



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Utopian Studies Society 10th December 2021

Present: **Chair:** Gregory Claeys, **Secretary:** Justyna Galant, **Treasurer:** Zsolt Czigányik, **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.

Greg Claeys welcomes all participants at the Society for Utopian Studies Conference Annual General Meeting.

1. Presentation of the Lifetime Achievement Award to Lyman Tower Sargent

Gregory Claeys gives a brief appreciation speech to Lyman Tower Sargent, then proceeds, on behalf of the USS/E, to express deep appreciation to LTS, and presents him with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Lyman Tower Sargent expresses his gratitude for the Award and voices his regret that the additional gift of “liquid refreshment” cannot be shared in person with the Conference participants on this occasion.

Gregory Claeys invites all participants to put all comments and questions in the chat box. Throughout the meeting, adding that the proceedings (along with the chat box contents) will be recorded. GC informs the participants that the AGM meeting will automatically close at 15:50.

2. Election of the USS/E Secretary, ECR Officer and EDI Officer.

GC informs participants that, in view of the Committee’s agreement on the new voting arrangements, no voting (for the USS/E Secretary, Early Career Research Officer, and Equality and Diversity Officer) will take place during the AGM. The voting will take place via an online ballot circulated in advance. Entitled to vote are all members of the Utopian Studies Society / Europe who have presented a paper during any of the USS/E’s conferences.

GC invites 2-minute presentations from the candidates. The speeches by the candidates are given in the following order (alphabetical in each category): for the post of the Secretary: Justyna Galant, Daren Webb; for the post of the Early Career Research Officer: Rhiannon Firth; Equality and Diversity Officer: Heather Alberro, Jennifer Hankin).

GC informs participants that the results of the vote will be known in the evening – at approximately 5pm.

[The results of the voting provided by the recruitment officer Laurence Davis on 12th December at 13:24 were as follows:

Q. 1 membership declaration: Have you presented a paper in any of the USS/E conferences? 103 people answered yes. No one answered no.

Q. 2 Secretary: 101 voted.
Darren Webb – 24
Justyna Galant – 75
Abstaining – 2

RESULT: Galant elected.

Q. 3 ECR officer: 102 voted
Rhiannon Firth – 74
Abstaining – 28

RESULT: Firth elected.

Q. 4 EDI Officer: 102 voted.
Heather Alberro – 52
Jennifer Hankin – 10
Abstaining – 40

RESULT: Alberro elected.]

3. Proposition of Constitutional measures.

Gregory Claeys points to the proposed constitutional measures circulated in advance to the membership indicating that they are the effect of the Committee's discussions in the weeks preceding the conference and all are proposed in response to the changed (online/hybrid) format of the USS/E conferences due to the COVID19 pandemic. GC adds that the Committee agreed that the first of the constitutional measures (below) allows a far fairer and more democratic way of dealing with Society business during COVID and adds that it can be seen as an improvement on the voting procedure. GC reads out all proposals and invites questions and comments from the participants (to be posted in the chat box).

“Constitutional measure 1. DEFINITION OF AN AGM. In reference to § 4-5 of the Society's Constitution (<https://utopian-studies-europe.org/constitution-andregulation/>), an AGM is constituted from all members of the Society who have participated in any Society meeting. Participation is defined as having given a paper during the Society's conference, and being on our mailing list. All AGMs are henceforth defined as virtual.”

“Constitutional measure 2. VOTING BY THE AGM. Items to be voted on will be circulated by the Secretary, and a ballot form provided to the entire membership, who will vote electronically. Members will normally be given about two weeks to deliberate and vote on issues put forward by the Committee, and on the election of officers and the Committee.

GC notes that constitutional measure follows from proposal no. 1.

“Constitutional measure 3. COMMITTEE ELECTIONS. The Committee's maximum size is fifteen. If more than fifteen candidates for the Committee are nominated, those with the largest number of votes will be deemed elected. (The Chair, Secretary and other officers are ex officio members of the Committee).”

“Constitutional measure 4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS. In reference to § 9 of the Society's Constitution (<https://utopian-studies-europe.org/constitution-andregulation/>) nominations for membership of the Committee and the office-bearers will be made in writing in advance of the meeting. Officers of the Society and Committee members are elected by the membership of the Society. This ballot will be sent approximately one month in advance, with the declaration confirming that the person voting has participated in one or more of the Society's conferences, and is therefore entitled to vote. Brief c.v.s and nominations will be included with the ballot. The results will be announced at the end of the relevant conference.”

“Constitutional measure 5. COMMITTEE DECISION-MAKING. In the event that the Committee is required to make decisions about Society procedure, for instance in the choice of a future conference venue, where time may be of the essence, and consultation with the membership may be unwieldy, it may by majority vote take preliminary decisions, such as soliciting proposals, without recourse to an AGM. An AGM will normally vote (electronically) to accept or reject such proposals.”

Justyna Galant reads the chat comment from Laurence Davis: “Perhaps we could allow members of the AGM who wish to speak to unmute themselves, so that we can have proper dialogue and discussion?”

GC reiterates that due to the presence of a large group of participants and time restrictions chatbox is the preferred mode of communication. GC asks LD for a specific comment on the proposed measures.

JG reads the comment from Siân Adiseshiah: “I'm wondering about who constitutes the membership.” GC answers that the membership is constituted by those who have contributed with their presentation to any of the USS/E conferences thus far. Siân Adiseshiah points out that no other association that she is a part of defines membership in such a broad manner and invites a reflection on what that may imply. While expressing her wish that the Society

has a broad and diverse membership, she sees the need for a tiered membership fee that would allow individuals to opt in and out of the Society. SA points out that she finds it strange to have a huge membership that can grow exponentially every year. GC responds that the idea is to make the most democratic possible casting of the idea of the membership of the Society. A fair assumption is that a number of those who no longer hold interest in the Society but continue to receive email correspondence from the Society simply do not respond to the messages. The current USS/E list is 1200 people, the assumption being that about a quarter, or one third of this number are interested and active members.

GC also recalls that in the past participants to conferences were asked to pay the Society yearly membership fee in person when checking-in to a specific conference. As opposed to that, no membership fee has been asked of participants of the last conference in Porto. GC points out that there have been suggestions, to be discussed by the Committee, regarding having a fee-based membership, i.e. only the payment of the Society fee entitles participants to be members of Society in any given year. GC says that his opinion limiting de facto the membership only to those who participate to the Conference would not allow the Society to grow and he suggests a more inclusive approach.

Artur Blaim points out that Article 2 of USS-E Constitution states that “Membership shall be open to anyone with an interest in the study of Utopianism, all participants of any USS conference will be counted among its members and their email addresses will be added to the Society’s mailing list”.

Nicole Pohl, Tim Waterman, Raffaella Baccolini, Antonis Balasopoulos, Darren Webb, agree with Siân Adiseshiah comments above. Patricia McManus also agrees and adds that a whole membership vote is only superficially democratic, more a plebiscite. The commitment involved in subscribing and hopefully attending means a commitment to the society rather than to a mailing list. Seconded by Laurence Davis.

Vasé Alavi says that for some it would be impossible to pay the membership fee despite being interested in the Society. In this respect, Siân Adiseshiah suggests a membership fee that isn’t the same as the conference fee. In response to Vasé Alavi Tim Waterman says that waiving a fee will not be a problem in case of members who are unable to do so (e.g. due to living in a country under economic sanctions, such as Iran).

Laurence Davis suggested that a more proactive approach of the Society towards former Society members together with a more modest fee could help the Society to increase its members.

Justyna Galant notes that charging modest fees both for conferences and for membership for conferences was discussed during a previous committee meeting.

Artur Blaim wonders whether the Society should be less money-oriented. In response, Tim Waterman points out that the organization needs some money to carry out its activity and that this is widely known to most members. Heather Alberro agrees with Tim Waterman as long as the fee is capped to a modest amount.

GC notes that the discussion around fees and membership has to take into account how the Constitution defines memberships, which currently includes everyone on the mailing list. Any initiative that would limit membership (e.g. to those participating in the AGM of a given year) would require a modification of the Constitution. GC proposes to discuss the matter amongst the Committee first. GC also agrees regarding waiving fees in necessary cases and invites the Committee to deliberate about the categories of exemption. Seconded by Nicole Pohl.

To Laurence Davis' comment above, GC responds that in case of decision making by membership even if only 300 or so people from the mailing list respond to the message circulated to the whole mailing list, it is significantly better than if matters were decided by the few dozen maximum to attend an AGM.

Artur Blaim states that all members who have opted in should be entitled to vote. Tim Waterman and Siân Adiseshiah say that they both dealt with the similar issues as chair and co-founder of other associations and offer to share their experience. To the opportunity of waiving the fee to people not in the position of paying it, Rhiannon Firth, Heather Alberro are in favour. Rhiannon Firth also supports opting-in / nominal fees proposal.

To reconstitute the membership, in person or online, Tom Moylan suggests doing the following: (i) asking each former member to opt in; (ii) asking for a fee, established in a tiered system as suggested; (iii) then this new list of members would be the voting membership. He also agrees to waive the fee in necessary cases. Julia Ramírez Blanco, Antonis Balasopoulos support waiving the fee in necessary cases.

GC points out that TM's proposal requires a change of the Constitution which currently does not allow the Committee to deliberate autonomously as all Society's members (i.e. all people in the mailing list according to current Constitution) should agree on the change and, in case they are in favor, provided with a draft of the proposed amendments to the Constitution.

Laurence Davis, Adam Stock, Siân Adiseshiah, Rhiannon Firth, Heather Alberro, Tim Waterman, Darren Webb, Matt York, Julia Ramírez Blanco, Raffaella Baccolini, Michael G. Kelly support TM's proposal. Artur Blaim also supports the proposal as long as the payment can be done by credit card. GC says that the Committee already did some research about the intermediaries to be used to collect fees and Paypal seems to be a cheapest of all according this preliminary assessment. The Treasurer, Zsolt Czigányik, notes that the Society has no facility to accept credit card payments, adding that PayPal is viable, and fees are below 10 per cent. Heather Alberro points out that Credit card, PayPal, Revolut, and/or any other platform that makes the fee payment as widely accessible as possible should be considered. Antonis Balasopoulos is in favor of PayPal. Tim Waterman has ethical concerns regarding Paypal and invites to weight the CSR of the financial intermediaries selected by Society to collect the fee. He also offers to do some research in this respect. Heather Alberro agrees with Tim Waterman. Rhiannon Firth agrees too as long as ethics is properly balanced with practicality and offers her help in that respect. Greg Claeys invites all to recommend any ethic payment providers that charge a modest commission. GC suggests discussing the choice of the payment platform during the next committee meeting to be called for January 2022.

Heather Alberro says that once conferences will be back in-person, the Society should consider contributing to travel expenses for those from marginal socioeconomic backgrounds and ask members to contribute what they can. Tiered membership fee can be an option. GC points out that associations that charge tiered membership fees (and usually higher fees) are usually financially supported by an institution. He adds the Committee is certainly open to consider the viability of such an option as, inter alia, a structured (and on average higher) fee could provide the Society with additional resources to be allocated to subsidies.

Zsolt Czigányik says that the Society is currently using the most ethical cooperative bank in Hungary, MagNet Bank, yet, since Hungary is not a EUR currency country, the fees could be rather high.

4. Conference plans 2022 and 2023

[GC: Brighton 2022; proposal for Cluj in 2023 and possibly Istanbul either 2023 or 2024][GC: if it is agreeable to her, Patricia McManus will be co-opted to the Committee until the Brighton meeting in July 2022][standard procedure]

GC says that the University of Brighton has offered to host the Conference in 2022 both in-person or virtually and invites Patricia McManus to speak about the conference plans.

PM confirms that Brighton 2022 can be a hybrid conference and provides provisional details about the event: the dates would be July 13th to 15th 2022; the theme of the Conference and the call for papers will be formulated in January 2022 and publicized provisionally by the end of January 2022; the CFP should be open from February to March and publicized by mid-April. PM hopes that participation will be relevant to cover IT costs for remote connection. In-person participant estimated fee should be about £100-120, subsidized to about £50 for the three days.

GC says the fee for online participants is yet to be estimated and will be discussed by the Committee alongside with waiving fee conditions.

GC informs the Society that with respect to conference plans for 2023, there are two options at hand: Babeş-Bolyai University in Romania and Istanbul, Turkey – for 2023 or 2024.

With respect to the 2023 conference plans and amendment 5 (committee decision-making between conferences), Laurence Davis states that he would like to see calls for conference venues sent out to all members, at least a few months prior to the AGM as many members may not be aware that they can propose a conference venue, whereas it is important to make them aware of this possibility so as to be as inclusive as possible.

To this latter comment, Justyna Galant responds that the Society IT officer has already been asked to add this information on the Society's website. GC also welcomes Laurence Davis's proposal by pointing out that any venue proposal should be ideally complemented with a high-level viability study as to better compare pros and cons of each option.

5. Approval of minutes for the Prato 2019 conference (to be found on the Society's website: [https://utopian-studies-europe.org/constitution-and-regulation/.](https://utopian-studies-europe.org/constitution-and-regulation/)) No objections, Approved by tacit consent.

6. Treasurer's report.

Zsolt Czigányik informs the Society that currently the balance of the funds is equal to about EUR 5.300. ZC adds that the Society has opened a EUR account in the Hungarian MagNet Bank which charges relatively low fees but he believes that having a treasury in a country that has adopted EUR would be more advisable. Gregory Claeys points out that so far nobody has volunteered to open a bank account in EUR-adopter country. Justyna Galant reminds all that the election for the treasury position will be next year. JG also reminds all that the election results will be announced at the closing section of the conference.

GC offers a vote of thanks to Justyna Galant.

7. Other matters.

None.

8. A vote of thanks to the Porto 2021 Conference Organisers.

Gregory Claeys thanks Fátima Vieira and her Team for their efforts and professionalism in organizing the event.

Close of the AGM.