

Editorial

Editor's comment

Democracy scraped thin

Despite an impressive ceremony last Friday, this year's elections ended not with a bang but with a whimper.

Four of the six Vice-Presidents stood unchallenged; all credit to their campaigns and their victories, but as our front page reads this week, this is not democracy.

You can't place any blame on the candidates that stood - no-one during the application process will have had the foreknowledge that their lone ballot-box opponent will be the ever-chirpy, complusive loser R.O.N. That democracy-preserving character that prevents Guild elections from descending into dictatorship; the escape-clause that so many ignore because, being honest, they just don't want to go through the whole process again.

Hard-fought positions for VPSA, VPS and President did bring out more of the competitive streak, with a real need for each candidate to prove themselves above the rest. No-one could have avoided Paulo's highly persuasive horde of Mexicans, Steve 'Guinness' Hancock's invasion of the toilet cubicles or Kirsten Jongberg's drunken escapades on the steps of the library, should anyone have braved the downpour that overshadowed the whole caper. Every year will have its highlights.

But with talk of voter turnout on the up, I have to question the fact that only 10% of students at the University found themselves at a voting station, or more accurately, made the effort NOT to avoid one. In this 'self-consciously ironic' new millennium it seems that everyone is too busy criticising voter apathy to do anything about it - and yes, I did vote, before I get accused of hypocrisy.

Cat Little's drunken opinions are extreme and, I feel, unfair to the candidates: it solves nothing to judge them before their term has even begun. However there is certainly a grain of truth in there: there is no reason, after all, to vote for someone who you don't believe could do the job.

Where this attitude falls flat is that for many voters the Guild elections are little more than a popularity contest, spurred on by catchy campaigns and the whoring of corporate brands. Maybe this is the only way to tap the student market; you tell me. Best of luck to all of the new Exec though - maybe next year things will change.

A note on Guild Council

While I'm on the subject of Guild politics, it's impossible to avoid bringing in the bastion of bureaucracy itself.

Guild Council plays a fundamental part in the running of this institution and, in its own way, has a fair degree of power over the student body it represents.

So why, and I'm sure the vast majority of those present will agree, was the last session padded out by a heated debate on the meaning of the word 'uncomfortable'? To put this in context, a clause in the constitution was up for modification, and the suggestion was that students should not be made to feel uncomfortable in the Guild. The intricate symantic implications of the word therefore had to be explored in painstaking detail, helping to extend an already lengthy meeting to over four hours, and putting a highly charged, delicate issue - whether the Guild should adopt a policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict - to the end. An issue that is current and relevant was sidelined to allow for pedantic wordplay, and this is not an isolated concern: as with so many of the democratic organisations that represent us, an obsession with treading the tightrope of bureaucracy displaces the need for the important issues to be addressed, or at least ensures that voters are sufficiently weary to no longer care.

Letters

Letter of the week

Come and collect your ten tickets to RISA!

Football could have promoted co-existence

Dear Redbrick,

It's a shame when India and Pakistan can play a game of cricket against each other on the world stage and Iran and USA can play football in the World Cup and yet some students on Birmingham Campus cannot play a friendly game of football. As part of Multicultural Week at Birmingham University a 'World Cup Football Tournament' was arranged in which each society was to represent a country.

Before the match of Israel v Palestine, Adam Benjamin the Jewish Society Chair made a statement saying that the game should be played and supported in the right manner keeping in mind the correct spirit with which Multicultural Week was set up to achieve, 'a game of football! Not political, not aggressive, but a friendly game of football' and then he passed it over to the Palestinian Society Chair, Bilal who made a political statement about the 'occupied territories and about the massacre of Palestinians' then called his team off the pitch.

We have some contentious points and opposing political views but when we have things in common we need to grab them.

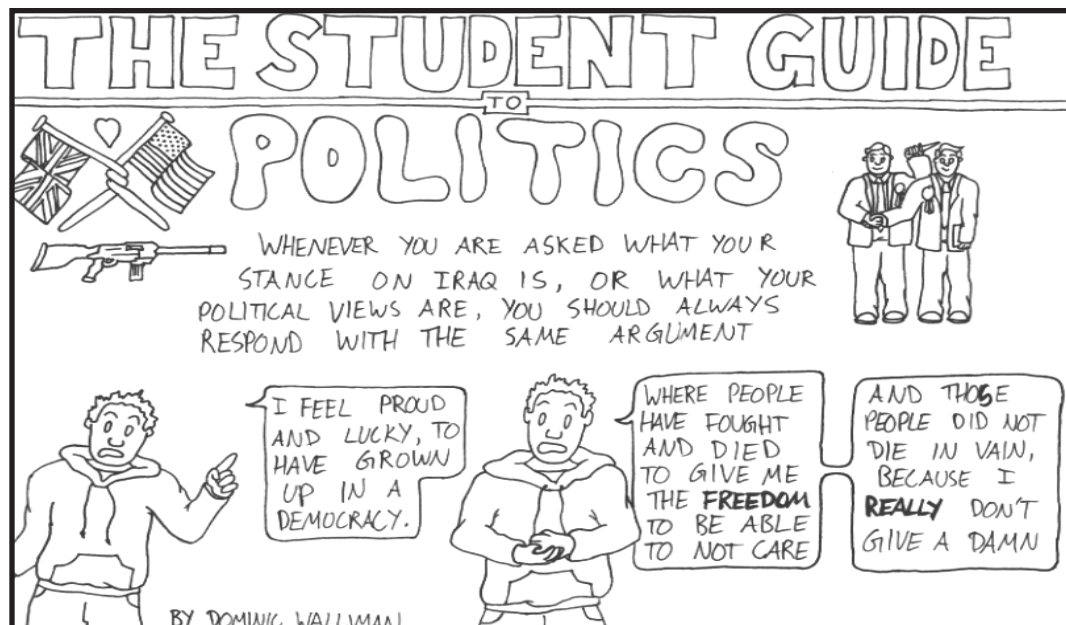
Football was something we had in common and unfortunately the Palestinian Society missed the opportunity for coexistence. It really makes me upset, frustrated and angry that if we can't find a platform to respect and understand one another in Birmingham, then how can we expect the politicians who are dealing with life and death to find a solution in the Middle East.

Unfortunately despite the efforts of the Guild Executive to find some form of environment that everyone is comfortable with, the Palestinian Society's agenda became evidently clear at the last Guild Council meeting and on the football pitch. They are not for peace, coexistence and respect; they are for confrontation at every level. Unfortunately for the students of Birmingham University they have succeeded in achieving their aim.

The spirit of Multicultural Week should have been upheld by all students regardless of political beliefs, religious views and practices.

Ben Rosen (History II)

As I say in my editorial, the Israel-Palestine situation is highly charged, and I agree with you that it's important to find a plateau of co-existence before going any further. Football certainly seems like a good idea, but it's obvious from the Palestinian response that they believed the game had certain symbolic significance that could not be ignored. Your letter raises some very valid points but you regress to the 'us and them' philosophy which is in itself antagonistic. It's clear that your two societies, as with the countries you represent, have a long way to go before complete co-existence is possible, but I'm sure both societies will agree with you that mutual respect and understanding is the first step: hopefully future efforts will be more successful. See below for a corresponding statement from the Palestinian Society.



We'll play only when our country is free

Dear Editor,

Please find below the statement we, the Palestinian Society, made before the Palestine vs. Israel match in the multicultural week tournament. It explains our reasons for calling the game off, and we hope it clarifies our intentions should you choose to cover it in a future publication.

"Today we have the wonderful opportunity of watching a game between Israel and Palestine. A game between a country that exists, and another that does not. A game between the last colonial occupation in modern

history and the remains of a shattered and broken people. It is immensely difficult for us as Palestinians to reconcile playing football with a team claiming to represent the state of Israel in a time when our families back in Palestine are having to face the most brutal oppression faced by any other people in the world.

If a day comes when Palestine is free, maybe then we'll play football. But not today. Thank you very much."

**The Palestinian Society
10th March 2003**

Redbrick is a forum for debate, but it seems to me that neither

yourself nor J-Soc have fully taken the concept on board. There are some strong views flying around, especially given the vibrant multi-cultural mix in this University, and clearly both sides of the divide differ dramatically in their interpretations of events, and how you believe progress can be made. To illustrate this we've been handed two very separate statements that indicate a gulf of understanding between you. The ideology behind Multi-cultural week is, I don't think you can disagree, one that needs to be taken forward: hopefully progress will be made both internationally and within this melting pot of diversity in which we're all studying.

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Carnage anger not quenched

Dear Redbrick,

A few weeks ago I was so utterly dismayed by the organisational skills of Carnival that I wrote a letter to you highlighting my experience. In the last edition of Redbrick I was confronted by the response of the Carnival committee. Once again they have failed in their duty. Their response centered around the problems that occurred outside Tiger Tiger.

However, these were not created by the carnival stewards. Tiger Tiger and its staff caused all the problems on the actual evening. Whilst shifting all blame from themselves and hiding behind Tiger Tigers obvious naivety, Carnival failed to answer my criticisms of the queue system for purchasing t-shirts.

A system which they have complete control and must accept responsibility. Perhaps one reason for their lack of response maybe that there truly is no answer to sheer incompetence.

yours,

DL MORETON