

# ST. CATHERINE'S COLLEGE MIDDLE COMMON ROOM EXTRAORDINARY OPEN MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday May 24, 2023, 8 pm, Ainsworth Graduate Center Top Floor

Committee Members Present:

Co-President: Felice Wallner

Secretary: Laurence Peinturier

Social Secretary: Vaibhav Mahajan

Bar Manager: Juyon Lee

Assistant Bar Manager: Hannah Geddes

LGBTQIA+ Welfare Rep: Sunny Pydugadu

Academic Officer: Joanna Kramer

Environmental Rep: William Walker

Minutes Taken by Laurence Peinturier

## A. MINUTES

### 1. Approval of minutes from previous meeting

Meeting of April 30: <https://mcr.stcatz.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Open-Meeting-April-30-2023-2.pdf>

Minutes approved.

### 2. Motion: Show solidarity with the trans community, against the Oxford union for platforming the TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist), Kathleen Stock.

Motion proposed by: Sunny Pydugadu

Motion seconded by: Laurence Peinturier

This MCR notes that:

- The Oxford Union has invited notorious transphobe Kathleen Stock to speak this term.
- Stock is a transphobic and trans exclusionary speaker and has actively worked against trans rights. This includes supporting gender identity conversion therapy, despite a professional consensus on the ineffectiveness and harmfulness of this practice, repeatedly portraying trans women as dangerous and predatory, despite a total lack of evidence for such, and is a trustee of trans-exclusionary hate group the LGB alliance.
- Stock is also well known for spreading misinformation about the trans community, often using arguments that disregard empirical facts and research. None of her writing on gender has been subject to peer review, and yet she is being invited to likely espouse her views on such by the Union committee.
- LGBTQ+ members of the university have received threats of violence as a result of speaking out against Stock's platforming.
- Trans people, especially trans women, are more likely to face abuse, violence, and attacks as a result of their gender identity.
- 41% of British trans people reported facing transphobic violence over just a 12-month period (Stonewall, 2018).
- In 2022 trans people experienced the biggest increase in hate crimes of any group, up 56% (BBC, 2022). This has been linked by some to a growing wave of hatred from far-right groups against the trans community.

This MCR believes that:

- The rights of any minority group to exist should never be up for debate. This is not a trivial issue, but one where lives are at stake.
- Right to free speech does not pertain to include the right to a platform to amplify your views, especially a platform this prominent and exclusive. It also doesn't grant a free pass to spread dangerous misinformation.
- By inviting, and refusing to disinvite Stock, the Union has made the choice to amplify a voice that actively harms trans students, trans people and the trans community at large, choosing to generate self-interested controversy at the expense of a vulnerable community.
- Doing so, the Union will be both complicit and responsible in spreading transphobic rhetoric; and the consequences of such, should it choose to promote Stock via this event, adding to the current wave of attacks towards the trans community in British politics, governance and mainstream media. This event will only further a culture of transphobia both in this university and country, as well as boosting the career to a dangerous and unreliable transphobe.
- Transphobes should not feel welcome in Oxford, or in St Catherine's College.

- Trans people are valued and loved members of this university, St Catherine's and society at large, and they deserve to feel welcome and supported in their home.
- Showing solidarity with the trans community across Oxford is more important than ever, and this must be done both publicly and meaningfully.

This MCR resolves to:

- Condemn the Oxford Union for platforming Kathleen Stock, and call on the president and the librarian of the Union to rescind her invite in support of the trans community.
- Reaffirm this MCRs solidarity with the trans community in Oxford and beyond, that trans rights, trans lives and trans happiness matter and must be protected.
- Call for organisations across Oxford (including the Union) to platform often silenced trans voices and stories, beyond a context where they have to argue for the right to exist. Stress that those in power and the mainstream media have uplifted and spotlighted Stock enough, and that the conversation needs to move beyond a reductive argument around trans existence.
- Release a public statement (written by the LGBTQ Rep) detailing such on its communications and social media platforms. Have the MCR Secretary send a copy of said statement to the Oxford Union president to inform the institution of its disapproval.
- Offer support, where possible and suitable, for events organised by LGBTQ+ groups in Oxford against Stocks' platforming, to the best ability of its officers.
- Donate £25 to the trans rights charity, Gendered Intelligence.

Discussion:

- Vivek: are there 2 motions? One in support of the trans community/condemning the Oxford Union, and one for the donation?
- Laurence: It is one single motion, but you can vote to revise and resubmit the motion if you wish to.
- Vivek: What is the Oxford Union view on this situation?
- Sunny: The Union has invited the speaker to speak as a single speaker. Is the Union supporting this woman? No one can say that for sure but that is an implication. The Union should have organized the event in a different way.
- Vivek: Has the Union been approached about this?
- Sunny: Yes, they said they were sorry but said they could not cancel it.
- Nora: Here is what the Union said about the situation (\*shows her phone\*).
- Sunny: \*reads the Oxford Union statement\* (it can be found on the Oxford Union Instagram account).
- Vivek: So it is a moderated interview, not a speech.
- Sunny: The problem is on the decision of inviting the speaker in the first place.
- Vivek: If the interview is moderated sufficiently, do you think there would be place for actual conversation and active discussion though?

- Sunny: Yes but opposition will be highlighted by the students who are asking the questions.
- Sunny: We can't really do anything anymore about this situation but what we can do is express our concerns and show our support for the trans community. It is the main idea of the motion.
- Felice: The point of this motion is not to discuss whether it's a speech, interview etc. Their views will still be challenged. But historically the Union does not fairly represent both sides of the story (they would often invite speakers that have controversial views in one direction but not necessarily provide the same platform and space for the opposite side).
- Juan: I believe the motion is not correctly targeted in the right direction. The statement should make sure to highlight that the Union is biased. Also when you read the motion it was very politicized.
- Sunny: All these are very good feedbacks, we will make sure the statement reflects this.
- Sunny: Also the motion comes from the student union; it is a universal motion that has already been passed in many Colleges.
- Juan: What about the donation? Will the money be directly targeted to the current situation?
- Sunny: It is unsure.
- Juan: I think we should make sure there is a clear connection between the motion and the donation.
- Vivek: A 25 pounds donation is symbolic. Making a donation is a statement.
- Felice: We can separate the motion into 2 parts if you want; one for condemning the Oxford Union, releasing a public statement and showing support to the trans community, and one for the donation.
- Sunny/Felice: Donation would not be directly targeted to the Oxford Union situation, but it is just to support the cause on a broader level.
- Sunny: We can also make the donation higher if we want to.
- Felice: The maximum we can do is 50 pounds.
- Vivek: Can we raise 25 to 50?
- \*It was then agreed to modify the donation to 50 pounds\*

Important note: It has therefore been agreed during the meeting that the motion would be separated into 2 parts:

First motion resolution (synthetized):

- Condemn the Oxford Union for platforming Kathleen Stock
- Reaffirm this MCRs solidarity with the trans community in Oxford and beyond, that trans rights, trans lives and trans happiness matter and must be protected.
- Release a public statement (written by the LGBTQ Rep) detailing such on its communications and social media platforms. Have the MCR Secretary send a copy of said statement to the Oxford Union president to inform the institution of its disapproval.

Second motion resolution:

- Donate £50 to the trans rights charity, Gendered Intelligence.

Motions called to vote:

Online voting: 8 for, 8 against, 1 revise and resubmit.

In person voting:

Motion 1: 22 for, 0 against, 2 abstain.

Motion 2: 18 for, 2 against, 2 abstain.

**Motions were passed with majority.**

Public statement to be released:

The St Catz MCR condemns the platforming of gender-critical feminist Kathleen Stock by the Oxford Union and calls on the Union president and librarian to rescind her invitation in support of the trans community.

Stock is a trustee of the trans exclusionary group, the LGB alliance and a signee of the extremist WHRC declaration. Stock has advocated for conversion therapy of trans youth, which has been proven to be ineffective, and claimed trans women to be “predatory”. Even though Stock claims to support the trans community, her discourse clearly fuels transphobic speech that incites violence, hatred and attacks on trans students and the trans community at large, as shown by recent studies (see e.g., the BBC article, Oct 6, 2022). Indeed, Stock popularises the use of rhetoric that exploits misinformation and abets aggressive behaviour towards gender minorities, hereby putting trans lives at risk.

We believe that freedom of speech is legitimate, and any opinion has the right to exist and be upheld to public and Academic scrutiny. Stock’s ideas, however, have continuously shown to be a product of bigotry, diverging the very pressing legal and philosophical debates regarding trans issues into personal opinions, demonising her opposers as authoritarian prosecutors, and fully disregarding the clear consequences her speech has on fueling violence and discrimination against trans individuals.

St Catherine’s College MCR is convinced that bigotry, hidden as free speech, does not have the right to be amplified through influential platforms, especially given the serious risk of spreading dangerous and hateful ideas that harm trans individuals in our community.

The Oxford Union is disregarding silenced voices, including (but not limited to) the trans community. While we are aware the Union is supposed to be a space for public forum, Stock is not being invited for a debate with experts on this topic where her dangerous ideas can be fairly counterargued by someone with the same platform and power. Moreover, the Oxford Union has purposefully decided to portray Stock as a victim of “attacks” further continuing the demonisation of the very valuable critiques to her transphobic views. Therefore, her invitation shows the organisers’ absolute negligence of the impact of such a discourse, and we consider the Union must be held accountable of on future increment in transphobia here in Oxford and the UK.

In summary, this MCR believes that the spread of hateful ideas, based on misinformation and with a seriously dangerous impact on minority groups, should never be supported and amplified through platforming in educational institutions. Furthermore, those in

power at the union must be held directly accountable for these consequences, both for extending this invite and refusing to rescind it.

Hate of speech will never be welcome at St Catz college. Those protesting this event have our full support, and the trans community has our absolute solidarity. We call on organisations across Oxford to platform and prioritise (often silenced) trans voices, beyond a reductive context where they're forced to fight for their right to exist.

The St Catherine's college MCR