

## Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Utopian Studies Society Monash University, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Present: **Chair:** Gregory Claeys, **Secretary:** Justyna Galant, **Treasurer:** Adam Stock, **Committee Members:** Andrew Milner, Antonis Balasopoulos, Artur Blaim, Fátima Vieira, Jorge Bastos da Silva, Laurence Davis, Lisa Garforth, Nathaniel Coleman, Nicole Pohl, Pavla Veselá, Sorin Antohi, Susanna Layh, Zsolt Czigányik and 92 ordinary members.

- I. **Apologies** from Lyman Tower Sargent, Michael Kelly, Julia Ramírez Blanco.
- II. **Minute of silence in the memory of Jim Arnold** proposed by Greg Claeys.
- III. **Approval of Minutes** for the Tarragona AGM held on 12th July 2018. Minutes previously sent to the USS Prato Conference 2019 participants and shown on screen in the conference room.
- IV. **Finance:** Treasurer's report for 2018/2019 is presented to the members and approved unanimously after Adam Stock's brief presentation of the contents. After thanking Sam Bunn for his work on filming the keynote speakers of the Conference, AS informs that the bill will be available on the USS website and urges the Society to consider additional sources of funding.
- V. **Changes to the USS constitution:** Greg Claeys expresses his thanks to Adam Stock, Lisa Garforth and David Bell for their work on the suggested changes to the Society's Code of Conduct, Suggestions for Organizers, and the Society's government.

### 1. ADDITIONS OF FUNCTIONS

- A. The function of the **Website Officer** (currently Matthew Wilson) is proposed and approved by majority vote.
- B. The function of the **Editor of Utopian Studies** (currently Nicole Pohl) is proposed. After Peter Sand's suggestion that the position may be problematic as Utopian Studies is a journal associated primarily with Society for Utopian Studies, on NP's motion the proposal is delayed until the Society's next AGM.
- C. **EDI officer and working group** – Gregory Claeys reads out the proposed definition of the officer's function displayed on the screen in the conference room.

"We propose to elect an Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Officer along with an EDI working group, who will represent a marginalised demographic (e.g. LGBTQIA+, BME, disabled, women, people from the working class, low income earners, ethnic minorities); who will work with Conference Organisers in an advisory function; who will serve as the persons of contact for anyone who might experience any form of harassment (sexual/social harassment; bullying;

racism) during our meetings; and who will be in charge of a working group who will devise a clear policy on sexual harassment.”

Justyna Galant invites Lisa Garforth and Adam Stock to speak to the original document drafted by themselves and David Bell. The document is presented on the screen. Adam Stock explains the need for inclusivity of the Society and explains that the work on the original document was undertaken over a considerable time and involved thorough deliberations.

Objections are raised by Tamara Prosic, who indicates that the proposal strongly suggests that the Society currently marginalises sexual and other minorities, implying the Society’s elitism, and also involves categorisation of individuals, which she considers to be in disagreement with the spirit of the Society. She also asks about the proposed definition of bullying.

Tim Waterman reads out a definition of bullying, suggesting its most common version could be adopted by the Society. Antonis Balasopoulos shares TP’s concerns and indicates that the Society may find itself dealing with delicate and complex legal issues. Laurence Davis indicates the hard work and consideration that led to the careful drafting of the document by DB, AS and LG, thus supporting all the proposal contained within.

Lisa Garforth responds by emphasising that the main function of the EDI officer is primarily related to the important recognition of the complexity and diversity of our world and the need of the Society to acknowledge and aid all those who may find it difficult to participate in the life of societies in general, as well as within the academic context. LG underscores the significance of the much-needed change in the patterns of thinking about exclusion, of which the EDI function is an expression.

Michał Kłosiński suggests that the most suitable person to undertake this function would be an individual with legal background.

Justyna Galant proposes a vote on creating the position of an EDI officer and their associated working group, whose exact functions and duties will be agreed upon during next year’s AGM. The persons for the functions are to be elected during next year’s AGM. The notion is seconded by Annette Magid and Nicole Pohl. The proposal passes unanimously.

- D. **ECR officer – Early Career Researcher.** The function of proposed and approved unanimously. Elections for the position are to take place during next year’s AGM.

## 2. **TERMS OF OFFICE**

- A. **COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS – TERMS OF OFFICE** – It is proposed that all Committee members as well as the three officers – Chair, Secretary, Treasurer – are elected for the period of three years, after which time they may stand for re-election.

Antonis Balasopoulos asks for clarification as to the number of possible re-elections and enquires what happens if a member standing for re-election has a competitor. Justyna Galant explains with regard to the latter question that the bio notes of both candidates are then to the participants of a given conference and both candidates compete for the position on equal grounds.

Laurence Davis, referring to the document drafted by David Bell, Lisa Garforth and Adam Stock, proposes that the possibility of re-election for Officers is reduced to one, thus making the 6-year period the maximum term of office.

Gregory Claeys expresses his concern that by limiting the number of years in office the Society may lose the services of those with expertise and experience, also pointing out that, as the recent situation with the vacancy for the Treasurer has proven, the positions

of Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary do not normally enjoy much popularity, thus indicating possible problems with filling those position as the respective terms of office come to an end.

Justyna Galant suggests LD drafts options of proposal for this issue for further consideration and vote during next year's AGM. Darren Webb supports LD's motion, pointing out that the principle of fixed terms of office has a rich utopian heritage. DW argues that it would be inappropriate to delay key votes until next year because members wishing to vote on the issues presently might not be in attendance at Bucharest. He also expressed ethical concerns regarding next year's conference on grounds of the personal and political history of one of the conference's key organisers.

LD observes that the expertise and experience of former office-holders will not necessarily be lost, as those who are committee members will retain their positions on the committee. He suggests that if no alternative candidate comes forward, then as discussed and agreed in committee an incumbent officer may retain their position for a specified period of time to be determined following further democratic discussion at a future USS AGM. He also expresses his belief that a 6-year limitation will make the election procedure more welcoming to new members. On this basis, and given that the issue had already received at least one year of detailed consideration following the mandate for democratic reform at the Tarragona AGM, he formally calls for a vote on the proposal. Darren Webb supports LD's motion, noting that term limits are a feature of many literary utopias. Artur Blaim replies that term limits are not a feature of many other literary utopias, and Greg Claeys again warns of a loss of expertise, experience, commitment and the willingness to make substantial financial sacrifices, mentioning past officers – Fátima Vieira and Lorna Davidson – whose long-standing commitment to the Society were and are one of the reasons for its success and longevity.

Feride Çiçekoğlu suggests that since the Society was "coming of age" now, and since "adulthood" means risk, positions of power should not be continuous (beyond two terms).

Nathaniel Coleman suggests adopting a proviso that the above would not apply in case no candidate for the position is proposed, apart from the one standing for re-election. It is agreed that the question of the maximum 1 year in office in case of no competitors for the position be addressed again during next year's AGM.

Justyna Galant proposes a vote on the limitation of the maximum 6-year term in office, as read out by Laurence Davis: "Officers of the society (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer plus EDI and ECR officers [see section 2 below] and any other new officer roles) may hold their positions for a maximum of two three-year election cycles (six years in total), after which they will not be eligible for re-election." The proposal is accepted by majority vote.

- B. **EDI AND ECR OFFICERS – TERMS OF OFFICE** – It is proposed that the EDI and ECR officers can be re-elected once after the period of 3 years in office.
  - C. **WEBSITE MANAGER and UTOPIAN STUDIES EDITOR** – It is proposed that these positions (see 1B above) are permanent and not subject to elections or rota. No objections.
3. **INFORMATION ON VACANCIES:** Information on the elections to any positions within the Society and the bio-notes of the candidates will be sent out to all participants of the USS conference in advance of the AGM (if possible, one month before). In this case no nominations are taken from the floor at the AGM. All agreed.

4. **ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS** – Committee members who are already on the board may voluntarily undertake additional positions as group coordinators (with regard to subject, language, discipline, etc.). No objections.

Justyna Galant explains that the change is linked to the idea of geographical / thematic Committee reform raised during the AGM in Tarragona and discussed during the year by the Committee; as well as to the project of a map of utopian studies' scholars and centres (proposed the previous year by Julia Ramírez Blanco) to be placed on the USS website and linked to the ARUS database of utopian publications prepared by Fátima Vieira and team.

5. **3-YEAR TERMS OF OFFICE OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS** – It is suggested that all current Committee members (NOT the Chair, Secretary or Treasurer) as of today commence a 3-year period of office due to the changed / expanded functions mentioned in point 4 directly above. No objections.

#### 6. **DECISION-MAKING WITHIN THE COMMITTEE**

- A. It is proposed that decision making is based on the consensus of those present at the Committee meeting – all agreed.
- B. It is proposed that if no consensus is reached, decisions are taken with the majority of 50% + 1 – all agreed.
- C. It is proposed that no Committee meeting can take place without a quorum (50% +1) – all agreed.
- D. It is proposed that on some aspects decision-making via email is possible – all agreed.

#### 7. **ELECTIONS OF CHAIR AND TREASURER**

- A. Gregory Claeys informs the Society that no candidates were put forward for the position of the Chair (with the information on the vacancy sent out on 31st May 2019 by the Secretary). GC stands for re-election as the only candidate and is elected for the period of 3 years with no objections from the floor.
- B. Justyna Galant explains that, similarly, no candidates were put forward for the position of the USS Treasurer (with the information on the vacancy sent out on 31st May 2019 by the Secretary). JG explains that, given the indispensability of the position for the functioning of the Society, after the expiry of the deadline for nominations herself and Adam Stock made inquiries among the Committee Members as to their possible willingness to take on the function. On Justyna Galant's request, Zsolt Czigányik, agreed to stand for the election as Treasurer a few days before the USS 2019 Prato Conference. On request from Antonis Balasopoulos, ZC introduces himself briefly. Zsolt Czigányik is elected as USS Treasurer for the period of 3 years with no objections. Gregory Claeys and JG express their gratitude for ZC's willingness to serve as Treasurer.

8. **CODE OF CONDUCT** – Justyna Galant informs the members that the Committee has also worked on a number of changes in the Society's Code of Conduct and asks all to expect an email notifying of the new version of the document being posted on the USS website. JG invites all to comment on and suggest alterations to the new document.

V. Conference plans: Sorin Antohi speaks about the plans for the 2020 in Bucharest, Romania, themed “Utopia and History,” promising an engaging programme, interesting conference venues, some additional financial help for the Society’s travel grants, and inviting all to next year’s conference. Greg Claeys thanks Fátima Vieira and team for their willingness to organise the 2021 conference in Portugal. Burcu Kayisci provisionally proposes a conference in Istanbul in 2022. GC expresses gratitude for the offer.

VI. **A vote of thanks to Adam Stock** for his years of service as the Society’s Treasurer.

VII. **Gregory Claeys offers a vote of thanks to Justyna Galant.**

VIII. **A vote of thanks to the Organisers of the 2019 USS Conference in Prato.**