

TCSU Open Meeting, 11 May 2024

In attendance: Emmy Charalambous (EC), Joe Morgan (JM), Dylan Stewart (DS), Alex Reeves-Bonoldi (ARB), Tilly Aldridge (TA), Mire Diallo (MD), Verity Marshall (VM), Toby Collins (TC), Balqiis Ali (BA), Jasmine Kieran-Ejmadu (JKE), Zayna Mian (ZM), Jaysol Doy (JD), Dido Coley (DC),

Not in attendance:

Apologies: Elnoy Greenenko (EG),

Emmy Charalambous, President

- Working with college to secure the best outcome for Kitchen Fixed Charge
- Working with committee to get people settled into their new roles
- Started the process of planning for freshers' week
- Held meetings with college about divestment from Israeli arms companies
- EG is managing the budget well
- Money has been used to hold events, improve student welfare

Alex Reeves-Bonoldi, Vice President

- Making sure everyone in the committee feels comfortable
- Handling admin
- Working to promote student interests on the Liaison Committee
- Set up student feedback survey
- Will set up a student feedback board in the bar soon
- Making the TCSU more accessible to the student body as a whole

Mire Diallo, Mental Health and Wellbeing Representative

- Running welfare teas every week
- Plan to include international snacks
- Week 5 chocolates will happen again
- Night at the Picture House last term
- There will be more such events in future

Zayna Mian, International Students Representative

- Working with MD to add international snacks at welfare teas
- Working with the Admissions Office to plan international freshers' week
- Heavily involved in July online open day

Jaysol Doy, LGBT Representative

- Ran two theatre trips last term

- Ran LGBT poetry night last term
- More exciting plans going forward, especially for Pride Month
- Working with college to trial a college LGBT family system

Jasmine Kieran-Ejimadu

- Working with porters on unconscious bias
- Providing information into the experiences of BAME people, especially for senior staff
- Discussions on divestment with senior staff
- Working with the ACS to hold a Caribbean formal
- Planning Black History Month
- BAME barbecue near end of term

Dylan Stewart

- Holding college to accountable on their commitments to widen participation
- Will continue to do so in future
- Applications for replacement are open
- Liaising with college to evaluate Trinity Maintenance Grant and ensure it can continue

Verity Marshall

- Improving the experience of women in college
- Pink Week last term—raising awareness for breast cancer charities
- Charity basketball, Pink Week bop last term
- Night walk, run by Cambridge Union

Tilly Aldridge / Balqiis Ali

- Handover bop at Hidden Rooms
- Karaoke every other week
- Helped organise Pink Week bop
- Working on awards for Halfway Hall
- Want to put on more daytime events on future
- Working with student experience offer
- Want to hold lots of events in May Week
- Open to suggestions
- Running a garden party at the end of term (brown bread ice cream!!!)

Dido Coley

- Advocating for disabled people
- Sorting out maps to make them as accessible as possible
- Producing new videos to help disabled students coming into college
- Holding new events for disabled students in freshers' week

Toby Collins

- Working to improve sustainability
- Working with catering and bar staff to reduce waste
- Takeaway box system will change next year to help environment
- Improve college's use of heating and electricity

Max Smith

- Transferred emails to new committee
- Representing TCSU at IT committees
- Updating TCSU website

RENT

- EC
 - Rents are higher
 - The KFC has been incorporated into rent (approximately £220)
 - Introduction of band scheme
 - All rooms are shared between x number of bands
 - Some rooms = more expensive
 - Other rooms = cheaper
 - Based on how they were banded
 - We are still in the bottom third of colleges for rent (even after KFC being incorporated into rent)
 - We will continue to advocate for college to alleviate the cost of living
 - There are no longer exemptions from the KFC now that it has been incorporated into rent
 - But catering is working hard to improve vegetarian and vegan options

STUDY SPACES

- ARB raised the importance of study spaces around college
- EC
 - We are working to improve the Burrell's Field Common Room and the Butler House Party Room (i.e., make them bookable by students)
 - There may be vending machines in Burrell's Field
 - The Wren is now open for study

DIVESTMENT

- EC
 - Trinity has invested in Israeli arms companies in the past
 - We have had meetings both with students and with college about this issue
 - The latest update is that Trinity will be and is in the process of divesting; however, the college will not be making a public statement on the matter
 - This is because the college does not want to be seen to reward the slashing (last term) of the painting of Arthur Balfour on the way up to the Wren
 - We will still be pushing the college to make a public statement, though

- ZM
 - Pointed out that if Trinity announced it was selling its shares, it wouldn't get a good price for them
- EC
 - The college is divesting from *all* arms companies
 - College will have divested by the summer (that is the timeline the TCSU has been told)
- JKE
 - College has donated £250,000 to the Rowan Williamson Fund (which helps students applying from countries where there is military conflict)
 - But this does not help students who are already here
- EC
 - We will continue to advocate for support for current students
 - We will be asking for written confirmation from the college of their divestment
- JKE
 - We have been told the college council voted to divest
 - This has gone through council already

CCTV in the Laundry Rooms–Student Motion

- We have been asked to install CCTV in the student laundry rooms due to clothes being stolen
- EC
 - Accepts that theft is an issue
 - But it would have to be voted through by the college council
 - And it would be an administrative burden for the college
 - We are also not sure how students suspected of theft would be punished (an internal procedure? Criminal charges?)
- UNANIMOUS OPPOSITION

Gaza and Palestine–Student Motion

- Proposer of motion
 - Divestment is good news
 - But there is always more to be done
 - 34,971 civilians have been killed in Gaza
 - And these numbers are in fact likely to be much higher
 - There is a story behind each of these numbers
 - White phosphorus has been used (including on children)
 - The U.S. State Department has concluded that Israeli has used weapons in violation of human rights and international law
 - Hospitals, refugee camps have been targeted and destroyed
 - Over 70% of residential buildings have been destroyed
 - According to the UN, it will take decades to rebuild Gaza
 - Gazan universities have been destroyed
 - UN aid workers have been killed
 - Journalists have been killed

- This has culminated in South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide
- UN human rights workers have emphasised that genocide is being committed
- In the West Bank, the level of state and settler violence has escalated in recent months
- These atrocities are the tip of the iceberg
- At least 14,500 children killed
- The tragedy is not over
- The invasion of Rafah has begun
- The scale of destruction does not bear thinking about
- Trinity still has investments in these companies
- We, as students, are profiting off Trinity's investments
- We are part of a greater connection to the crimes being committed
- We should ask the college to divest and to publicly say so
- The college's lack of initiative to support students who have been affected is poor
- At the start of the Ukraine-Russia war, the college established a fund to help Ukrainian students
- The same has not been done in the Israel-Palestine conflict
- We need to take a stand on the crime that is being committed
- Second proposer of motion
 - Palestinians have to worry—every day, every second—about a bomb dropping on their heads
 - We don't have to worry about that
 - The comparison with the Ukraine war is damning
 - Trinity acted on the Ukraine war without any student pressure
 - Four points
 - 1. All students should feel supported at Trinity
 - 2. There should be no place for discrimination at Trinity
 - 3. We should protect freedom of speech
 - 4. We should support divestment from arms companies
 - We are profiting, as a college, from the war in Gaza
 - Another four points (for the TCSU specifically)
 - 1. Express solidarity for Palestine (and condemn the illegal occupation of the West Bank)
 - 2. Express support for a relief fund
 - 3. Offer funded places for students in Gaza who no longer have a place to study (as with the Ukraine war)
 - 4. Endorse a meeting to discuss the college's investments (not only in arms companies, but in any companies that are affiliated with Israel's war on Gaza)
- EC
 - Expressing support for Palestine and calling for a ceasefire could cause a problem
 - Because we are legally required to have an apolitical stance
 - The government and the media do not see this as anything other than a political weapon

- And they are the people with the power to strip us of our function to act as a student union
- ZM
 - We went through multiple drafts of our statement of support for students
 - We were not allowed to release drafts that took a political stance
- EC
 - We are constitutionally required to support freedom of speech for students here
 - But legally, this could cause us issues
- BA
 - Let's say we are stripped of our legal right to act as a union
 - Let them do that
 - That will attract public attention
- EC
 - We do not want to deprive students of the right to be represented
- Question: if we cite charity organisations doing the same work and making the same calls, then that creates no precedent for us to be stripped of our status
 - There are lots of charities that have not been stripped of their legal status
 - If we frame it in the same language they're using, then we could make a comment while remaining legally protected
 - There have been organisations that have successfully used language that allows them to retain their legal status
- EC
 - The legal situation with student unions is different
- Question: were there statements written on South African apartheid?
 - A precedent here would be useful
 - It is not political to consider human life valuable
- EC
 - The legal obligation began in 2013
 - Acknowledges that calling for humanitarian aid are not necessarily political
- Question from the floor
 - The TCSU could stress compliance with international humanitarian law (e.g., the ICJ case)
 - Non-confessional charities such as Amnesty International have made statements like that
 - Concretely speaking, the student union has no purpose if we cannot take a stand on such a cut-and-dry issue
 - The TCSU does not have the bargaining power already to do what the students actually want
 - If we were to be criminalised for something like this, we should be willing to bite the bullet
- Question from the floor
 - The college will defend the TCSU if it makes a statement like that
- JD
 - Thanked the proposers for their motion
 - The college has agreed to divest
 - What we should do is work with them now and try to take them even further

- We should propose an amendment saying that we aim to call for a ceasefire and to comply with international law
- We should work with Dr. Spagnolo to draft a first clause that is consistent with our legal obligations
- This could make sure we have legal backing for a statement so that we are not dissolved
- EC
 - Dissolution is an extreme scenario
 - But it is worth people being aware of when they vote
- Statement from floor
 - In 2021, the TCSU put out a statement expressing solidarity with Palestinians
 - And there was no backlash
 - Similar motions have passed by other colleges
 - And there has been no massive backlash
 - We should not be afraid of taking action
 - If they do shut us down, then that becomes a bigger story
 - The tide is turning
 - We are the largest college in Cambridge
 - We should be at the forefront of taking the right stance
 - We should not underestimate the power of our example
- EC
 - Asks the meeting to vote on JD's motion
- Statement from floor
 - Accepts JD's point
 - Proposers went through the college bureaucracy
 - What we are calling for is a 'humanitarian ceasefire'
 - Neither of those words is political
 - Fundamentally, this is not political
 - Calling for a ceasefire is not political
 - We are exaggerating and overthinking the response
 - This statement is not for the media; it is for the student body here
 - If the TCSU cannot put out a statement, where can students be represented?
- EC
 - In terms of the motion itself
 - Rather than amending it to take out the first clause, we could add an acknowledgement of our legal obligation
- MD
 - There is definitely a feeling that we can't talk about this issue
 - And students' fears of that are not unfounded
 - Just look at what is happening in the US
 - Although this should not be a political issue, in a very unfortunate way, a lot of students are really scared about making anything that is too overt a statement
 - In the US, students have been barred from applying for things
 - We need to find a way for students to feel comfortable talking about this
- Response from floor
 - That is why the motion includes a statement defending academic freedom
 - This statement does not undermine academic freedom
 - That is why a statement from the TCSU would help

- Statement from floor
 - There are differences in temperament in this room
 - Some people feel happy protesting, some do not
 - That is fine
 - The point of having this statement is that it will give students in Trinity permission to think and speak
 - That is why an amendment would be good (to unite us all, even if we all have different temperaments)
- EC
 - We should also acknowledge that sometimes comments are made to broaden the context
- New amendment = proposed
 - Text will be sent to the TCSU but was heard and understood by everyone in the room
- Vote on *amendment* to motion
 - Passed
- DS: this should come from a place of legitimacy
 - This should go to a referendum where every undergraduate student can vote
- VM
 - College would respect it more if it comes from the whole student body
- BA
 - This would delay the project even longer
- JD
 - The referendum could be held quickly
- EC
 - We could draft a statement prior to the referendum and then publish it immediately
 - It would not cause that much of a delay
- Proposers of motion
 - We are open to that suggestion
 - How long would it take?
 - We do not want to delay until the end of the year
- EC
 - We need 168 hours' notion for a referendum
 - We could announce that today and hold it in one week's time
 - We could use the week to write the statement
 - And then it would be immediately read to release
- Statement from floor
 - Could we pass the motion and then have a referendum to reiterate it?
- EC
 - We do not think there is a precedent for that
- Statement from floor
 - This would unnecessarily politicise the issue
- Further statement from floor
 - This would establish a precedent
 - How do we decide what goes to a referendum and what does not?
 - TCSU statements on their own would lose value
 - It creates a stratification between the two

- Statement from floor
 - Do not understand point about wanting to hold a referendum
 - This would not necessarily have the advantage of forcing the TCSU to act
 - The open meeting is for motions like this
 - There have been other humanitarian crises in the past
 - What makes this so different that it needs to go to a referendum?
- Vote on referendum
 - 2 in favour, all against
 - This will not go to a referendum
- JKE
 - Was told that the student body can be told about divestment
- EC
 - We should make an amendment asking the college to
- Amendment proposed
 - To include statement that the college has divested from Israeli arms companies and calling on them to keep us posted on future investments
- Vote on motion (with amendment to tell students that the college has divested from arms companies and calling on the college to keep us abreast of this)
 - Passed
- Vote on motion
 - 1 abstention, everyone else in support