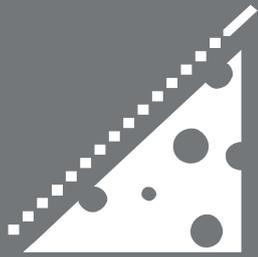


# The Cheese Grater

The Other Student Magazine of University College London Union



Special Report  
March 2008

## Annual General Muck-up

“Students ban military” raged The Sun. But did anyone notice that UCL Union seems to have banned the democratic process as well?

Hannah Hudson and  
Peter Woodman

What breaks Union rules and British law, ends in chaos, and gets UCL on the front pages of outraged national newspapers? It's fitting that the punchline is UCL Union's recent Annual General Meeting - because while there's nothing funny about it, it was a complete joke.

### There but for the the grace of Godwin

Congratulations then to UCLU General Secretary (and Chair of the AGM) Samantha Godwin for organising the first quorate AGM since 2003; she had already failed to do so at three previous meetings this year. Fourth time's the charm, eh Sam? Commiserations to the students of UCL, however, for her success was matched only by her incompetence and inadequacy as Chair. Unable to “keep the meeting in order” and “ensure [its] general smooth running” (as required by the Standing Orders), challenged by a vote of no confidence, and neutral only until she stepped down to present a motion; Godwin was an embarrassment to her role. At one point in the evening, she herself whined, “Does everyone understand that? Probably not.” So tied up with the AGM was Godwin, it was difficult to see where her ineptitude ended, and the farcical meeting began.



Chaos reigns under General Secretary  
Sam Godwin at this year's AGM

### Vote early – and often

The delayed start to the meeting did give students a chance to sample what UCLU democracy under Godwin is all about. With three officials roaming the aisles and distributing voting cards, it wasn't exactly difficult to obtain more than one card. When concerns were raised, official Jeremy Harris simply replied “the system is easily abused.” People needn't have worried. When it came to the first vote, it turned out Godwin wasn't keen on counting anyway, preferring to guesstimate

the result instead; she had to be prompted by the floor to actually count. There was consternation also from one of the three vote-counters, Jim Hunkin, whose voting figures Godwin decided to ignore when they didn't tally with those of the other officials. The devil's in the democratic details, one supposes.

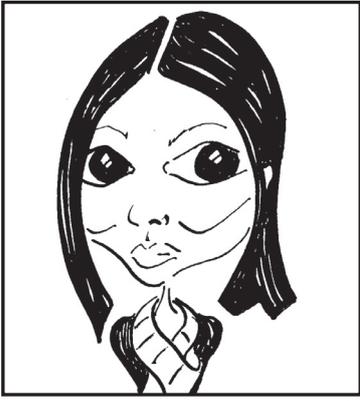
### I pity the fool

Procedure took a bit of a battering after Chris Dodsworth's call for a vote of no confidence in the Chair. Godwin might have seen fit to defer to the Secretary of the meeting, Jim Hunkin,

whose task it should have been to oversee the appointment of a temporary Chair. Interestingly, however, she chose to appoint Taherali Gulamhussein, AKA ‘Mr. T’ (his own moniker for the 2005-06 Ramsay Hall Student Rep. campaign). This wasn't to be his only outing.

After surviving her vote of no-confidence, Godwin returned to the Chair, only to stand down in order to speak in favour of the “Troops Out of UCL” motion. Mr. T took over once again. Perhaps a line from UCLU's Standing Orders would be handy here: “In the absence of the General Secretary, any member of the Governance Committee may take the Chair. In their absence a member of the Executive shall take the Chair.” But wait a minute! Mr. T is a member of neither. This makes Godwin's decision to appoint him Chair – despite the presence of members of both the Governance Committee and the Executive – rather baffling. One wonders why Godwin (who appears to be expert on all aspects of protocol) knowingly disregarded procedure just to appoint T. In spite of his status as General Secretary Elect, T proved a little out of his depth as Chair, receiving constant assistance from Godwin, who was sitting in the front row.

It wasn't as if T was exactly neutral either, having proposed the Palestine Motion earlier in the meeting and, during his speech, made the oh-so-slightly



inflammatory comment on suicide bombers: “you put a wall in Palestine, what do you expect?” Oh dear, oh dear...

## Quor blimey!

Before someone called quorum during discussion on the controversial “Troops Out of UCL” motion, the inexperienced and unqualified T wasn’t doing a bad job. Unfortunately, his response was not only to deny the quorum count but also to ban any further requests, in contravention of the Education Act 1994. People were quick to point out to T that he couldn’t do this, but, with Godwin silent as a mouse in the front row, he chose to ignore them, and the meeting moved swiftly on. You’ll remember that Godwin had stood down as Chair in order to speak in favour of the “Troops Out of UCL” motion? Coincidentally, this was the very motion under discussion when T denied the call for a quorum count. This was quickly moved to a vote and passed. Interestingly enough, the total votes (89 ‘for’ and 59 ‘against’) did not add up to the 200 necessary to make the meeting quorate. So, either over 50 people abstained, or there weren’t enough people present when the call for a quorum count was denied and the motion passed. Whichever way you look at it, something ‘aint right.

Farcically, T later overturned his own ruling and, after allowing a quorum count, declared the meeting inquorate, to the bewilderment of many present. After the meeting, T acknowledged his mistake and admitted to not knowing the

Standing Orders. But he should never have been there in the first place. Godwin not only violated the Standing Orders by appointing him, it is also likely that she benefited from failing to stop him rejecting the quorum call. It needs to be noted that quorum had become a contentious issue already that evening after a number of students attempted to walk out during a count. This breach of both the letter and the spirit of the law, however, wouldn’t have happened if Godwin, and her Chair-of-choice T, had been able to keep control.

## Chair or cheerleader?

There are reasons for Godwin being less than impartial. She is a well-known member of the Stop the War Society that proposed the “Troops Out of UCL” motion and clearly cared enough about it to step down as AGM Chair to speak in its favour, despite the motion’s proposer, Sham Rajyaguru, being present. As Chair, you’d have to be pretty foolish to openly show your support for one motion, right? Yet before the AGM, Godwin created a publicity group for the meeting on Facebook with the tagline “everyone should come to the Union Annual General Meeting to vote for Stop The War’s motions”. Surely she must have created it in a personal capacity, rather than in her role as General Secretary then? Alas, no. The contact address for the group was [general.secretary@union.ucl.ac.uk](mailto:general.secretary@union.ucl.ac.uk). Godwin may have been elected on an anti-war ticket, but she seems to fail to understand that when she speaks as General Secretary she speaks for UCLU; her actions have blurred the divide. This was further illustrated by her astonishing attempt, after stepping down as Chair, to count votes on the motion she spoke for. Anything to stop motions “being decided by the far right-wing [sic]”, eh Sam?

## The Godwin Delusion

Like a loose tooth that just won’t fall out, or a Bond villain who refuses to croak, the AGM

wasn’t the last people heard of Godwin. The next day, the glorious General Secretary issued a press release which (as a large proportion of it discussed the “Troops Out of UCL” motion) you would be forgiven for thinking was written on behalf of the Stop the War Society. However, it seems that while Godwin failed to make any intelligible points during the meeting, she was able to use the email to, ahem, set things ‘straight’. Claiming that those who opposed the motions “used every procedural tactic available to them, including failed attempts to no confidence the Chair”, Godwin denied the possibility that this was called for not as a “tactic”, but rather because... erm, people had no confidence in her. That’ll be the Right-wing conspiracy again, won’t it Sam?

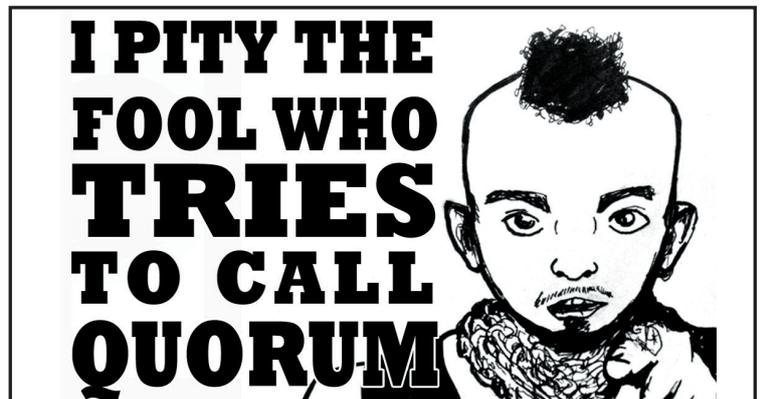
## Inglorious victory

So what exactly was wrong with the AGM? First, the voting card system was open to abuse because of poor organisation. Secondly, the Chair, Sam Godwin, ignored procedure when faced with a motion of no-confidence, by installing Taherali Gulamhussein as temporary Chair; a rule she broke again when she appointed him for the second time after standing aside in order to speak on behalf of a motion. Thirdly, and most importantly, a quorum call cannot be denied unless the meeting is already in a vote. In rejecting this call, and forbidding any others, T not only broke the Standing Orders but also the Education Act 1994. The “Troops Out of UCL” motion is contentious, therefore, not be-

cause of its text (people did have a chance to turn up and vote, after all) but because it’s likely the meeting would have been found to be inquorate before the vote was taken, if procedure had been properly followed. While refusing to comment “on specific accusations” Godwin commented: “I adhered to all standing orders as written and when the standing orders did not clearly indicate procedure I made appropriate interpretations which were upheld by the floor against all challenges. All allegations of misconduct on my part relating to the AGM are without basis and clearly politically motivated.”

## Negative Impact

The “Troops Out of UCL” motion has also caused hysteria in the national press, with Shadow Defence Minister Gerald Howarth bellowing “They should have their grants scrapped!” Yet when a UCL spokesperson was asked about the motion’s effect, he disparagingly replied that the vote “has no implications for any activities held on the main campus of UCL, or sponsored by the University.” Interesting, because the Freshers’ Fayre is held on... UCL premises. There has also been panic at the highest level of Union management, with one member of staff present at the AGM openly voicing his concern that the meeting was not legal, and needed to be reported to College. It seems that with UCL embarrassed by this motion and anxious to save face, there’s little chance of the military actually being banned from any UCLU events. Nice to know that long, chaotic AGM was worthwhile.



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