

KCSU Open Meeting 11th February 2010

Apologies: Louisa, Bono, Jonny, Lotte

Motions:

Hannah Bass: Requesting £500 for women's event, annual thing that King's does. Dinner for women. This year, to make it more democratic.. Half event happens in afternoon. Panel discussion. For men to come to as well. KCSU's money will just go to the event. Covering cost of speakers, performers, afternoon tea, art materials.

Vote Taken: All in favour. MOTION PASSED

Reports:

Juan: After a week of flag discussion, this is the system. Two stages of voting: 1st stage, 3 options. Keep/take down/change. Various alternatives. Purpose of this discussion is to decide what these alternatives will be. Persuading people present to vote how you'd like them to vote. Using STV. Andrew Tindall will give us a brief presentation on STV.

Hannah: Just to clarify, part of the system is that all the second tier of 'change' votes come under change.

Juan: If we vote to keep, ends there. Take down ends there. Change – opens up alternatives. Which alternative is the most popular.

Mansour: If the number of votes for keep exceed individual changes..

Juan: We only go to round 2 if change becomes majority.

Floor: Will round 1 be STV?

Juan: Yes.

Tindall: I'll quickly run through STV. System used for KCSU elections. Three options – rank in order of preference, 1,2,3. Collation: All first choices are added up. If nothing reaches 50%+, we eliminate option with fewest votes, reallocate those votes to their second choices. This is more important in second round – awful lot more options.

Hannah: If you really really only want one option, just choose one thing.

Tindall: Don't have to put a number by something you really don't like.

Hannah: If you put a number down, you can inadvertently give vote to something you don't want.

Juan: If anyone has any further questions, feel free to email Andy or check Wikipedia. KCSU Forum was useful, but not all proposals were presented as proposals, etc. Point of today is to give suggestions. If you feel strongly about a particular alternative, now is the time to do it. We'll have some time to argue for/against certain points.

Jacob: Can I make a process point. Although it's very important that we discuss the potentials for what might happen in a second round, structuring it like this seems to be talking about the ways in which we might change it. There's no 'let's keep it up' proposal within the second round. If we discuss it like this, I wouldn't argue to keep it up against every single proposal. I'd like to see an indicative vote to see who wants an open discussion.

Juan: The reason I thought this'd be the best way to continue the discussion. From the forum, most of the debate was about the alternatives, etc. If the majority want to keep the flag, we won't go to second round.

Shayan: Reason behind discussion now is so we can be clear exactly what the options are, for clarity's sake.

Tindall: Can I propose, if there's a genuine concern, maybe someone could give a brief recap of each side?

Juan: Once we're in debate, feel free to make case for keeping up/taking down.

Shayan: Juan will go through alternatives.

Juan: Anarchist flag, Red flag, Same flag minus star, Amnesty, Purple, Flag upside-down, Mr Toad, Just a physical hammer and sickle, add quotations to show diverse opinions, add a question mark, disclaimer. If you have any other proposals, now is the time to do this. Chances are someone else will agree with you.

Luke: For clarity's sake, do you mean plain black anarchist flag?

Juan: Yes.

Chad: I don't want to rock the boat, but I think it's important that even if you vote to keep it, you should be allowed to vote on the alternatives.

Hannah: I thought we'd do the vote, keep it, change it or take it down. Then, if change, we go to second round.

Aris: Isn't this a way to frame/direct the debate? It all becomes an issue of alternatives.

Juan: If majority pick keep the flag, we won't go to second round.

Jacob: Chad's point still stands.

Chad: If you say keep, you should still have vote.

Jacob: Say 'take it down' was discredited, your vote is reallocated towards change.

Juan: Say there's one person who wants to keep it.

Hannah: I thought second round would happen on completely different day.

Juan: I didn't see an advantage in doing that. Doesn't make a difference.

Shayan: If we're going to use STV as a system, we need to do it separately. First of all establish keep/takedown/change, then second procedure, everyone gets a vote.

Floor: Potentially this is wasted time. Why not have this discussion after the first round?

Luke: We're all discussing alternatives in hypothetical situation.

Shayan: Discussion has to happen at one point or the other.

Jacob: Can I propose an indicative vote? I propose that rather than discussing alternatives, we have a general discussion. Then we have the first vote. It seems a bit like we all know what the purple flag would mean.

Jacob: Formal proposal: Open discussion on the flag on the wall, bring up whatever you want.

Shayan: All in favour? Majority, 1 against, 1 abstention. Passed.

Floor: Summarise?

Juan: Steve proposed to take down the flag. Luke Hawksbee proposed second motion. Big debate about what the flag is, what it stands for, about the spirit of the college etc. Many discussions about whether it's communism, Stalinism, etc.

Shayan: Main strand of argument. 1. Deeply rooted in King's culture etc. 2. This is potentially very offensive, and perhaps endorsing something *not* representative of King's.

Steve Downie: There was a time when we could get away with having flag in the bar. You didn't encounter many Eastern Europeans. It still shows a certain disregard for people who did live there. When it comes down to it, ideas which don't have any reality in this college might seem like plating. Some of the ideas that people are putting in this flag, people believe should be retained in this flag, have very real consequences. I don't think it's an appropriate thing to have in the bar for those reasons. It's not a toy any more.

Floor: Genuine question – do we have an obligation to see that everybody who sees the decor is happy with it.

Luke: I submitted a motion saying we should take it down. I completely agree that we shouldn't be endorsing Stalinism. Not a nice place to live for anyone. I have absolutely no bias towards this flag, if anything I'm offended by it myself. What is important is that we maintain the thing that it was intended to represent in the first place – the attitude that King's has always had of forging forward and looking to the future optimistically. State school, Women, International etc. All the things King's has been at the forefront of, pushing forward with progressive and 'radical' ideas. I think that something that represents those ideas, whether it be a physical hammer and sickle, purple and white or *whatever*, it really should remain in the bar, otherwise we'll lose track of where we've come and where we've still got to go. Institution of equality, freedom etc.

Will C-G: If we do choose to replace, something that represents radicalism, in that case you'd have to argue for a departure from communist symbol. There was a time when radicalism and activism were associated with this.

Juan: I'd like to propose a symbol of voting. I imagined to vote for both on same time, two different pages. Page 1 of voting, keep/take down or change. Irrespective of how you vote on page 1, redirected to new page of alternatives. More than free to say zero throughout. Advantage of this system, we can be done with 'whole debate thing' in 2 days time.

Aris: The first motion was about taking the flag down. What I feel that we should be trying to establish is whether King's students think it is an issue. Wouldn't it make a lot more sense to keep these two votes separate. Shouldn't discussion of alternatives take place after we've established that it's an issue. Isn't that already a way of skewing it?

Juan: If you personally feel it should stay up, use 0 for next page.

Aris: What is the problem with going ahead with one vote to see how people feel about it? Why do we have to complicate this?

Andy: Aris – As we have a lot of the members of the college here, we should put it to *them*.

Juan: Formal proposal – this is the voting system we use.

Aris: I think this shows that we don't want to rush this into one thing. We don't need a next stage, but a next *discussion*.

Juan: Last week we did say we'd vote tonight.

Shayan: All in favour of using Juan's system of voting raise your hand. All in favour: 39. All in favour of using separate system, discussing whether to keep it up, take it down: 20. Abstentions: 7.

Cate Higham: If we something was going to replace it, we can't all agree on whether King's is political radical, etc. One thing about King's is that it's very inclusive. We should have something that 'represents the ethos of King's', it should represent ethos of inclusivity. Gay Pride flag?

Benny: I find King's College Chapel quite offensive. The whole thing was built mainly by King Henry VIII as a monument to his power. There isn't actually a single religious symbol carved into the stonework except a tiny Virgin Mary. Tudor Tudor Tudor everywhere. This, which is the most impressive thing, the thing people think about, it's a symbol of royalty. A lot of people could take offense at that. This picture does not represent King's College. This is one part, that represents one part of it. I'm not arguing that we get rid of the chapel. Even though I'm offended, a lot of other people really like it. Personally, the radical history of King's is the reason I applied. Coming in and seeing a flag – I do not agree with it – it stands for the history of King's itself. Can't just replace it with another symbol. There are a lot of communists, they were communists. If the vote went against me and people wanted to change it, I can understand that point of view. To put a different symbol in would be better than nothing. Symbol as it stands is very important. Symbol should be a symbol of equal radicalness. Not something nice like an amnesty flag.

Floor: To develop Benny's point, I would quite like to see maybe one of the portraits from the hall, rendered as kitsch as this is. I'd like to see the flag in the hall, where all the nasty old men are.

Mansour: When you say the word flag, you imagine something a flagpole representing one things. KCSU should be an impartial body. I fear that always calling it a flag skews the discussion.

Floor: In everything Benny said, it shows the history of KC in left wing politics. *That* flag is associated with the USSR. Something that represents *us*, not the USSR.

Steve Downie: Benny makes a really good point about the chapel. It's part of this place whether we like it or not. This flag was put here in 2004 as I understand it. I appreciate we have a history of left-alignment.. We can't rely on ideas of heritage or history to justify the future. This flag was a recent decision.

Juan: Mansour talked about impartiality. Personally, I think we should keep it here. When I was applying to King's, I saw it and thought we should leave it here. Flag is *part* of us. Only alternative I like is to turn it upside down. Turning it upside down is a big fuck you to Stalin. Keep exactly the same physical object, but upside-down makes it completely ironic.

Harry Frankish: If we people want a symbol, why not just the King's flag. [angry murmur]

Richard Dorrell: Another possibility on the same vein – If the general consensus is that we like the idea that the flag represents history of radicalism, why not replace it with a series of images/text demarcating brilliant things that the King's community have done in the last 40 years. One of the first colleges to let women in, state school, rent strikes etc.

Lucy McMahon: Once we choose to change it, becomes a very different act. Represents democratic decision taken now by the students here and now in 2010. Once we change it, it changes *why* it is up in the first place. If an equivalent hammer and sickle put up, reaffirms our relationship with the USSR today. Supposedly turning a flag upside down is a symbol of distress – represents dissent. Not necessarily one type of radicalism. Putting the minutes up on the wall – artistically pretty crap.

Will C-G: To expand on point of putting minutes up, I don't see why we need constantly to be reminded of our supposed radicalism. Putting symbols up that forcibly remind people of that – you're forgetting this is a college full of people. Everyone knows what King's is. You don't need text up to remind you that you're part of a stimulating academic environment.

Jess Kwong: I'd like to remind everyone of something we said last week – if we take it down or replace it with something more polite, generic etc, we're not allowing people to remember what we're actually here for. If we add something, or turn it upside down, explain that it went up in 2004, then that in 2010 it was changed – if you explain why it's here, what was done – in future people may have a completely different idea. It's great that we're having this discussion and it should be allowed to continue in future.

Luke Hawksbee: Why we need to remind ourselves of our history – have to bear in mind that in universities there is a quick turnover of students. By and large, people don't really know what happened four years ago. How many people know that the Lay Dean occupied senate house as a protest against the Vietnam War? By having symbols of that heritage up there, gives us reason to keep the legend going. Have to remember that we're still not quite there yet. Still more privileged private school students etc.

Aris: Following Luke's point – In previous discussion last week. There is a misinterpretation of what this artwork symbolises, the link of this symbol with King's history. People keep talking about this being symbol of liberal inclusive tradition. I think this is already a departure from what putting up

this picture on the wall was meant to symbolise. Meant to symbolise a certain form of political activism, engagement. Doesn't stand for a notion of everyone being right, happy etc. Aggressive act, unleashed something against very strong things which we should oppose. Not about being a happy family, agreeing that no one will be offended etc. In many ways it is associated with Stalin, but still – this hasn't inspired liberal debate where everyone agrees.

Steve Downie: We don't need some kind of talisman in the corner to magic up discussion.

Aris: My point is, I would much prefer to see this going down than adding anything. The very act of adding anything that ironises it, perpetuates and stands for everything this action was against.

Floor: I don't know how representative that is of what was happening in the 70s 80s.

Steve Downie: I take issue with people describing it as an artwork. The only reason there's a frame around it is that otherwise it wouldn't hang on the wall.

Floor: It is the only ornate frame in the bar.

Juan: The gilt frame was the fellows trying to stop people getting it down.

Jed: I see this as something really positive. Radical heritage – people took action. We're presented with an opportunity now. We can stamp our own representative authority on King's. I'd like the debate to be seen in that way.

Will C-G: If you add/invert etc, you risk offending people again by trivialising it.

Matt: I don't agree – If you turned the flag upside down in Soviet Russia. Makes sure flag doesn't offend – keeps radical heritage intact.

Jacob: Keeping it up – we had a few points about potential for people to see that as representing support for Stalin. It doesn't make any sense. We have to stop calling it a flag.

Munro: It is.

Jacob: Shit. It's not a flag on a *flagpole*. That trivialises value of clearly ironising artwork. We understand how state capitalism developed and what happened to it. We could go through analysis of original intent, but we're risking moving this whole debate into one of intent. It's a representation of how the bar used to be. We can try to ignore the heritage, but it's a representation of a previous situation. This is not saying "hey we're Stalinists" this represents ideology. Communism = about dismantling forms of oppression. It stands for different things to different people. Generated a lot of debate. We're in capitalism – there's loads of capitalism everywhere. As soon as there's a representation of another horrible system, we get upset.

Higham: Regardless of whether we disagree with capitalism – on intention, has it occurred to us at any point to ask Robin and Hallvard why they put it up? If they put it up because they think that the students here are an interesting and controversial group of people that can spend days and days debating this, doesn't that indicate it should be there?

Juan: They just put it there to pre-empt the vandals – they were happy to let rumour of it being a student spread.

Valentina: So many potentially offensive symbols. Chapel, Choral Scholars, etc. I have an issue with saying 'The Russians as a group would find it offensive' This symbol means something very different from the Stalinist flag.

Annie: I think that there is a problem with being politically correct. We'll just end up doing it too much and have to remove everything. About the frame, there is something inherently ironic about that fact that the artwork shows us something we associate with communism, and around it there is a gilt, old-fashioned frame. That's the really interesting thing. You think you've got your finger on what it's about, then suddenly you shift.

Hannah: From what you said about Robin, I just want to emphasise fact that it's not the case that all the fellows want this down. Lots in opposite direction, lots indifferent. No point in us talking about whether we uniformly oppose capitalism. Because of the way it's framed, it doesn't represent pure political system. Represents the opportunity for dissenting thought. Represents one way of thinking against the grain.

Steve Downie: When it comes to seeing it as a symbol of dissent – distinction between 'Stalin' as bad guy, Lenin as good guy, wrong. Made by a state trying to consolidate power. Not a general statement about general ideas.

Grad: We had debate 5 years ago. I sympathise with people making claim. Argument that in some ways is true, on the other hand, it's a bit of a decision whether or not you associate that piece of history with this symbol. You don't have to do that. Lots of symbolism around. Analogy with swastika goes wrong – I can see good intentions behind this flag being up.

Floor: On a totally different point, I think if we decide either to keep it up or change it. People who look at it later weren't here, they haven't heard all these arguments. People will get immediate impression, whether right or wrong. They'll just have a gut reaction. We shouldn't be overly politically correct, but bear that in mind.

Liz Rush: I'd like to restate a proposal I made – another piece of artwork next to it signalling that it's seen in many different ways. I'm uncomfortable with notion of 'politically correct'. Comes out of a conservative push to criticise liberal emphasis.. Push to delegitimize. Tradition to which it is indebted.. Lobbies hard to make sure hate crimes are not punished with additional degree of severity etc. We're dealing with a respect for people's emotive response. Make sure acknowledgement of different views are enshrined next to it.

Richard Dorrell: Continuing from the last two points. Ultimately, the turnover of the community is so rapid. We cannot assume that everyone was here when it was discussed/explained/knows why. We'd have to put up some kind of disclaimer to give context.

Andy: Although we have no idea what people in the future will think, that's not an argument against taking it down so to speak. Sparks more debate – will get to a point where enough people will go "It is weird that they've got this" – another open meeting. Losing the artwork would be a loss of some of this stimulus for debate.

Lucy McMahon: I agree with Liz. To be politically correct is to be representative, democratic. If we do think in that way, have to make distinction between what the flag will be, and dissent. In my first

year there were signs all over the Pepsi machine, etc. Because of the fact that we've now debated over this, democratic decision to replace it, no longer a symbol of dissent. If it was even taken down, that empty space is a symbol of democracy.

Stefan: I know that this symbol carries a lot of importance for a lot of people – Best argument is that for a lot of students in King's today it's just irrelevant. If we want something that represents ethos of King's, we should have something more relevant to today.

Floor: If frame is meant to represent window into old bar, etc, a red flag would be just as good.

Steve Downie: Seeing it as abstract representation etc, easier if you're less connected to it – shows that we're completely detached. I was in Korea last year, saw lots of symbols of imperialist and Nazi Germany – all over tourist's bags etc. So completely out of their locus of political history, didn't mean anything. Shows a certain amount of ignorance.

Annie: Good intentions – Swastika was first an ancient symbol in Scandinavia and Buddhism for the sun. We can't say this is a complete symbol of even if you find it scratched in stone in Scandinavia. Symbols can mean a lot of different things to different people. Will we be voting tonight?

Juan: Voting system out by end of tonight. 48 hours to make decision and vote, then it'll be closed.

Jacob: We're talking a lot about what it's meant to represent as if any of us can definitively say what it represents. I can't persuade you that you should forget about the death and take my understanding of it. We're not trying to find something that represents the whole of King's. Represents very specific thing. False syllogism to say "Oh, therefore King's is radical". If you're looking in relativistic terms, we are far more left leaning than other colleges. There is no 'misunderstanding' of a symbol. Everybody has a specific understanding. I know lots about Stalinism, think it was really bad, doesn't mean I think it's a bad symbol. Trivialises other side's argument.

Matt: Nothing can't be solved by turning it upside down.

Will C-G: The fact is – it wasn't put up to cause offence, with that express intention. Nor was it put up with the intention of representing some sort of radical tradition in King's. It was put up as a response to vandals painting hammers and sickles. Was put up for a purely practical reason.

Jacob: Completely fallacious! What was happening in the bar was clearly linked to the ideology of the vandals.

Will: Strikes me as a caricature of King's students. Surprised that people would rather see this romanticised caricature than something truly representative.

Benny: Turning it upside down would not only make it not a symbol of the Soviet Union – ridiculing the WHOLE ethos. This is the one symbol that is different. More symbols would be great – doesn't mean you need to take it down.

Georgia Clements: I don't see why it's wrong to be detached. If you're going to say you can't judge something because you weren't there, devalues the whole of history. If you're going to forget things because they were bad, don't have memorial day on 11th November etc.

Juan: Hopefully we're going to be able to vote online tonight. 48 hours to make selection. In terms of possible alternatives: Amnesty International, White/purple, communist flag, satirical, upside down, add quotations, genuine hammer and sickle, anarchist flag, King's, etc.

Lucy: Can I add that we take it down, but have an empty space, with some indication that this happened underneath.

Floor: Placard with explanation of why it was put up.

Luke: Can we be clear exactly what flags, put an image up.

Benny: Another suggestion – keep it as it is with a flag right next to it that contradicts, etc. Not just a question mark.

Tindall: When you say something satirical like Mr Toad.. can we make it specific.

Juan: I'll speak to person and get an exact line.

Aris: Some of the ideas for alternatives – Seems to me that this is different to change. In terms of how people think other symbols can also represent it.. Shouldn't they consider adding other images or other symbols next to or around it. If people want to add other things to the bar's decoration.. different issue.

Liz Rush: Recontextualises.

Jed: If it does stay up, it'd be nice to commemorate that we had this debate.

Bart: Does something else have to be *next* to it? Add other symbols around the bar. As a collective, they represent left wing ideals.

Luke: Black flag red star – never represented any regime.

Shayan: As Jed said, this has been fantastic. Excellent turnout. It's important that this is reflected in the votes. Important that you reiterate it all in the voting system. Please vote. www.kcsu.org.uk.
AOB? NONE.