

RINGMAR TOLD TO REMOVE BLOG
MASSIVE SUPPORT FROM THE STUDENT BODY FOLLOWING THREATS

CLEANERS' POVERTY WAGES
STUDENTS, CLEANERS AND ACADEMICS FIGHT SCHOOL FOR 'LIVING WAGE'

TONY BLAIR VISITS LSE
UNVEILS THE LOST FABIAN WINDOW, INSTALLED IN THE SHAW LIBRARY

AUT strikes; Sutherland; Erik Ringmar; Living Wage Campaign; Paper throwing; Ethnic minorities report; LSE students in local elections

Senior Lecturer threatened over comments

Sidhanth Kamath
Managing Editor

Students and staff have rallied to the support of Dr. Erik Ringmar, a senior lecturer in the Government Department at the LSE, who was recently threatened with internal disciplinary procedures by the Departmental Convenor Professor George Philip and further reprimanded by LSE Director Howard Davies.

Ringmar, was invited to address prospective students at an LSE Open Day event, and made an unconventional and controversial speech, which he subsequently added to his online blog 'Forget the Footnotes.'

The speech, made on March 22, included comments such as: "An undergraduate is today worth £3000," and "I know we are expected to 'sell' our programme to you." He also expressed his belief that "first-class teachers usually will have their minds elsewhere than on undergraduate teaching," since the "greatness of a scholar is measured in terms of output - that is, research."

Ringmar was reprimanded by Philip in an email on March 24, which said that his speech "raised the question of whether you really did want the potential students to come to the School," and went on, "you embarrassed your colleagues." Philip's email also contained an informal oral

warning, requiring Ringmar to "destroy/cancel your blog entirely and shut the whole thing down" and expected that when representing the School in the future he would do so in "a positive way that does not risk bringing the School into disrepute," in order to ensure that a formal disciplinary would not be issued.

Ringmar claims that on being asked to attend the event he, "told the Convenor that I would speak in my own name and in my own fashion," and was "explicitly given the right to ignore the [pre-prepared] Powerpoint presentation by the Deputy Convenor." However upon receiving the email he claimed to have been "intimidated by the big time professors who were hurling abuse" at him, and took down the site.

When contacted by *The Beaver* he commented that, "Blogs give power to the little guys, and the professors are terrified that this will set a precedent for criticism, even if it is purely of the constructive variety."

Ringmar subsequently decided to defy the departmental ban and re-posted the material believing that "this

was my one chance to make a stance." The blog contains an excerpt from the School's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech which incorporates Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and states that every individual has the right to "impart

what I do is in accordance with School rules."

Davies replied saying he believed the blog was "damaging to the School," and found the blog to "contain criticisms of your colleagues." He went on to say the issue was not one of blogging, "it is whether a col-

flooded with comments from students and staff all supporting the contents of his Open Day speech, but more crucially his right to express his opinions. Comments have praised his speech's "refreshing honesty" and implied that his rejection of the usual corporate style presentation could only have strengthened the appeal of the School to students.

Since the controversy arose, the blog has been visited close to 10,000 times by over 2,620 visitors. A poll on the website also revealed that 60 percent of the 50 voters were of the opinion that the blog was "thought-provoking (and a great way to recruit students)" while only one voter believed that the results were "truly scandalous, punishable."

In 'blogger' conversations with students on the website, Ringmar has also expressed his belief that the LSE needs a 'Bloggers Charter,' and has underlined his determination to pursue the matter with the relevant authorities.

Student support has led to a support group titled 'Students who Support Erik Ringmar' on Facebook, a popular student networking web-

site. At the time of printing group membership had reached 156 members, who have all signed a petition in support of Ringmar.

Some students also reported that they were unable to access the blog through the LSE's network on Friday April 28, leading to suspicions that the school had fully clamped down on access to Ringmar's website.

An email to Ringmar from the man in charge of blogs at Warwick University explained that while their blogs "frequently contain robust criticism of aspects at the institution...understanding our staff and students' concerns is important to us...as is the idea that we are not afraid of criticism, as is the idea that we support freedom of speech."

The email continued, "The only particular concern we sometimes have is when criticism becomes abuse...[for example] to say that whoever is responsible for X is an idiot or some other, stronger term of abuse."

The enormity of support however, seems to have had effect, with Ringmar's latest posting claiming that the ban had been lifted, albeit "grudgingly," but that the department could continue to monitor the blog. Ringmar is determined to continue his campaign for a 'Bloggers Charter' and claims that "as far as this blog is concerned, I will never budge. I'm scared but not suffering, and the issue of freedom of speech is one for everyone."

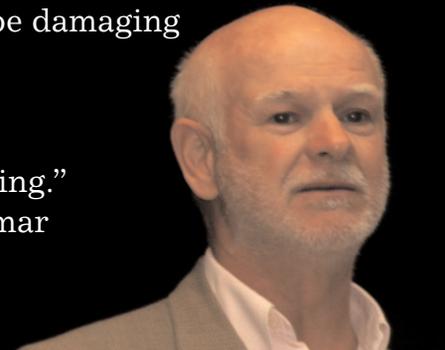
"Destroy/cancel your blog entirely and shut the whole thing down."

George Phillip, Government Dept. Convenor, to Erik Ringmar 24/03/06

"I entirely support your convenor's views. I looked at the blog and it seemed to me to be damaging to the school ...

I think you should reflect carefully on your behaviour which I find most disappointing."

Howard Davies to Erik Ringmar 28/03/06 13:52



information...in writing or print...or through any other media."

Ringmar then contacted Davies on March 27 in an email requesting advice on the official School policy on blogging and expressing his belief that "a great School such as ours benefits from critical scrutiny," and that he was, "very keen to make sure that

league can publicly abuse his employer and colleagues without consequences." He also claimed that Ringmar had "repeated these slurs to parents and prospective students," accused his emails of being "disingenuous," and warned that Ringmar should "reflect very carefully," on his behaviour.

The blog has since been

SU told to ban paper throwing at UGM



Elaine Londesborough
News Editor

The LSE Students' Union (SU) has been told by the School's officials that they must ban paper throwing at the Union General Meeting (UGM) on the grounds of both the LSE's own Freedom of Speech regulations and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Opponents of paper throwing have long insisted that it makes for a hostile atmosphere at meetings which deters new people from getting involved and worst still, excludes students with disabilities.

The issue was discussed at length at the UGM of week five of the Lent Term, following the Constitution and Steering Committee's (C&S) controversial decision to ban it. The decision was consequently over turned by students at the UGM who voted to no confidence and dismiss the C&S Committee in light of their unpopular move.

However, following complaints made to the School about the practice, it seems that the original decision by C&S may have been vindicated. One of the C&S members who was dismissed over the issue has made a complaint to the School's Freedom of Speech (FoS) board.

The complaint argued that:

"the habit of paper or any other missile throwing clearly intimidates and interferes with a person's ability to take part in a meeting that occurs on the School's property."

Section 1.3.2(1) of the School's Codes of Practice on Freedom of Speech was also highlighted: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority."

The issue of compliance with the DDA has also been under debate, with the School's Legal Compliance office and the School's Secretary, Adrian Hall, having been contacted about the

issue. Hall has responded saying: "[We] request that [the General Secretary] seeks to achieve a resolution of the issue of paper throwing in meetings as soon as possible."

SU General Secretary, Rishi Madhani, responded by saying: "The Union is committed to ensuring that all members can participate in its activities and meetings without fear of discrimination."

"We are awaiting the results of the independent risk assessment we have requested," he added.

However, Union insiders have questioned if the promised risk assessment is merely a delaying tactic until the new sabbatical team takes over.

Dave Cole, one of the students who made the original complaint to C&S about paper throwing, is concerned that the SU Executive aren't doing enough to tackle this issue. He told *The Beaver*: "There has been a total lack of leadership from the Executive."

"It would have been infinitely preferable to resolve this within the SU, but that has not been possible," he continued.

Given the strong feelings on both sides of the debate, the issue of paper throwing at the UGM looks set to rumble on for some more time yet, but with pressure from the School the SU is likely to have no choice but to ban the practice.

AUT exam crisis

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

AUT members voted to strike again earlier this month, yet the issue was again not raised at LSE Council. Though the LSE cannot hope to directly influence the outcome of negotiations between the AUT and university employers, many have questioned the School's inadequate and slow response to the crisis. When asked just how serious the problem may be Murphy responded, "we don't know - we cant know."

Striking staff have already been contacted by the school in an effort to persuade them to step down. Letters and emails were also sent out to try and ascertain the total number of staff intending to strike over the marking period.

Chris Husbands, the President of the AUT's LSE branch, said that "the local AUT fully supports the action as a tactic that is likely to be most effective in bringing about a serious and speedy response from UCEA (Universities and Colleges Employers' Association)."

"We greatly regret that the action short of a strike-approved by 80 percent of AUT members who voted in the corresponding ballot - is seen as hurting students in the short term," he continued.

Husbands has been hoping to meet with LSE Director

Howard Davies to discuss matters.

School officials stressed that once an agreement had been reached nationally, the situation would be speedily retrieved.

The next arbitration meeting is scheduled today. Husbands was optimistic that the situation would be "wholly retrievable". No further developments were known at the time of going to press.

"There is a danger ... of making contingencies too early. Suppose the dispute was to be resolved in the next fortnight - it would have caused a great deal of anxiety among staff and students for nothing."

Simeon Underwood,
Academic Registrar