

State of the Union addressed

Politics reflects on the aftermath of this years Union AGM which was fraught with debate, subterfuge and controversy

By Nathan Glover
 Political Correspondent

At last week's AGM, a student tried to 'stealth bomb' a radical motion past the student body, which, if passed, would have led to the effective disaffiliation of the Union with three organisations.

Stefan Thomas, a member of the Socialist Workers Student Society, tabled a motion entitled 'War In Iraq', which mainly focused on putting pressure on the government to withdraw immediately from Iraq.

However, one passage of the motion, which read 'AGM resolves: ...To campaign against military recruitment on our campuses and investment in arms companies', was intended by Stefan to sever the link between Cardiff University and the University Officer Training Corp (OTC), the University Royal Naval Unit (URNU) and the University Air Squadron (UAS).

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In a survey of 21 students at Cardiff, only one student made the connection between the motion and its implications for students, with most responses consisting of either 'don't know', or 'not much'. Those that did predict a difference in recruitment only referred to differences in the stands at Freshers' Fair or advice available to students.

However, the OTC, URNU and UAS rely on recruiting students on campus in order to maintain any kind of membership. Without an annual influx of new members, the organisations could completely cease to exist in Cardiff. Admittedly, some members are drawn from the UWIC and Glamorgan campuses, but Cardiff University is the main recruiting ground. Without its Cardiff unit, the OTC would, at least, be deprived of its headquarters, and with it the administrative support that it provides.

Stefan told me that the intention of deploying the passage in the AGM was to get the Union to officially reject the OTC, URNU and UAS. This is despite the fact that 19 out of 21 students indicated that they thought that students should not be prevented from joining the OTC, URNU or UAS. Stefan accused the quasi-military organisations that he had tried to outflank of 'indoctrinating young minds' and being violent in nature.

When faced with the suggestion that students had not understood the full ramifications of his motion, Stefan responded by pointing out that no-one had proposed an amendment. He later admitted that he himself did not know at the relevant point in the meeting that students could offer amendments, and agreed that most students were unfamiliar with the procedures of the AGM. He also agreed that his motion was moved through to the final vote quite hastily, and acknowledged that some students probably did not have sufficient opportunity to contribute.

The motion was defeated in the final vote by the student body. Speakers from the floor included Kate Tildsley, the chair of the politics society. She believes that 'withdrawing from Iraq is ridiculous, and anyway,

they have the power to tell us to leave'. Her views were similar to a former soldier, who launched a counter-attack to the idea of withdrawing prematurely from Iraq.

One student in favour of the motion mentioned his aspirations to become an officer in the British Army on leaving university, and emphasised the need to preserve the lives of British soldiers and Iraqi civilians. A range of views were expressed, mostly weighing up the pros and cons of withdrawing from Iraq, along with a general agreement that the government was deceitful in its pre-war statements.

This two-pronged attack was clearly undemocratic, as it deceived the student body

Notably absent was any mention of what direct impact the motion would have on students' lives. Therefore, it would seem that this part of the motion slipped past the collective radars of the students involved.

This two-pronged attack was clearly undemocratic, as it deceived the student body as to what they were voting for. Fortunately, they chose to form ranks against the main thrust of the motion, thereby also repulsing the anti-military aspect of its content.

And what about the fight over the military itself? That is a whole other battle, and Stefan should fight it somewhere else in future.

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PHOTO: James Perou

DISMISSED: the student body voted against Stefan Thomas

CAN'T BEAT THE REAL THING?

By Hector Roddan
 Political Correspondent

Being ethical is very hard. This is the general consensus even in an institution that serves to promote radical quality-of-life issues such as fair trade. The proposed ban of Coca Cola reflects changing opinions in a society where issues that don't directly affect our own personal survival are increasingly seen as 'the right things to worry about'.

Now though, in line (ironically) with this trend, the Coke drinkers are becoming increasingly fraught as to where their next beverage will come from, complaining that they are being left unrepresented and their freedom of choice curtailed by more radicalised students.

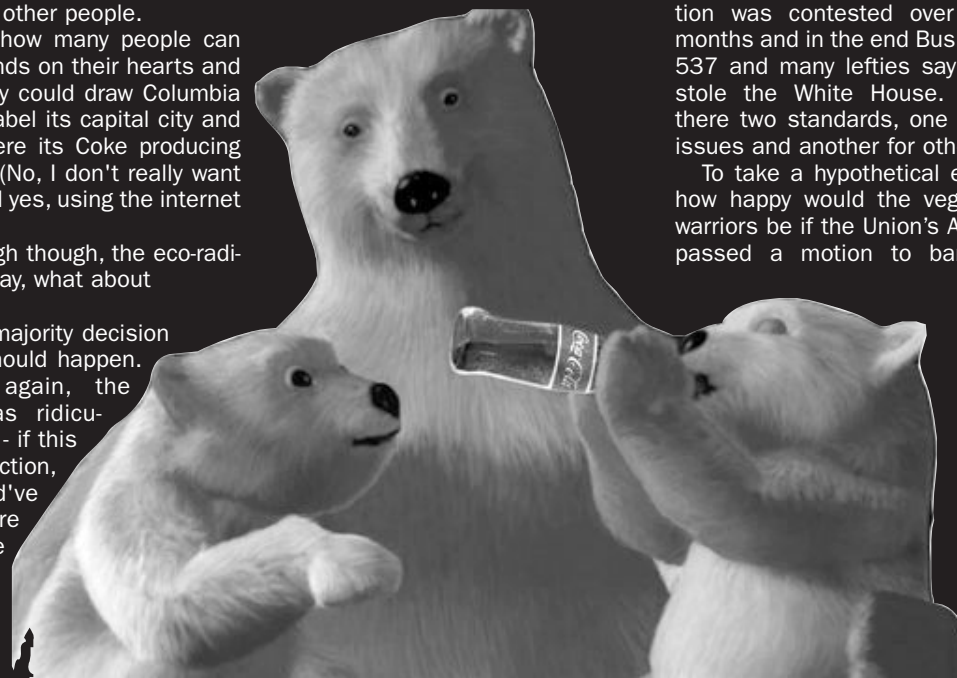
Logically though, they have a point. With freedom of choice, you should have the freedom to drink your favourite brand of unhealthy

sugary drink and sod the consequences for other people.

After all, how many people can put their hands on their hearts and say that they could draw Columbia on a map, label its capital city and indicate where its Coke producing plants are? (No, I don't really want to know. And yes, using the internet is cheating).

Fair enough though, the eco-radicals might say, what about democracy?

It was a majority decision and so it should happen. But then again, the majority was ridiculously small - if this were an election, there would've been more than one recount.



The 2000 US Presidential election was contested over several months and in the end Bush won by 537 and many lefties say that he stole the White House. So, are there two standards, one for 'our' issues and another for others?

To take a hypothetical example, how happy would the veggie eco-warriors be if the Union's AGM had passed a motion to ban those

weird vegetarian health-food things from the University?

But then again, who would dare suggest something like that? Even if the things do smell and look like some squirrel has done its business in a wrapper after a particularly heavy feast at the nuts store, it would be against the prevailing social consensus to do that because they're 'good for us'.

These caring individuals find it hard to accept that - yes - other people don't give a flying donkey on stilts about their 'moral issues'. And seriously, just having Coke in the canteens doesn't force you to buy it, just like those irksome little health-food things don't.

In both cases, you can go elsewhere for your anti-capitalist juice or whatever. Sure, feel free to strike a blow for freedom yourselves, but don't infringe other people's freedoms when you do so.