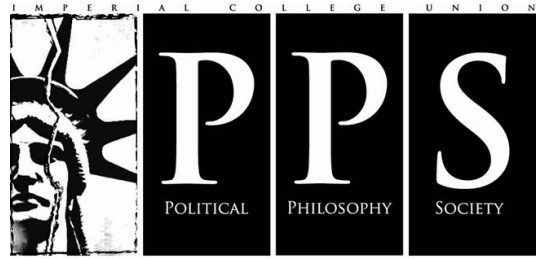


PPS Chairman Report – Ammar Waraich (2007-2009)



The Imperial College Union Political Philosophy Society (PPS) was an idea long overdue at the university scene in London.

Over the past two successful years, the PPS has become a name renowned for unhindered debate and discussion on all political, philosophical, ideological and cultural issues, where every perspective is truly represented and thoroughness and quality are given great importance. The committees of 2007-09 and 2008-09 worked hard to achieve this, taking great care to remain faithful to the core PPS principles, and sometimes having to work against prevailing societal and media attitudes to challenge the status quo.

Upon the formation of the committee of 2007-08, it was agreed that in order for the PPS to achieve a presence and success, a unique presentation style would be required, and thus the need to create a logo that would communicate the values of the PPS and spearhead this presentation was identified. Following several creative brainstorming sessions and cycles of refinement, the current PPS logo was painstakingly fashioned and to complement it, a unique contrasting aesthetic was also contrived which would in time become integral to all PPS activities.

So with the above in hand, the first event titled 'The Environment: An Impossible Challenge' was planned with leading environmental journalist Mark Lynas addressing an audience on the politics of global warming and what needs to be done to resolve the situation. There was a remarkable turnout, an excellent discussion and a satisfied crowd; and so began the PPS in earnest.

The committee wanted to continue setting high standards and so for the next activity, an innovative format of a themed week-long series of events was devised to allow attendees to approach similar issues from different perspectives over several events in a week. And thus the 'Conflict Case Study Week' came to being, with three events in the week covering the conflicts in Israel/Palestine; Kashmir and Ethiopia/Somalia; discussing their causes, their present situation and also possible opportunities for resolution. Conflict Case Study Week was a resounding success, and the PPS received praise from think-tanks, lobby groups and individuals for its effort, putting the PPS firmly on the map. However, this week also drew some controversy due to the sensitive nature of the topics addressed and due to the inaccurate reporting of some of the Jewish media regarding the Israel/Palestine event.

In a similar vein, the subsequent major date planned for the PPS was the 'Genocide Awareness Week' where international leaders in the field of Genocide gathered under the PPS name to take part in a first-of-a-kind academic gathering. During the week, the definitions of genocide; historical and current genocides; and intervention as an international responsibility were discussed, with a focus on genocides in Darfur, Rwanda and Europe, amongst others. This included firsthand accounts from a holocaust survivor and Darfur, as well as a film

showing on Nazi Germany from the UK Jewish Film Festival. One of the esteemed guests during this week was Dr. James Smith, CEO of the Aegis Trust, who had flown in from Rwanda having just met US President George Bush.

Alongside all the events described above, the PPS had also been conducting a weekly small-group 'Seminar Series' throughout the second term of the 2007-08 academic year, where abstract political concepts and the ideas of classical political philosophers were discussed. This was a more regular offering designed to appeal to those interested in advancing their critical thought; and although formally led by an academic, the students in attendance were actively encouraged to participate by generating most of the discussion themselves, reflecting as a group on the topic being discussed. Initially proposed to broaden the range and quality of the PPS events, the seminars ended up holding an appeal for many that was above and beyond the larger events and this was illustrated by the group of dedicated regular attendees that the seminars built up.

During the Easter break, the committee was fortunate enough to receive the contact details for Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia 1981-2003, who was in due course confirmed to deliver a lecture on the War in Iraq and his beliefs on war in the international context. Hugely publicised and massively popular, 'The Case for Criminalising War' was an event well attended, and helped the PPS become a well known society across the country. The lecture itself was impressive and was followed by a lively Q&A, getting coverage on various international media and across many internet sites.

However, the occasion was also sadly marred by the Imperial College Rector's Office imposing severe restrictions on the event on the advice of the Imperial College Union, following pressure from the Imperial College Jewish Society and the Union of Jewish Students, who were against the guest being allowed to speak at Imperial. Deplorably, this resulted in entry being limited to Imperial ID holders only and no audiovisual recording or photography being allowed. Many students from across the country who had paid for accommodation and travel were upset and angry; and their genuine complaints to the PPS were deeply regretted.

Nonetheless, despite the imposed restrictions that refused entry to many (including Lords and MPs), some VIP's were able to forcefully demand entrance while restrictions on recording could not be policed on the day, and so consequently, photos and an audio of the event were made available online to those who could not be in attendance.

As a result of these disappointing circumstances, the trust and respect the PPS held for both the College and the Union was significantly undermined. It was therefore with this eventful and somewhat unfortunate occasion, that the first year for the PPS came to an end.

The 2008-09 academic year began for the PPS with the election of a new committee and the introduction of a few refinements. Firstly, instead of organising week-long sets of events, the PPS events would now be either one-offs in response to the current affairs at the time or a pre-planned series of themed events where events would occur over a few weeks. The Seminar Series though was planned to continue as before, running again only in the second term.

The first event of this year, titled 'Yes, We Can', was planned in response to the American elections and designed to evaluate the promise of change from the new Obama administration. The two panellists were Bill Barnard, Chairman of the Democrats Abroad UK, and Rakesh Surampudi, Cultural Officer for the U.S. Embassy in London. In a bid to involve the audience, the event was planned as a seminar where the chair would have an informal discussion with the guests, bringing the audience comments and questions into it regularly. With a turnout that was much larger than anticipated, the event was enjoyed by many and made for a good start to the new PPS year. Furthermore, the style of chairing proved very successful and it was decided that this style would become the norm for future PPS events.

Following on from this was the 'Emerging Economies Series', designed to look at the politics, economics, domestic policies, foreign relations and cultural aspects of the fast rising countries of the world. The events in the series focussed on China, India and Latin America; and all three events went extremely well. However, it was the China event that received the most positive feedback, where Dr Kerry Brown from Chatham House shed light on the Chinese economic growth; Professor Hugo De-Burgh explored issues of media boundaries and human rights; while Dr James Reilley of Oxford University led a fascinating comparison between western democracy and Chinese governance, looking at the similarities, differences, pros and cons of both.

'Israel or Hamas: Who is the aggressor?' was the first event of the second term and was a heated debate about what had happened during the Israeli War on Gaza in the winter holidays. The panellists presented facts and opinions on why Gaza was attacked as well analysis of the policies followed by both Israel and Hamas. This timely event was difficult to plan but was thankfully executed well, catering for over 200 people who all had a good say in the discussion and got opportunities to ask pressing questions.

At this point the PPS website was also finally launched, having been in construction for a few months, and the Israel/Hamas event was the first podcast to be made available on it. In time, all the events' audios and photographs were uploaded and made available for download, and a PPS iTunes podcast was also introduced. All of these opened new channels for the PPS to project its activities and predictably allowed it to gain more attention, including listeners from other continents as well as interest from larger organisations such as BBC News.

To end the 2008-09 academic year, a sell-out even titled 'Sri Lanka: A Forgotten Conflict' took place where international attorney Bruce Fein addressed the fighting between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels; followed by the 'Religion and Politics Series' which was designed to examine the role of religion in modern politics and law. As part of the latter, Alastair Crooke, founder of the Conflicts Forum and an expert commentator on Middle Eastern affairs, joined a full auditorium in an event titled 'Resistance, Revolution and Islam' to explore the rationale of Islamist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah and discuss how understanding them and their ethos could be the key to political solutions. This too was a hit event but one which generated a unique atmosphere given the controversial nature of the topic and the high calibre of the speaker.

And with the above came to a close the academic year of 2008-09 for the PPS, and on a personal note, I came to the end of 2 years of chairmanship of the PPS. This has by far been

one of the best things I have done in my life and an experience that has taught me much more than the effort and time I have had to put in. I have been very privileged and extremely proud to have been chair for two years running and am thankful for having had this opportunity.

I would like to thank my committees for their patience and assistance in making the society what it is, and would like to wish the future committees all the best in their continuing endeavour to provoke thought under the accomplished name of the PPS.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ammar AW', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ammar Waraich – PPS Chairman 2007-09