's student delegates at USS 2006 had suggested that this might help to dispel the aura of mystery surrounding the concept of Utopian Studies. J Fischer said that the 2008 conference organisers planned to try and engage other bodies around the Limerick community. L Sargent recommended that individuals who favoured this type of discussion could propose a session on particular issues. R Levitas welcomed a broad approach, but cautioned against the Society becoming seen in any sense as a political body; she reminded delegates that the Society was set up to encourage the study of Utopia, and advised that mixing politics and academic study could be disastrous. L Davis commended the impressive range of papers at the 2007 conference, some of which did indeed link utopian theory to practical real-life issues. M Miles was encouraged by RL's and LD's comments, and hoped that some interesting new initiatives connecting academic work with "real life" had taken place in Plymouth.

10. Date of next meeting.

This will be held in Limerick during the 2008 Conference.

Fátima Vieira closed the meeting, with thanks to the USS Committee, and all the conference delegates for their contributions. She hoped that many would meet again at the University of Limerick in 2008.