



NOUSE

Est. 1964

Bolting the doors of Heslington Hall

It's sometimes a thankless task producing what we occasionally like to call – only half in jest – a campaigning student newspaper, particularly at a University where pulses wetly thud more often than they beat. It has rarely been more thankless, though, than this week past, as Nouse attempted to wring details of the University's review process, and its financial implications for campus services and academic departments alike, from the clenched fingers of an administration that grows ever more Soviet in its behaviour.

From pillar to post were we passed, from office to office, rarely taken seriously, frequently chided for meddling in matters that were, it was made abundantly clear, none of our damned business. The process, we were told, was complex. It was, more importantly, ongoing. To ask facile questions about 'cuts' or 'reductions in service' was to entirely misinterpret the meaning of the exercise. The meaning of the exercise itself, meanwhile, seemed ever more elusive to us.

So, in the absence of any information, stonewalled at every turn, we've drawn the only conclusion left to us over what's going on behind doors that will, it seems, remained closed to the public interest.

That inevitable conclusion is that this University does not wish for its students to ask difficult questions. More to the point, they don't have answers to those questions. We ask: How far will the cuts go? They say: How long is a piece of string. We plead: Are you serious about selling York by the pound? They smirk: Where lies the bottom of the deep blue yonder.

Let's make something absolutely clear. We are not the only section of the University community shut out in the cold. From the SU, to your lecturers, to the cheerful dear who sells you tea and sandwiches at lunchtime, nobody is being informed and nobody is being consulted. Decision-making is taking place in a vacuum, allowing for no comment, no scrutiny and no reply – not from us, not from you, and not from anyone else with a real stake in where this campus is headed.

Why do we care? We're in this for the duration, just like you are. We're irrationally but powerfully fond of this place, and want to see it thrive. And, most of all, we're fundamentally unwilling to be sold short. If nothing else, we refuse to be told that we have no right to know what's going on.

Fire and brimstone

Is it fair to judge a man by the company he keeps? Rabbi Aharon Cohen attended a conference in Tehran that was also graced by the likes of David Irving, the "historian" and holocaust denier. Is he guilty by association?

This is not the place to debate the rights and wrongs of the two men's positions. Such a fundamental difference of opinion is not the starting place for a reasonable discussion, as evidenced by the general lack of even-temperedness at the talk.

Instead, our concern is the fact that it took a firestorm, precipitated by a stage-managed, bussed-in confrontation, to generate any heat. Two people with fundamental disagreements can shout at each other almost indefinitely without achieving anything, save for boring the tears out of anyone unfortunate enough to be in earshot. This is what a lot of political debate is like. It's also why a lot of people hate politics. Can't we do a little better?

In praise of Ziggy's

Who ever knew you could love the feel of a stranger's sweat-greased skin pressed against yours so well? The power ballad singalongs, the drunken fist-fights, the falling over, the getting up again, and oh! the falling over. Again. The giddy, nauseous claustrophobia of it all; the drunken embraces that last moments, the piercing hangovers that last... for ever. Admit it: the first time you stepped inside, you lost a little shred of your innocence that, try as you might, you'll never quite reclaim.

Sometimes the only way to cope with the truly horrific is to look it square in the eyes, jab a bony finger in its face, and ask it what it has on under that grubby old overcoat. Strike a Faustian pact, and walk without fear through the shadow of the valley of death without fear of physical harm, emotional scarring, or permanent hearing loss.

So it was that we sent our most intrepid reporter, along with our very bravest guerrilla photographer, on a perilous mission to the very depths of the student netherworld: halfway up Mickelgate, nigh on midnight, on a Wednesday night in February. They were dispatched sober, curious, and with a solemn promise ringing in their ears: that if they didn't blow the gaff wide open, we'd never let them in our sights again.

After all, this is the service we provide to you. Never mind that you could trace the outline of the dancefloor with the tip of your pinprick stiletto. Never mind that you tread those rickety stairs sometimes in your very dreams. We've got old man Ziggy for you, right here. He's in his ancient piss-stained undies and his tangled string vest, and there's something he'd like to show you. No really, it's all right: you don't have to thank us. Have a peek. And don't worry if you think a little less of yourself afterwards. Ziggy will love you just the same.

Comment & Analysis

Battling with the deathly grip of ignorance and apathy

The elections are here again. Is anyone really going to notice?



Stephanie Dyson
Deputy Comment
Editor

In the words of the Walrus, "the time has come". No, not to talk of shoes and ships or sealing wax, but of YUSU and the upcoming elections. "What's this?" you cry, ignorant of the vibrant posters around campus, promoting the influx of fresh faces to the Students' Union.

Yet this publicity seems insufficient to whet the political appetite of students. Hustings last week had few attendees. These events are intended to provide a platform for candidates to promote their policies and visions for the coming year, whilst receiving a thorough grilling from the audience. The pressure of these questions penetrates the polished veneers of the candidates' perfected posters, and hands a clue to confused voters. Some candidates revelled in it, proving themselves worthier than their publicity suggested. Others did not.

However, the influence of these events was undermined by the fact that the audience numbered fewer than fifty people. The majority of these were either supporters of the candidates or current YUSU sabbatical members, plus three drunk blokes who seemed blissfully unaware of the drama of student democracy being played out beneath their own alcohol-suffused nostrils.

The disappointing turnout begs two questions: one of student apathy, and the

other of student ignorance. One wonders to what extent the poor show was a consequence of general unawareness of the events or, more importantly, lack of knowledge regarding the role of YUSU and how it affects the average student.

Upon questioning a number of my fellow first-year flat-mates I discovered, to my horror, that few knew the different offices and their roles; others were foxed by the YUSU acronym; and several had

YUSU should protect its members' interests, not pussyfoot around the real issues'

no idea who SU President Rich Croker actually was. This led me to the conclusion that disinterest in the workings of the SU is very much based upon a lack of engagement between students and their Union.

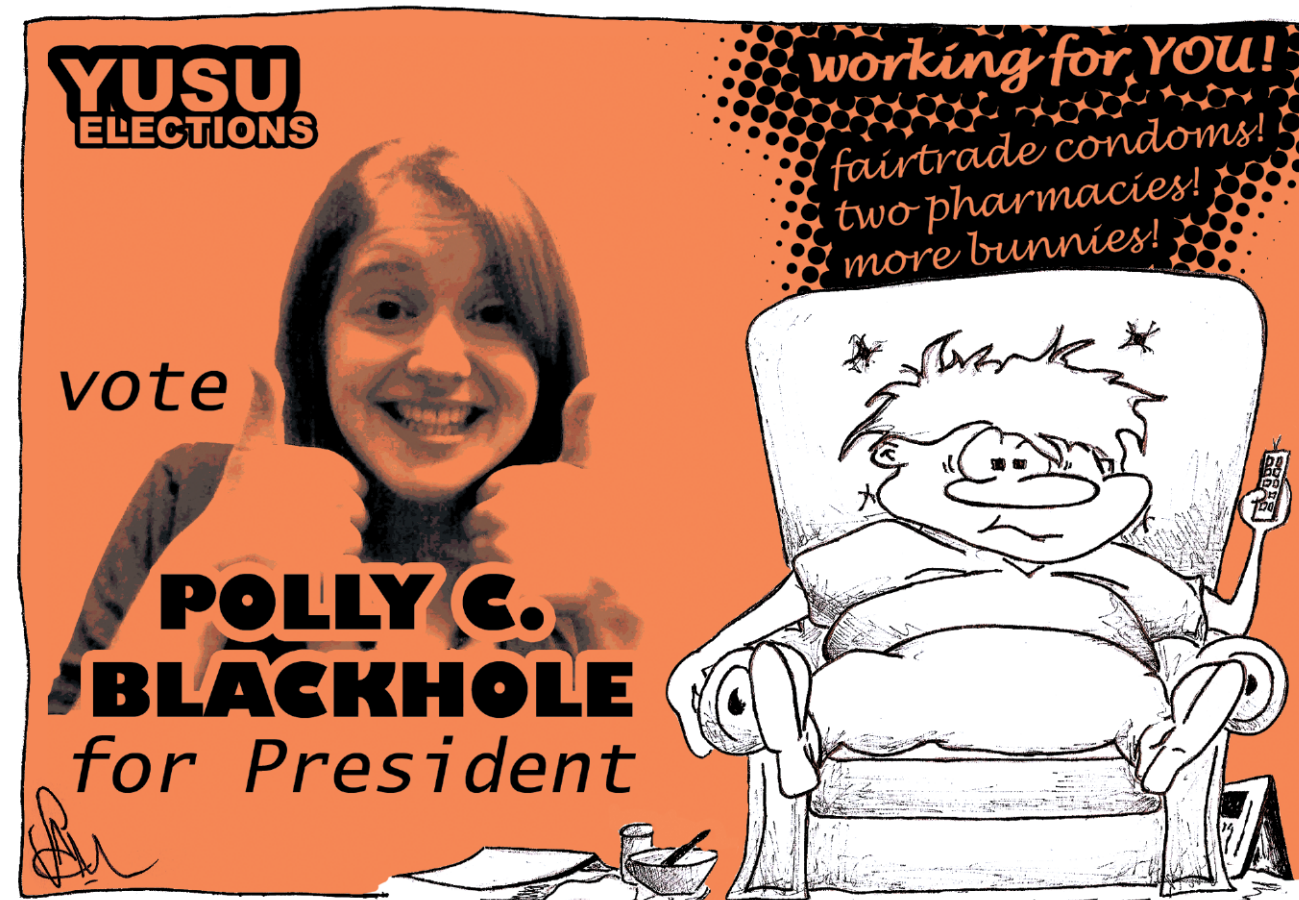
No doubt you're aware of the extensive planning required for events such as Freshers' Fortnight and the Summer Ball, and thus recognise the masses of work undertaken by the YUSU team. The various welfare campaigns, including lobbying the University over reduced cooking facilities in colleges and the recent motion mandating YUSU to enforce a policy of non-smoking at campus events, also illustrate the significance of the Union in safeguarding our rights.

However, serious levels of apathy plague YUSU due to uncertainty about the effect that they can have on the work-

ings of the University, something hard to miss if you consider the results of previous elections. In the 2006 YUSU General Elections, turnout reached a dizzying 1,300 – around 2% of the 11,000-strong student population. In the 2005 National General Elections 61% of the population voted, causing disquiet amongst the political classes with fears of growing apathy, acting as poison through the veins of society. Surely our comparably paltry levels should have sounded alarm bells in the happy land of YUSU?

In light of this, it should be considered whether general student dissatisfaction with YUSU's sluggish response to the closure of Porters' lodges - and their other poor efforts on behalf of students - could result in even lower voting this time. YUSU should remember that students see it, like any union, as protecting the interests of its members, rather than pussyfooting around the real issues and pandering to management whims.

Nonetheless, I remain optimistic. The principal way in which students can begin to appreciate and believe in their Union is through heightened involvement in the political process. The majority of candidates appear to grasp this, calling for more transparency in Union business and thus greater incentive to participate. YUSU also desperately needs fresh blood to guarantee against more scandals like the Sex Bingo fiasco, in order that it might regain the respect that it deserves. If the Union wishes to be honoured by us, the students, it must remember its representative purpose and seek to reunite the members of all colleges of this University, battling the deathly grip of ignorance and apathy.



Freddy, needless to say, wouldn't be helping to elect the lovely Polly, belle of all Alcuin College.

Cartoon by Sam Waddington

Putting the passion back in

Why are some students so reluctant to connect with politics?



Emily Cousins
Contributing Writer

During the joss stick-burning era of the 1960s and 70s the opportunity to participate in political protest was vast, and seized by many young people desperate to make a difference to their world.

Marches and sit-ins were raw and sincere, and the black and white photos of Kumbaya sing-alongs have become iconic and legendary. 'Genuine concern for genuine issues', the retrospective tag line could read. Sadly, the majority of contemporary students have lost this feistiness and with it, the willingness to protect issues formerly fought for with a passionate zeal.

As a society we are increasingly plagued by consumerism, and it would seem that our approach to politics is becoming similarly tainted by attention to the material in life. The rise in issue-based voting means that politics is increasingly based around what politicians can offer us in order to make our lives easier, rather than representing our principles and governing accordingly. Supporting a particular party or cam-

paign is akin to a trendy fashion statement; campus-based Tory and Labour societies are booming.

It would appear, however, that there is often neither ideological affinity nor genuine sincerity - only a desire to be indoctrinated into a vogue masquerading as commitment and compassion. How much do we really know about the causes we profess to support? Why do we sacrifice our integrity and social responsibility in order to buy into the politics which is being marketed towards us?

I feel I must publicly shame and chastise myself for an inexcusable act of apathy I committed during the course of writing this article. Hurrying across campus, late for a lecture, I was stopped

'How much do we really know about the causes we profess to support?'

by a human barrier petitioning for signatures to save the porters. I gave a knee-jerk answer, half-heartedly mumbled my tardiness, and scurried along. Consumed with guilt, I resolved to return and add my signature to the list, which I did. So, I would like to thank the Porter

Supporters' chain gang for reminding me of my duty and conscience. However, did I sign for the wrong reasons?

There seems to be a reluctance amongst some of us to get involved with any form of direct action, or to trouble ourselves with proactive, vocal gestures. Many a YUSU motion has failed because poor turnout at meetings has prevented motions from reaching quorum and being ratified. Worse still, contrived participation renders such crusades farcical.

A nameless individual, from an undisclosed College, attended a JCR open meeting last term in which 50 votes were needed to secure a new constitution. Upon being 20 hands-in-the-air short of a democratic conclusion, individuals were sent to round up house-mates in order to boost numbers - a political charade. Can elected committee officials really be chided for this though, if we are not prepared to engage with and support them as we should?

It is the student body who has the power to change this. Let's put the passion back into politics. We need to fully integrate ourselves into issues that are of personal interest. Lots of student-run political groups and individuals on campus do a fantastic job of highlighting plights that deserve our attention. We should support them and get involved. Let's be aware. Let's listen. Let's participate.

A deafening silence



Francis Boorman
Contributing Writer

Amidst accusations of student apathy, the recent visit of the controversial Rabbi Ahron Cohen seemed able to arouse political passions. The Rabbi's anti-Zionist stance, proclaimed by his talk's title, surely wouldn't go unopposed. Indeed it didn't, with a large turnout from York's Jewish community, deeply critical of his views. Did the ensuing debate inspire and provoke; did it showcase the freedom of speech we all enjoy?

Sadly not. It was commendable to see Ahron Cohen's detractors ready to argue their case and not falling back on any attempt at denying him a platform. But nobody seemed interested in an actual debate, least of all concerning the actual topic of the talk. Denying the speaker's credentials as a Rabbi hardly convinced me that the existence of Israel is justified, nor was I particularly won over by the case that peace is good so Israel and Palestine should stop fighting.

Constant shouts of "Question!" when audience members spoke underlined an inability to get to the point. No real exchanges were had, points were directed toward people and passion was overcome by ill tempers. Angry exchanges following the debate nearly descended into playground politics. This is not the way to fight your cause.

While arguing over who was actually representative of the Jewish community, there was no clash of ideas, no attempt at persuasion. Asserting authority achieves very little if you're not willing to back it up with some reasons. While I was pleased to see a large body of people argue for freedom of speech, it seemed a shame that they chose to exercise this right in such a way. Anger over Rabbi Cohen speaking at an Iranian conference about the holocaust was a moment which, worryingly, defined the talk. The Iranians didn't censor the Rabbi himself, so he had little reason to complain. It seemed futile to bemoan the morality of his overseas speech. Our commitment to freedom of speech is illustrated by countering arguments, not travel itineraries.

To move forward in our understanding of the world, we have to stop enjoying freedom and start using speech. We can't engage with ideas until reasoned argument and debate overtake symbolism and show. It's about time that student politics focused not on opposing, but proposing. Don't protest at debates; take part. Conflict isn't a cold war. The real battle of concepts can only be won by a willingness to engage with others in the first place.

The meeting had its positives. It showed that students aren't as turned off by politics as some people think and that freedom of speech is alive and well at York. Let's take the obvious interest and the open forum and use it for real debate. A lot more work needs to be done before we can truly say that student politics is fit for purpose.

