

SUCU General Meeting Minutes Thursday 17th October 2019

Council Room, Firth Court, 1pm

Chair: Sam Marsh, SUCU Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions

Sam welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

2.1. Sam provided a matters arising update following the Annual General Meeting held 6th June 2019.

Moty Katzman has been co-opted by committee into the role of Pensions Officer. Over the Summer Emma Nagouse stepped down from Committee and the position of Vice President. The Vice President position was advertised to all members but there were no expressions of interest other than from within SUCU Committee. At a Committee Meeting Sarah Staniland was co-opted as Vice President, and Lauren Selfe was co-opted to fill the vacant Branch Secretary role. The Policy and Governance Officer position is now vacant and we have one expression of interest so far. The co-optation of Sarah and Lauren was endorsed by members nem con.

2.2. The minutes of the AGM on 6th June 2019 were agreed as a true record.

3. Brief round-up of news

3.1. In addition to our monthly SUCU Branch News we will be sending a weekly email digest. Only under exceptional circumstances will we send any emails in addition to this.

3.2. Congratulations were given to the Climate Strike Organisers for all their hard work and a successful rally. SUCU members will continue to work with this group and others are welcome to join.

3.3. Members were asked to take a look at our 8 ways to get involved graphics: one if you have 15 minutes a week to spare, one if you have an hour in a week, and one if you want to get a bit more involved (although still not with a huge time commitment).

3.4. The Committee has supported a “Unis Resist Borders Controls” campaign for a migrant member and her family. SUCU provided a donation towards the legal fund and sent a statement of support.

3.5. We have provided a link to the ongoing oppression of academics in Egypt.

3.6. The UCU annual Equality Conference is to be held from 21st to 23rd November. If members would like to attend they can do so by registering on line. The deadline is the 7th November.

3.7. We have provided information about the University’s earlier deadlines for modules, and raised concerns with management.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- The SUCU organised Anticasualisation workshop went very well. This was open to all members including other Branches, and there were a number of external speakers. The materials from this workshop will soon be made available online.

- We are looking for volunteers who can help us with graphic design.

4. Industrial Action ballots

- 4.1. UCU is conducting two industrial action ballots at the same time (on pay and related matters, and the USS pension) and both close on 30th October. We have been asking our network of Departmental Contacts to contact all local members. In many departments where we have a Department Contact we have reached a turnout of 70% plus.
- 4.2. Robyn Orfitelli provided an update on the pay and related matters negotiations, and explained how the two ballots relate. We are asking each member to talk to one colleague every day about the ballots. This would ensure we reach the 50% turnout threshold.
- 4.3. Sam Marsh gave an update on the USS ballot and negotiations, and highlighted the sacking of Jane Hutton (UCU nominated USS Trustee). Sam has written to Frank Field MP (Work and Pensions Committee) raising concerns.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- Is this sort of conduct typical?

Ans. We do not know of many cases where Trustees have been sacked from pensions schemes, but the concern is about how this was done.

- Every union on the Joint Negotiating Team is balloting their members over pay and related matters. Every union is fed up and are presenting a united front.
- Why are the Employers silent about USS governance?

Ans. UUK has never attacked USS governance, and there are historical links between the Chair of the USS board, the Chief Executive of UUK and the Chair of the Employers Pension Forum.

5. Update from UCU Academic Related Professional Staff Committee including advice on ASOS

- 5.1. Jess Meacham sits on the national Academic Related Professional Services Staff Committee. She gave an update on how professional services colleagues can support any industrial action. Members can read more on the [UCU webpage](#).
- 5.2. Jess also made the meeting aware that the ARPS Committee have produced a manifesto for ARPS

6. University of Sheffield adoption of IHRA definition of antisemitism and Branch Motion

Proposed motion:

UCU Sheffield notes:

1. It has been the policy of our national union since its 2017 Congress to oppose adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism. In conflating criticism of Israel with anti-Jewish racism, the definition constitutes a threat to open debate and free discussion about the future and past of the Middle East and Palestine.
2. The 2017 motion was overwhelmingly approved by Congress delegates. It observed that in conflating antisemitism and criticism of the State of Israel, the definition was both deeply flawed conceptually and legally, and was an obstacle in the fight against the frightening resurgence of antisemitism in the US and across Europe and the UK. A number of Jewish organisations in the UK,

including Independent Jewish Voices, Jewish Voice for Labour and Free Speech on Israel, have taken a similar position.

3. The UK Government has adopted this definition of 'antisemitism' and urged Universities UK to advise all UK HE institutions that they should prevent meetings or events about Palestine that fall foul of the definition. Some universities have already complied with this instruction, and have banned campus events. Others have explicitly refused to adopt the definition, and have resisted outside pressure to comply.

4. In the United States and parts of Europe, academics and other professionals have lost employment as a result of their support for Palestinian human rights. Arab and Palestinian academics in particular have been targeted for speaking out. In the most recent high profile example, this June, Peter Schafer, an academic and director of the Jewish Museum Berlin, was forced to resign from his job after the museum retweeted a letter of support from academics supporting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement. The adoption of the IHRA in UK universities could conceivably lead to similar developments in this country.

5. The University of Sheffield is currently considering the adoption of the IHRA definition.

UCU Sheffield reaffirms:

1. Its opposition to all forms of racism, including antisemitism.
2. Its profound concern regarding the rising tide of antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism across the west.
3. Its solidarity with the Palestinian people and all those speaking out against abuses of their human rights.

UCU Sheffield resolves:

1. To oppose the University's adoption of the IHRA.
2. To educate members of the campus community about antisemitism and other forms of racism.
3. To support staff and students working for justice for the Palestinian people.

Proposed by: Katy Fox-Hodess on behalf of SUCU Committee

Seconded: from the floor

The proposer and seconder spoke in favour of the motion and gave some background. The issue is being discussed by the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee on 28th October, and any motion passed could be brought to that meeting. Debate and discussion followed. The branch communications officer outlined how we hope to organise a series of local events to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in January.

A vote on the motion was taken, and it was carried by a majority. There were 6 abstentions.

7. Branch Motion – Hong Kong

Proposed motion from a member:

Branch Notes

1. On 2/10/2019, activists from Hong Kong, mostly students at the University of Sheffield, were raising awareness about the protests for democracy and against violent police repression that are currently ongoing in Hong Kong. At around 5pm, at the end of their stall on Fargate, the group of about 30-40 democracy protesters were confronted by a group of about 100 Chinese nationalists.
2. The nationalists waved Chinese flags, sung their national anthem, and shouted derogatory racist chants at the Hong Kong democrats, calling them “cockroaches”. As well as having some possessions stolen and damaged, one of the Chinese nationalists threw a glass bottle at the protesters.
3. The Hong Kong democrats did not retaliate and made the collective decision to leave for their own safety and were escorted away safely.
4. The democracy protests in Hong Kong were sparked by the announcement of an extradition bill which many feared would allow the Chinese state to extradite political opponents in Hong Kong, who are currently protected by thin democratic measures. Protests against the extradition bill were met with violent police repression which has escalated, with the police now firing live rounds at protesters.
5. Hong Kongs administration is using £8.6million worth of arms export licences from the UK government in the form of teargas, riot shields, pyrotechnic ammunition, and more, to quell the demonstrations. British police officers are also known to be stationed in Hong Kong and helping them.
6. Although the extradition bill has been withdrawn for now, the protests have continued as a fight for universal suffrage, the resignation of Carrie Lam (Hong Kong’s Chief Executive), an independent public investigation into police violence, and more.

Branch Believes

1. We unequivocally support the democracy protests in Hong Kong, and the solidarity protests here in Sheffield, and others like it around the world.
2. We utterly condemn the attacks on protestors carried out by Hong Kong’s police with the aid of British arms exports and police officers.
3. We utterly condemn the aggressive intimidation of the Hong Kong democracy protestors by supporters of the Chinese state in Sheffield.
4. This intimidation should be treated by British trade unions as seriously as if any other demonstration or a picket line had been attacked. We cannot let democracy protestors - many of whom are our students and colleagues - be attacked and bullied in the streets for fighting for democratic freedoms for the people of Hong Kong.
5. Calling for democracy in Hong Kong is not supporting British or US intervention in the region. We are opposed to imperialist interventions in Hong Kong, and to any attempt to make it a proxy for imperialist disputes.
6. We do not endorse the anti-Chinese rhetoric of some who support the protests. This is a political dispute between the people of Hong Kong and its own administration, the Chinese state, and those

who are in political solidarity with those governments. Democracy protesters antagonsims to these cannot be extended to mainland Chinese people as a whole, many of whom are fighting similar struggles for universal suffrage and trade union rights on mainland China.

7. It is imperative that support for democracy in Hong Kong not be expressed in anti-Chinese rhetoric. Instead, the democracy protests must reach out to those from mainland China who are supportive of the cause and join forces with them. This is true in Sheffield in Hong Kong.

Branch Resolves

1. We will promote and support local protests and events for democracy in Hong Kong.
2. We encourage our members and students to attend Hong Kong democracy demonstrations and events to learn more, express solidarity, but also to protect them from intimidation and bullying.
3. We call on the university to ensure that protections are in place for democracy protests, that investigations into bullying and attacks be treated with the utmost seriousness, and also to publicly support democracy in Hong Kong.
4. We demand that British police be withdrawn from service in Hong Kong and the UK government stop selling arms used to repress democracy protestors.

Proposed by: a member from the floor

Seconded: from the floor.

The proposer spoke in favour of the motion and gave some background.

Discussion included:

- A friendly “delete and replace” amendment was proposed by a member from the floor and was seconded by the floor. The proposer of the amendment spoke in favour.

Proposed amendment:

Branch Notes

1. On 2/10/2019, activists from Hong Kong, mostly students at the University of Sheffield, were raising awareness about the current protests in Hong Kong for democracy and against violent police repression. Towards the end of the day there was a clash with a counter-demonstration, which reports indicate included threats and some violence.
2. Hong Kong's administration is using £8.6million worth of arms export licences from the UK government in the form of teargas, riot shields, pyrotechnic ammunition, and more, to quell the demonstrations. British police officers are also known to be stationed in Hong Kong and helping the state forces.

Branch Believes

1. We support the democracy protests in Hong Kong, and the solidarity protests in Sheffield, and elsewhere.
2. We condemn the attacks on protesters carried out by Hong Kong's police, with the aid of British arms exports and police officers.
3. We condemn any aggressive intimidation of Hong Kong democracy protestors in Sheffield.

4. Calling for democracy in Hong Kong is not supporting British or US intervention in the region. We are opposed to imperialist interventions in Hong Kong, and to any attempt to make it a proxy for imperialist disputes.
5. We do not endorse the anti-Chinese rhetoric of some who support the protests. This is a political dispute between the people of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong administration and the Chinese state. Democracy protesters' antagonisms to these cannot be extended to mainland Chinese people as a whole, many of whom are fighting similar struggles for universal suffrage and trade union rights on mainland China. Linking these struggles would strengthen both.

Branch Resolves

1. We encourage our members and students to support Hong Kong democracy demonstrations and events, whilst opposing anti-Chinese sentiment.
2. We call on the University to ensure that protections are in place for peaceful protests and that investigations into bullying of and attacks on peaceful protesters be treated with the utmost seriousness, and also to publicly support democracy in Hong Kong, as elsewhere.
3. We demand that British police be withdrawn from service in Hong Kong and that the UK government stop selling arms used to repress democracy protesters.

Discussion of the amendment included:

- A member preferred the original motion, as expressions of solidarity are very important.
- A member preferred the amendment, as the original motion contains problematic definitions.

The amendment was carried by a majority. The motion, as amended, was carried.

8. AOB

None.