

ROAR

March 2025 King's College London's multi-award-winning tabloid

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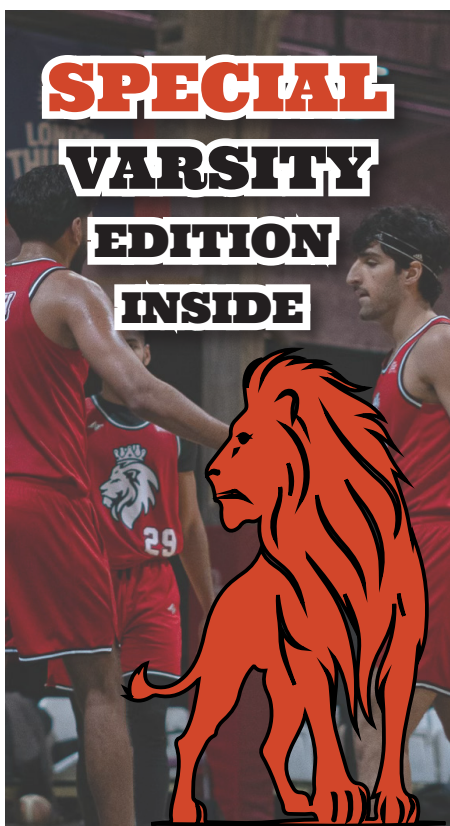
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THE HOUSING CRISIS REQUIRES THE UNIVERSITY TO STEP UP

As the housing crisis intensifies it is clear students are feeling the squeeze. Rough sleeping is the sharpest end of a crisis that encompasses all those: sofa surfing, living in overcrowded homes, temporary accommodation or unsafe and unsuitable housing.

Years of austerity and unfair attitudes to poverty have broken the housing system with local authorities now unable or unwilling to support their residents when they need it most. Housing is a human right, but in a city where more than 183,000 people are homeless and denied their rights, a university education cannot shield people from this tsunami of injustice and insecurity that London must confront. The mayor plans to end rough sleeping by 2030, a plan that offers hope but can be criticised as too slow. Now more than ever, it is vital we hold our politicians to account and enforce on them the urgent need for change.

The cost of bureaucratic failure on students is overlooked. The inflexibility of King's accommodations means students facing housing problems mid-year often can't access rooms that should be available. Instead, students are trapped in contracts they don't want, whilst

others pay the price - all to leave rooms unused and empty.

The insufficiency of King's administration has a seriously detrimental impact on the education of students without suitable housing options. University claims to be a great equaliser but after their first year many students from the lowest-income backgrounds are left teetering on the edge of housing instability.

If housing issues emerge students struggle to access the support they need, as confronting challenges of survival and uncertainty understandably distracts them from their studies. How can students learn if they don't even know where they will be living a month from now?

Without a change in the scope and scale of support, educational outcomes will remain unequal - especially for those students left to face these overwhelming problems alone.

KCLSU Halls
for All
A KCLSU
C a m -

paign, entitled Halls for All is asking for the University to raise the income threshold of 'affordability' in the upcoming review of the King's Affordable Accommodation Scheme (KAAS).

KAAS offers rooms to undergraduate students at below-market rates. This involves a limited number of rooms assigned to students meeting the current eligibility criteria of a household income below £42,875 a year.

This is massively important, with the threshold for support not being updated since 2014, despite a cumulative inflation of 31% since then, fewer and fewer people have been able to access the support they need.

However, this cannot be the sole focus.

Currently having a household income below the threshold doesn't guarantee a room, with such a limited supply. T h e r e -

fore, expanding the eligibility criteria with no change in the number of rooms available will only increase the demand for an already stretched stock of rooms.

Currently, rooms are allocated based on three priority groups. The first priority is for care experienced and estranged students. The second - for students based outside London and the final priority is for students based in London. So if all KAAS places have already been allocated to students of higher priority an applicant with household income well below £42,875 a year could still be rejected and left to face a hostile housing market.

It is university policy for 20% of its accommodation portfolio to be KAAS rooms. Re-opening the unused rooms in the abandoned Champion Hill accommodation in Camberwell could go a long way to ease the current squeeze on supply.

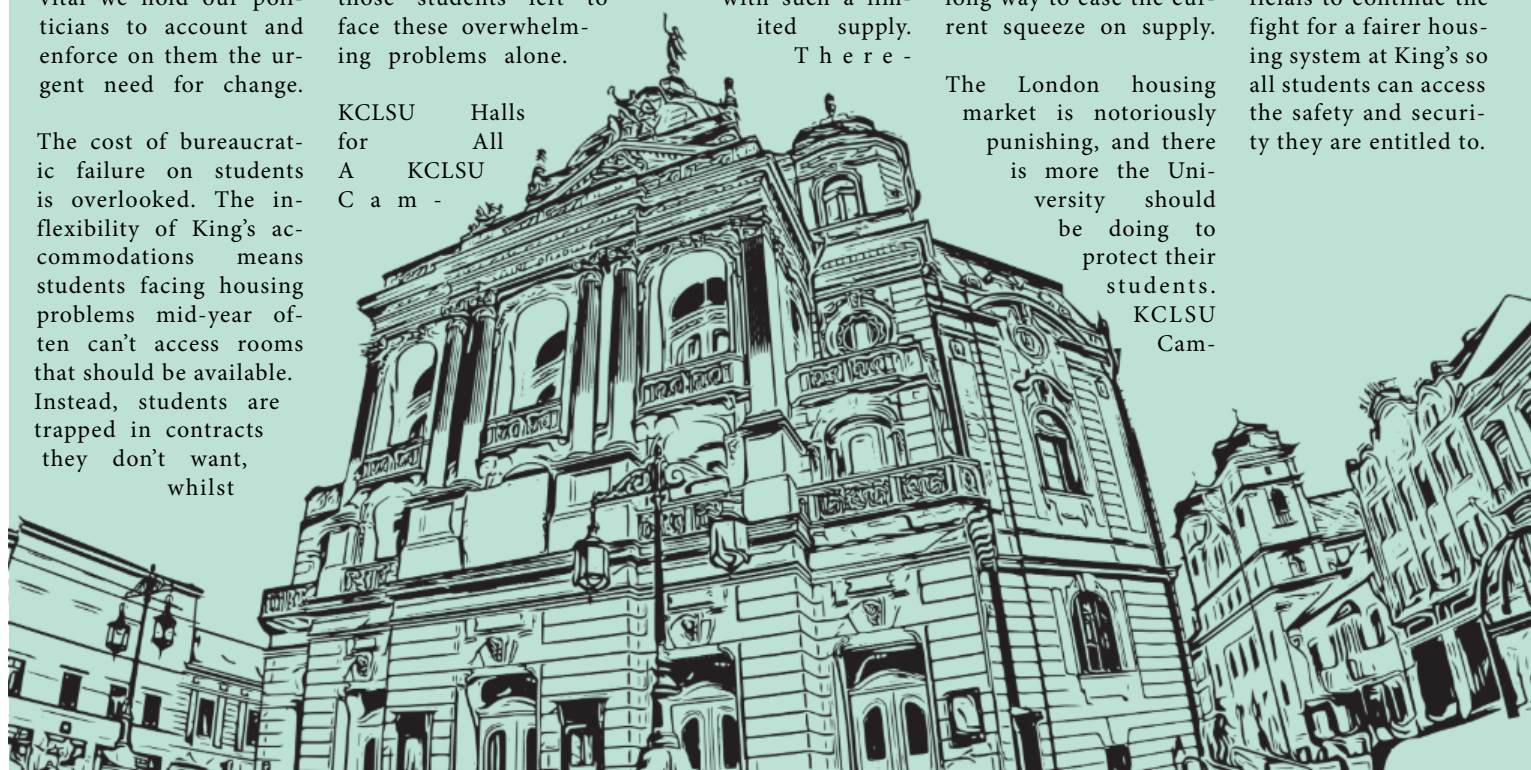
The London housing market is notoriously punishing, and there is more the University should be doing to protect their students. KCLSU Cam-

paigns have achieved a lot for students to be grateful for and as KAAS hasn't been reviewed since its introduction in 2014 this could lead to another significant victory.

However, introducing more competition for places won't help those who need support the most, those most vulnerable students who still aren't guaranteed affordable housing options.

Campaigners generously give their time advocating on behalf of students but if this demand is achieved it has the chance to harm students further by lowering their chances to access to KAAS. Before offering the scheme to more students the University should ensure it's providing for every student already eligible.

Roar calls on the newly elected KCLSU officials to continue the fight for a fairer housing system at King's so all students can access the safety and security they are entitled to.



Clarifications and Corrections

Roar aims to have the highest editorial standards in the paper and on digital. You can help us by letting us know if we've made mistakes. You can email us at: *editor@roarnews.co.uk*, or write to us at Roar News, 7th Floor, South-East Wing, Bush House, Strand, London, WC2R 1AE. We aim to correct errors, factual or otherwise, as soon as we can.

THE SPRING OF DISCONTENT: OVERVIEW OF RECENT TURMOIL ON CAMPUS

NIA SIMEONOVA

Editor-in-Chief

Protest has taken different shapes and sizes on Strand this spring -- from noisy demonstrations and disruptions to simple yellow ribbons. Roar brings you a recap of the largest protests at King's College London (KCL) since the start of the year and what caused them.

The Background

Dr Rana Baker, a Palestinian lecturer, was accused of disseminating Hamas propaganda in her History of the Modern Middle East class. The allegations came after a student recorded part of her seminar last spring, claiming Dr Baker was using Hamas materials to push anti-semitism.

Based on the recording, Jewish Chronicle and the Daily Mail published articles criticising KCL's handling of the situation. The student told the Mail that the University was trying to 'silence' the allegations. KCL started investigating the case and the review is ongoing.



13 February

The University College Union and KCL Stands for Justice (KCL S4J) staged a demonstration in support of Dr Baker, which was met with a counter-protest from pro-Israel student societies and external counter-protestors.

One student from Queen Mary University said: "Our motto is now 'Stop Teaching Terror' and we want to put an end to that. It makes students feel uncomfortable, unwelcome and it's just not the right thing to do."

There was a large police presence separating the groups. Dr Baker also attended the demonstration. Her supporters accused KCL of failing to protect "the only female Gazan academic at this University" from "baseless and racist allegations."

19 February

Hundreds of yellow ribbons appeared on Strand campus in support of the Israeli hostages still held in Gaza. The ribbons, tied to trees, fences, bicycle racks and benches, symbolise the campaign to return all 250 hostages held by Hamas after the attack on 7 October 2023. Some 1,200 people were killed in the massacre, which triggered a war with Israel, resulting in the deaths of over 48,000 Palestinians



25 February

London pro-Israel student societies demonstrated at Strand in condemnation of Dr Rana Baker. This prompted Jewish student groups opposing Zionism to stage a counter-protest alongside pro-Palestine students and staff members.

The anti-Baker protestors included various UK anti-semitism including Stop The Hate and Zionist groups and the controversial, far-right group Betar UK. Protesters brought orange balloons and flyers that read 'Ban.Rana.Baker.'

A spokesperson for the Students Supporting Israel movement said: "We protested to expose the extremist indoctrination of students - and the growing hostility toward Jewish students."

When speaking about Dr Baker, a supportive senior academic said she "is an exemplary scholar, respected by her peers, loved by her students, and targeted simply because she is a Palestinian from Gaza and because she shows integrity and courage."

Both sides alleged violence, but the Metropolitan Police told Roar that no arrests had been made at the protest.

28 February

A dozen pro-Palestine students disrupted an event with an Iranian pro-Israel speaker, causing all attendees to leave mid-event. The talk with Faezeh Alavi, hosted by the King's Geopolitics Forum and Jewish societies from across London universities, was interrupted by a heckler who questioned why the speaker made no mention of Palestine.

"Ifeltitmydutyto support [the disruptor]," said one of the protestors. "I maintained my right to oppose the atrocities in the Israeli regime," she added. The disruptors were not affiliated with any society at KCL.

"Tonight at King's College, I felt as if I were under Islamic regime occupation again," Alavi wrote on X. Later, she told Roar that she believes "there are extremists who are silencing the voices of Muslims and do not want to see a prosperous Middle East."

KCL is investigating the disruption.

To get all the breaking news on campus, follow @roar.news on Instagram!



KING'S COLLEGE LONDON REPORTS A DAY-TO-DAY OPERATING DEFICIT OF £19M

EWAN WHITE

Staff Writer

This marks a change from 2021-22 and 2022-23, when KCL had an operating surplus of £31 million in both years.

The report attributes this operating deficit to an acceleration in spending on "strategic investments", adding that day-to-day operations showed "a financial performance consistent with our plans."

KCL reported a headline surplus figure of £326.7 million. However, this figure was distorted by £323 million due to a significant release of KCL contributions to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS).

The USS is the pension scheme for academics across the UK. After a period of difficulty, with universities liable for its defi-

cits, the fund reported a surplus for the first time since 2008, reducing universities' liabilities.

The report described the release as having a "highly distortive effect" on headline figures.

Excluding this release, as well as income from donations and endowments, "the day-to-day operational activity and the revenue impact of investments would show a deficit of £19 million."

KCL reported that total income increased by £40 million (3.3%) from £1.23 billion to £1.27 billion. This marked a downward trend from 2021-22 and 2022-23, where KCL's income rose by 14.9% and 7%, respectively. By contrast, expenditure increased by £96m from £1.17 billion to £1.266 billion in 2023-24, an increase of 8%. Lower student recruitment was a

key reason for the underwhelming income figures. KCL recruited 1,400 fewer full-time students than expected. This resulted in a £40m shortfall against plans. The report notes that "our experience and that of other universities strongly suggests that the rapid growth in international students may be at an end."

This is significant because international tuition fees comprise 55% of tuition fee income and 27% of KCL's overall income. The report goes so far as to comment that "if there was a fundamental reversal in the trend of international student recruitment, King's would be severely financially compromised."

The report suggests that income growth only from tuition fees will not be a sustainable option in the future. KCL plans to combat this by "working to secure greater productivity in the way we work" and us-

ing their 'considerable estate asset.'

The significant increase in expenditure "was caused by the acceleration in our strategic investments consistent with our three-year planning and increases in staff salaries."

The cost of salaries and wages increased by £72 million, with the report adding that the national pay award to academics for 2023 was "higher than recent years". KCL's London Weighting allowance increased from £4,000 to £5,000 per full-time member of staff, partially offset by the lower USS employer contribution rates.

An increase in KCL staff numbers also contributed to the 10.8% rise in the cost of salaries and wages. This allowance helps staff offset the additional expense of living in the capital. The report comments that "a repeat of this level of in-

crease is not sustainable when compared with likely income increases in the coming year."

KCL's capital investment for fixed assets rose by £24 million from £77 million in 2022-23 to £101m in 2023-24.

In 2023-24, KCL completed major construction works on the St Thomas' Hospital Campus. It is also making progress on projects such as the development of the Bush House South West Wing.

4 KING'S STUDENTS

**MATTHEW PELLOW, BENJAMIN EVANS,
KAYLA RAHAMAN, ROXY LEES**

News Editor, Deputy EIC, News Editor, Staff Writer

A *Roar* investigation into housing and financial insecurity at King's College London (KCL) has revealed that four students reported they were street homeless in the academic year 2023-24, up from two students the previous year.

Information revealed to *Roar* through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests showed that four students were street homeless for the academic year 2023/2024.

Last year's figures were part of an upwards trend in the rough sleeping rate at KCL, with two reported rough sleepers in 2022/2023 and only one reported rough sleeper in 2019/2020.

This figure includes those students who reported rough sleeping on the streets as well as on campus. It should be noted KCL does not specifically capture data on those living in sheltered accommodation, so those figures are unavailable.

With the government's definition of homelessness being broader than rough sleeping, it is likely the number of statutory homeless or those threatened by homelessness is higher than these figures.

A spokesperson from KCL said, "Our priority is always ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our students and while the numbers are small, any reports of students facing homelessness is cause for concern".

Soaring Rents Leave Students in London Struggling to Keep Up



According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) private rent inflation in London surpassed 11% in the year to December 2024. These increases, alongside other significant cost-of-living pressures, have been felt by the student body across London's universities.

A report by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), a leading think tank on higher education, revealed that average student rent in London significantly exceeds the maximum student loan.

The study found that weekly rent in London now averages £295 - a rise of 18% over the past two academic years. For students on a 52-week tenancy, this equates to an annual rent of £15,340, surpassing the maximum student maintenance loan of £13,348 by more than £2,000.

To better understand the impact of these financial pressures, *Roar* conducted a survey of 94 King's students on their experiences with housing insecurity.

Respondents broadly identified four key challenges: Limited housing support beyond first year;

Restrictive eligibility criteria for the Living Bursary and the King's Affordable Accommodation Scheme (KAAS);

Slow communication from the University's housing team; Difficulties navigating London's competitive housing market.

Our findings show that 47% of respondents spent their entire maintenance loan - or more - on housing, while 69% of all respondents reported spending at least 80% of their maintenance loan on rent.

Many students were compelled to take on further debt, beyond their student loans, with nearly 70% of respondents reporting that they had relied on their overdraft to cover rent.

In 2020, CityMonitor ranked London as the least housing-secure city in England and Wales, partly due to high rent prices. The situation has only worsened in recent years.

It is unsurprising that nearly 60% of

students reported some level of difficulty in finding accommodation upon moving to the capital. One respondent said, "Each time I have secured a property, it has been right on the dawn of the new academic year, which has caused a lot of anxiety and last minute panic."

Several respondents noted the University's lack of support when students face the real possibility of becoming homeless. One respondent stated that King's provided "no help" when they were struggling with housing, offering only a leaflet on homelessness instead.

Overall, 72% of students claimed they did not feel 'very supported' by the University and 84% of students said they were concerned with their housing situation.

From Private Rental to Library Floors: One Student's Struggle for Housing at King's

Roar spoke with a former undergraduate student at King's who was forced to take drastic measures to find housing after their landlord "almost doubled" the rent. The individual, who has since secured stable housing, described the experience as deeply unsettling.

They chose to remain anonymous.

The student was unable to find a guarantor to secure a rental agreement due to their socio-economic status, making it especially difficult for them to rent a room with a landlord who took "cash-in-hand" and did not require a rent guarantor. They recalled:

"We didn't have heating in that place, so in the winter, it would get crazy cold," they continued, "And I remember I would just wear coats to bed."

They recalled other tenants were unpredictable and sometimes unsafe to live with, stating, "It was a very strange, a very weirdly unsafe place to live because there were no locks."

After several months, the student chose to leave their rental and began sleeping in the Maughan Library. They lived in the library for a month and a half before security ultimately removed them.

Roar spoke to a security guard at the Maughan who said that the University has no specific policy to help students who are found rough sleeping and that security is required to remove them.

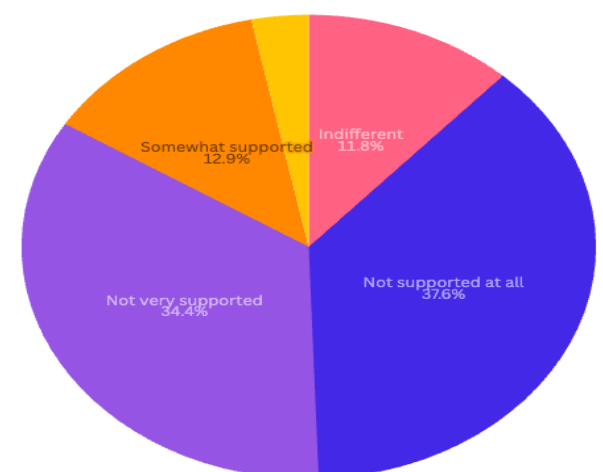
Despite no official policy, King's has a standard procedure involving the Money and Housing Advice Team, mental health support and hardship funding.

A KCL spokesperson told *Roar*: "If there is a risk of imminent homelessness, the above teams will refer a student to the Welfare team, who are specialists in this area and lead on referrals to Local Authorities, supporting students to navigate these services and access public funds, as well as working with the student to identify other sources of support."

The student praised the King's Affordable Accommodation Scheme (KAAS), which provides subsidised housing for students from low-income backgrounds, but criticised the

How supported have you felt by the university in regards to your housing situation?

Pie chart showing the percentage breakdown of 93 responses.



REPORTED STREET HOMELESSNESS LAST YEAR

lack of financial support for housing from the University after the first year.

They said, "You're kind of left on your own".

They also noted the lack of cheaper accommodation options for low-income students.

Across the 4758 ensuite rooms on offer, the average weekly rent for 2024/25 has been estimated at £293.84 a week.

"It's crazy you have one building [Wolfson House] for low-income students and then seven buildings for higher-income students.

"Most student accommodation has become much harder to get, and the only student accommodation you can get is crazy expensive."

The accommodations ran by KCL had an average weekly rent for an ensuite room of £229.84, far less expensive than those supplied by private providers at an average of £326.85 a week.

It should be noted, that our calculations did not include Wolfson House, the cheapest accommodation, as it does not offer an ensuite option. Wolfson House flats have either four or fourteen beds.

KCLSU are consulted on the rents of KCL accommodations in negotiations that occur multiple times a year.

Balancing a Full-Time Job and Full-Time Study

Many who do not receive adequate maintenance loans take on employment in addition to their full-time study to make ends meet. A report by HEPI noted that 55% of students juggled employment with their studies.

According to Student Finance England (SFE), the body responsible for student loans in England, maintenance loans are assessed on a student's household income in the previous financial year. This can create problems when families face unforeseen circumstances.

Roar spoke to one survey respondent who said they had to work at least three days a week during term time to cover their housing costs. While being entitled to only the lowest maintenance loan, they were unable to rely on financial support from their parents due to a recent redundancy.

As they put it:

"The student loan barely scratches its own arse."

"At the end of the week, after rent and food etc, there was virtually nothing left. Mentally it was hard to feel like I was missing out so much."

Many students struggle to maintain their academic performance and social life while juggling a job, leading to exhaustion and burnout. The student explained that while they appeared to be managing reasonably well, "mentally, physically, and emotionally, I felt as though I was sacrificing everything".

"Working until past midnight and then going to a 9am isn't normal, nor should it be normalised."

How Does KCL Support Students?

KCL does offer a range of support packages for students struggling with the cost of living. Two of these are the King's Living Bursary and the King's Affordable Accommodation Scheme (KAAS).

Supporting approximately 5000 students a year, the Living Bursary offers a payment ranging from £1,200 to £1,600 (depending on family income) to support with living costs.

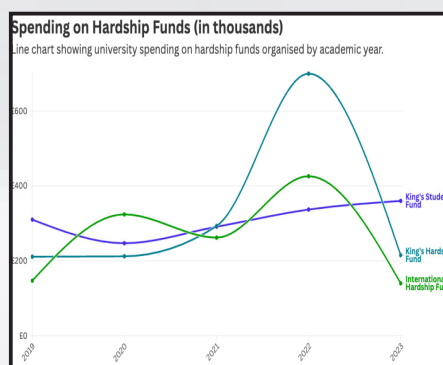
KAAS caps the cost of rooms below £169 a week, easing rent costs for students on lower incomes.

Both these support packages are offered to students with family incomes lower than £42,875 a year. Support from KAAS is limited by the supply of allocated rooms, with first-year students and those from vulnerable backgrounds prioritised. Elements of King's support packages are made in consultation with the KCLSU such as the number of KAAS rooms, currently the KCLSU are not consulted on the income threshold for eligibility.

Imperial College London offers a living bursary between £1,000 and £5,000 a year and students with a household income below £70,000 are eligible. For the full amount, one requires a household income lower than £16,000 a year. University College London offers between £1,000 and £3,000 a year, depending on income. Like KCL to be eligible one has to have a household income below £42,875. Last year, *Roar* reported the King's Living Bursary was among the lowest of the top London Universities.

Hardship Expenditure Reached Over £1 Million During 2022/23

Roar can reveal for 2023/24 there were 592 successful applications to KCL's various funds,



which led to £716,680 worth of support.

This was a 51% decrease in support spending compared to the year before, during which there were 534 successful applications receiving £1,464,670 worth of support.

A spokesperson from KCL explained, "The increase seen in 2022-23 reflects higher than usual applications for hardship funding due to the cost-of-living crisis and the unprecedentedly high inflation of the time."

In November 2022, the Consumer Price Index inflation peaked at 11.1% which has subsequently fallen.

They continued, "In response, we announced a £3m cost-of-living support package for students, which saw an uplift in hardship funding of £600k and included a one-off £250 uplift to the King's Living bursary.

"We then saw return to usual pre 2022-23 trajectories the following year." In regards to the gradual increase in the support for King's students, the University noted the changing demographics at King's with more students attending from lower socio-economic backgrounds than before.

"Over recent years, due to our strong approach to increasing fairer access to King's and making the University more representative, we have seen an increase in students who are from the least represented and most disadvantaged areas and backgrounds and who are eligible for this financial support, and for priority groups like care leavers

this results in multiple bursaries being awarded."

KCLSU's Halls for All Campaign

These revelations come as KCLSU prepares to launch their student housing campaign, 'Halls for All', led by student officer Haneen Farid.

The aims of the campaign are to secure a review of the current KAAS eligibility threshold, which many of our survey respondents deemed to be too narrow, as well as a review of the process students have to go through for disability support.

The 'Halls for All' team confirmed to *Roar* that KCL agreed to establish an Affordable Housing Working Group with student representation to examine future options for improving student access to housing.

Farid shared her aims and motivations for the campaign:

"The aim behind the Halls for All campaign is that all students at King's, regardless of their income status, year of study, or disability, should be able to access safe and affordable accommodation. During my time at King's, I've seen peers struggling with challenges that come with subpar private accommodation, and it is students like this who actually inspired the Halls for All campaign."

Farid argued that the University does not currently offer enough housing support for disabled students. She said:

"When we had the first Halls for All workshop, our disabled students rightly felt that University residences needed to do more to support their needs, and it's positive that there is an opportunity for this to be heard and addressed in the upcoming KAAS review so that no student is left behind. I'm glad that King's Estates & Facilities have been highly cooperative with us so far, and I am hopeful that we can continue this spirit into actualising much-needed change."

She also noted the lack of support for postgraduate students. She said, "Surely the cost of living crisis doesn't magically disappear once students finish their undergraduate degrees."

If you are interested in the topic, go to p. 8 to read '100 Miles From Campus: The Realities of Commuting to King's'.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE STUDENT START-UP WORLD

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Since October, a growing community of cross-university dinner clubs, incubators and informal hacker-houses have laid the foundations of London's student start-up scene. Roar spoke to cross-university community builders and Kings-affiliated founders to learn more about this developing community and what support it can offer to student entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship at KCL

Ranked as the fourth best UK University Start-up Hub, King's is an active player in London's start-up ecosystem. Since 2016, the King's Entrepreneurial Institute (KEI) has supported, through its annual accelerator programme, over 160 start-ups who have gone on to generate over £103 million.

They support early-stage businesses through short-term tailored mentoring and dedicated office space access to fast-track their growth. KEI's Start-Up Accelerator runs a unique "pledge model", taking 3% of equity in the ventures that either generate £1 million annual recurring revenue or receive £1 million in investment within the first five years.

Julia Devonshire OBE, Director of the KCL Entrepreneurial Institute told Roar:

"Entrepreneurship is for everyone, and anyone can become more entrepreneurial. We support students, staff and alumni at King's to learn new entrepreneurial skills such as disruptive thinking, compelling communication and team working, to enhance their chances of success beyond university. Some will create start-ups of their own and we support them to start better and scale."

A Harsh Environment

Being predominantly aged 18-25, many student entrepreneurs have found that inexperience makes it difficult to gain the respect of potential investors and clients.

Immanuel Rajadurai, ex-Kings and now CTO of AquaZoo Consulting Partners, a software start-up in the visitor attractions space, recalled being challenged on his team's competency whilst on a client call. They gave their software for free to initial clients to build relationships and their reputation.

In a male-dominated space, this sense of not being respected due to experience can be compounded by gender. When speaking to Roar, Jolyn Yin, an international University of the Arts London student stated:

"In the startup scene, women constantly feel the need to prove themselves twice over just to be ac-

knowledge—a system that rewards performative confidence over genuine work... So, I began hosting gatherings: first for 6, then 20, then 40, and now for 100+ founders and builders, all guided by my own rules. It's exciting to see more and more existing and new startup initiatives and communities being led by women redefining entrepreneurial culture."

Tight Budgets and Thin Margins

When speaking to Roar, Blitzo's co-founders and 'Idea Factory' finalists Arjun Khanna and Sundar Arvind highlighted that the high operational costs meant they were "burning cash" whilst making a loss to undercut the saturated same-day courier market.

During this stage, one commonly felt issue is that of team motivation when the money is tight. This makes the promise of an equity share and future rewards crucial in motivating the team.

Daniel Merighi, current King's student and CEO of Gradstay, a platform that connects landlords with students looking for a place to rent, shared this experience of giving free consultation to attract clients. Discussing the initial financial challenges, Merighi said:

"The harder it is to get started, the more defensible your business will be in future years. I initially

couldn't pay my team a decent wage, and so fully credit our company's early success to our strong founding team."

Psyryn is a mental health start-up with a vision "to enable doctors to see 100 patients per hour" through transforming mental health diagnosis that has raised over £1 million in investment after winning 'Idea Factory 2022'.

When their three co-founders met, an important topic of discussion was how to split equity, the distribution of ownership within the fledgling company. CEO Edwin Wong told Roar:

"We split equally. In the grand scheme of things, you're hoping to exit with a large amount, and we knew the relative gain isn't worth incessant fighting over."

An Exciting Future

On 19 October, Bush House hosted the 'KCL x UCL Tech-Summit 24', a collaboration between King's College London Technology Society (KCL Tech) and University College London Technology Society (UCL Tech).

Over twenty UK universities were represented at the event, attended by over 1,000 investors, recruiters, tech start-ups and students.

The summit inspired further col-

laborations, including the 'Breaking Into VC' and 'Warwick Entrepreneurs (WE) Shard' events which brought together the UK's ten biggest entrepreneurial societies.

These experimental gatherings are inspired by the dynamic start-up scene around Palo Alto, providing new spaces for creativity within the entrepreneurial community.

When speaking with Roar, LSE Entrepreneurs Chairman Reese Wong compared the entrepreneurial cultures between London and California, stating he wished "to harness that risk-taking wild energy lacking here."

As young entrepreneurs across London continue to support each other through these shared challenges, students at various universities are planning a joint initiative which is unprecedented for London.

Strand Ventures is aiming to be the first fully student-led venture capital fund in the UK when it is launched in April. Ammiel Wan, Co-President of Kings Entrepreneurs, will be one of the fund's co-founders. He told Roar their team is looking to "find the best student start-ups throughout London & the UK" and will be "working alongside founders and entrepreneurs with experience in building start-ups & working in VC".

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Staff Writer

King's College London (KCL) faces backlash from Nigerian activists over its association with controversial philanthropist Afe Babalola. Babalola made a £10 million donation to KCL for the creation of the Aare Afe Babalola Centre for Transnational Education.

At the end of 2024, the highly influential Nigerian public figure found himself at the centre of a human rights controversy after he petitioned for the arrest of activist Dele Farotimi from Lagos to Ekiti State, Nigeria. Farotimi was arrested for alleged defamation after publicly accusing Babalola of corrupting the country's judicial system in a widely-circulated book.

In 2023, KCL and Babalola collaborated to launch the Aare Afe Babalola Centre for Transnational Education, which aims to provide

access to education for young Africans who otherwise would lack such opportunities. Babalola supported the Centre's establishment with a £10 million donation.

In light of this controversy, activists in Nigeria and across the Nigerian diaspora called on KCL to distance itself from the influential figure. Many demand the University cut ties and denounce Farotimi's arrest.

The Babalola-Farotimi controversy
On 3 December 2023, the Nigerian Police from Ekiti State arrested the Lagos based human rights lawyer and activist Dele Farotimi, for cybercrime and defamation.

This followed a petition led by Mr Babalola accusing Mr Farotimi of defamation and cyberbullying in his book, Nigeria and Its Criminal Justice System. This move was a reaction to Mr

mi's authorship of the book, which is a critical examination of systemic flaws in Nigeria's judicial system. It accuses Babalola of corrupting the Supreme Court.

The Ekiti Police moved Mr Farotimi out of Lagos to charge him with defamation in Ekiti State, despite defamation being decriminalised in 2021. The incident triggered a free speech controversy in Nigeria. Farotimi labelled Babalola the "grandmaster of judicial corruption in Nigeria"

in his book, which Babalola alleges unduly damages his reputation.

The Nigerian Bar Association has called for the immediate release of Mr Farotimi, claiming "libel is not a crime" and that this case should be dealt with as a civil, not a criminal, matter.

Many observers regard the move as an abuse of

power, on the part of Mr Babalola, to silence his detractors. Amnesty International Nigeria posted on X:

"Amnesty International just received shocking report of the arrest of Dele Farotimi -- for exercising his right to freedom of expression. The Nigeria authorities must end repression of dissent and immediately and unconditionally release him." The Chief Magistrate Court granted Mr Farotimi bail for two cases against him. There were bureaucratic barriers to meeting that bail which initially stalled his release.

On 24 December, Mr Farotimi was released from prison in Ekiti and returned home to Lagos. In a YouTube Video, he gratefully attributed his release to the "collective action" and support of Nigerians across religion and ethnicity.

Mr Farotimi is pursuing legal action against those who participated in his "unlaw

to "ensure that some lawyers never practice law in this country again."

KCL's Afe Babalola Centre for Transnational Education
In 2023, KCL and Afe Babalola established the Aare Afe Babalola Centre for Transnational Education.

The Centre aims to "provide young Africans with access to education and opportunities which they would otherwise not have", through support, scholarships and funds for students who have experienced educational barriers such as conflict and displacement. The Centre is both inspired and entirely funded by Mr Babalola. Transnational education made an impact on his own trajectory. He cited his personal journey as inspiration to make education easily accessible for others:

"I greatly benefitted from the transformative power of remote learning. By partnering with King's College London, I am

able to reach even more Africans like me, breaking down the barriers and increasing their access to high quality education." - Aare Afe Babalola

Within Nigeria and across the global diaspora, many regard Farotimi's arrest as a clear obstruction of the human right to free speech.

Mothers United and Mobilised (MUM), a Nigerian women's group, called on KCL to cut ties with Babalola and return his donation over the controversy. On 10 December, a small group staged a #FreeDeleFarotimiNow protest in front of the King's Building.

How is KCL responding?
In December, Sahara Reporters claimed that KCL sought the advice of Amnesty International to appropriately respond to the controversy. Roar has been unable to confirm this.

TICK-TOCK, EXPERTS WARN: 89 SECONDS TO MIDNIGHT

SAM LORD JANA BAZEED
Sports Editor Science Editor

The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (BAS) has set the Doomsday clock to 89 seconds to midnight. Science Editor Jana Bazeed and Sports Editor Sam Lord discuss.

At the end of January, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists who operate the symbolic Doomsday Clock, announced that this year, humanity is the closest it has ever been to destruction.

The theoretical Doomsday Clock now ticks only 89 seconds to midnight – midnight signifying the end of humanity.

According to a statement released alongside their annual report, marking 2025 as the closest we’ve been to annihilation is intended to send a “stark signal”. They continued, “a move of even a single second should be taken as an indication of extreme danger and an unmistakable warning that every second of delay in reversing course increases the probability of global disaster.”

But what exactly is the Doomsday Clock?

Created in 1947 by BAS, a group founded by scientists who worked on the Manhattan Project, the Doomsday Clock is a symbolic representation of how close humanity is to global catastrophe. Particularly, it considers existential threats such as nuclear war, climate change and emerging technologies.

The Doomsday Clock was originally designed by artist Martyl Langsdorf in 1947 for the cover of the first magazine issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

Langsdorf, the wife of Manhattan Project scientist Alexander Langsdorf, was inspired by the urgency of scientists’ debates over nuclear weapons. Instead of using the symbol for uranium, she chose a clock to represent the limited time humanity had to prevent catastrophe.

The clock’s design was later updated by

Michael Bierut in 2007, but its fundamental symbolism remains unchanged.

Since its inception, the clock has been set backward 8 times and forward 18 times. It wasn’t until 2016 that this became an annual occurrence.

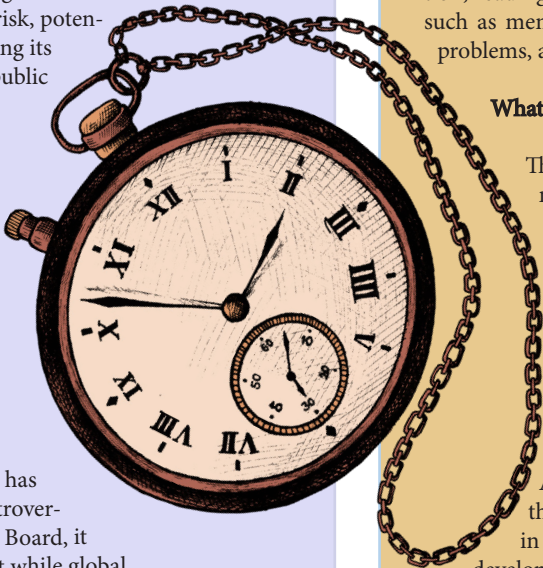
The time is set by the Science and Security Board (SASB), a group of globally recognized leaders with a specific focus on nuclear risk, climate change, and disruptive technologies. The SASB consults with the Bulletin’s Board of Sponsors, which currently includes nine Nobel laureates.

Some critics argue that the Doomsday Clock has lost its effectiveness as a warning tool. They contend that its frequent adjustments and the broadening of its scope to include various global threats dilute its original focus on nuclear risk, potentially reducing its impact on public perception and policy.

Unsurprisingly, this one-second change in the clock has proven controversial: per the Board, it appears that while global threats have intensified, the situation has not drastically changed from the previous year.

Critics argue that the clock should reflect more dramatic shifts in danger, while supporters contend that the small change highlights the complex, gradual nature of existential risks. Nonetheless, this nuanced shift challenges the idea of immediate action, even though the risks remain high.

Between forums like BAS or others, for instance, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, it seems despite the efforts of scientists to be heard by the public, their warnings fall on deaf ears.



Rx

Patient _____
Address _____

Prescription ALZHEIMER'S MIRACLE DRUG: WORTH THE RISK?

ANIKA MANGAL
Staff Writer
Staff Writer Anika Mangal dives into the controversy surrounding Kisunla – an alleged Alzheimer’s miracle drug.

Alzheimer’s disease is a debilitating type of dementia that affects neurons, which are cells in the brain that aid us in the sensation and perception of the world around us. In Alzheimer’s, these neurons begin to lose their structure and function, leading to issues with cognitive processes such as memory and learning, communication problems, and personality changes.

What actually causes Alzheimer’s?

There are multiple theories but the main one concerns a protein called amyloid: a harmful version of amyloid is produced in patients’ brains, which clumps together to form structures called beta amyloid plaques. These plaques then disrupt the connections between neurons and eventually trigger neuronal death.

Alzheimer’s is a common disease that affected around 480,000 people in the UK in 2024, making it vital to develop viable treatments to provide a better quality of life. There is currently no cure for the disease; however, there are promising new drugs being developed that may at least be able to slow down its progression.

A Miracle Drug?

In July 2024, the USA Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a new Alzheimer’s drug called Kisunla. The drug has shown significant improvements in patients with mild cognitive impairment and dementia, supposedly working by clearing up those harmful amyloid plaques in the brains of Alzheimer’s patients.

The FDA based their approval on a study in which patients received the treatment for up to

72 weeks. However, the study also reported numerous side effects associated with taking the drug such as a temporary swelling and/or bleeding of the brain. These side effects were often asymptomatic and temporary, but in some patients, they were quite severe and even fatal.

FDA Approval Shrouded with Controversy

While the drug appears to be quite effective in treating Alzheimer’s, there is significant controversy surrounding the FDA’s approval – 8 out of 11 members of Kisunla’s advisory committee reportedly had ties with Kisunla’s manufacturing company Eli Lilly, or were conducting research on drugs similar to Kisunla.

These potential conflicts of interest suggest that the decision to approve Kisunla may have been influenced, begging the question: did these experts properly weigh the potential side effects against its potential efficacy, and is Kisunla actually safe for commercial use?

UK Approval of Kisunla

As of October 2024, the controversial drug was also approved for use in the UK. However, it will not be funded by the government. The UK’s National Institute for Care and Excellence (NICE) stated that the high cost of the drug and its potentially severe side effects means “it cannot currently be considered good value for the taxpayer”. Another reason was a lack of evidence for its efficacy as very few human studies into Kisunla have been conducted.

What Does This Mean?

The field of Alzheimer’s research is constantly growing and evolving, bringing about new and potentially groundbreaking treatments. However, the approval of these treatments is, unfortunately, impacted by external motives which we must acknowledge. In the case of Kisunla, the controversy surrounding its approval raises a concerning question: do health advisory boards really act in the interest of the patient?

Signature _____ Date _____

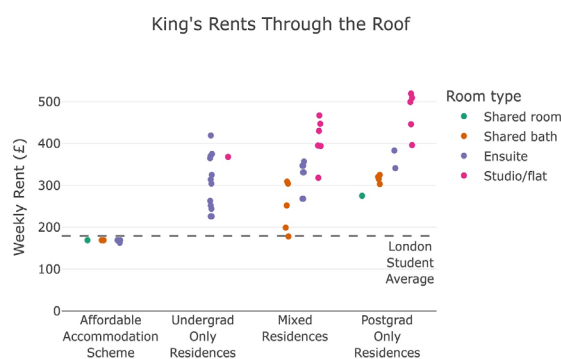
100 MILES FROM CAMPUS: THE REALITIES OF COMMUTING TO KINGS

ALEX MCKAY

Guest Writer

Guest writer Alex McKay shares the experiences of being a commuter student at KCL and proposes a series of solutions for how their needs can best be addressed.

Editor Note: All names used in this article have been changed to protect anonymity



KCL's advertised rent prices - number of students per room type unknown. Average London student rent from Save the Student's 2024 survey. Data visualisation by Przemysław Klupś.

The first test of that day: making it through Euston's morning crush.

My day begins at 5am. An unwelcome alarm jolts me awake, kickstarting a three-hour carefully choreographed commute. While the university ecosystem is built for the London locals, there's a silent student experience that unfolds long before the lecture hall, between train carriages and packed-out station platforms.

We are the unseen, but rapidly growing minority. A staggering 46% of students report commuting to class and this affects far more than just our morning routines.

Commuting to campus has profound academic, financial and social consequences.

This physical distance often translates into isolation - nearly one in five commuter students (18%) say they haven't made any true friends at university, while 14% feel lonely every day. Co-commuter Sofia told me she feels more like she's "clocking in and out of work" than part of a university community. This doesn't surprise me. For long-distance commuters, even a quick drink at the Vault becomes an intense internal calculation.

Once a week, I skip my usual cheaper ad-

ticket to allow for spontane-

ity, but that a month in rent, plus bills. A room in King's College accommodation? That'll set you back an average of roughly £1300 - more than you're likely to pay up the road at UCL or LSE. For many, commuting is the only viable option. But this saving comes at a big cost.

Commuting doesn't just complicate an evening at the pub, it impacts your general well-being and academic performance in ways the university cannot afford to ignore. Almost two-thirds of commuter students (59%) report lower grades due to limited library access.

We are less likely to make it to graduation, twice as likely to be working on the side, and more often come from underrepresented backgrounds, including those with disabilities or who are the first in the family to attend higher education.

Hannah, who commutes while undergoing medical treatment, raised issues with timetabling, but was simply asked if she'd considered moving closer to campus - something she can't afford. The

Disability Team's only other suggestion? Mentoring. Others I've spoken to have described university support as "elusive," "terrible," or even "appalling". This is unacceptable, especially as commuter students now appear in the Office for Students' equality of opportunity risk register.

King's, don't forget commuter students
 So what can Kings do? The university must prioritise affordable student housing in both the short and long-term.

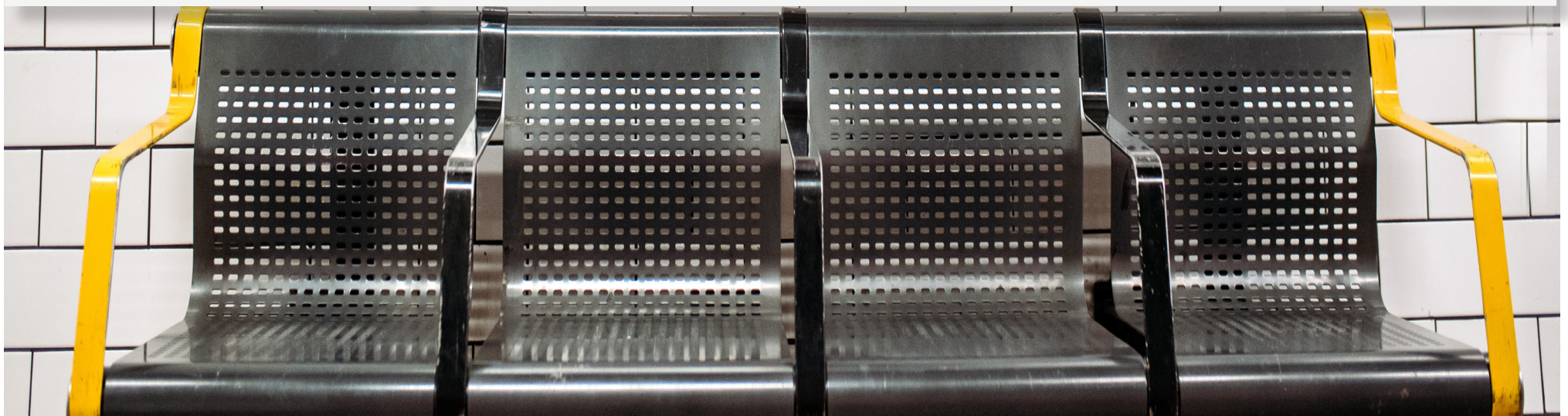
But there are other practical steps Kings can take to support commuters. Smarter timetabling, for instance, is key.

Simple adjustments like clustering seminars within core hours (11am-4pm) would make a huge difference. Particularly for students like Matt, who found himself unable to afford the peak-time trains that arrive in time for 9ams, after delayed enrolment and SFE payments landed him back in Leeds. Scheduling lectures - more easily accessed remotely - in early or late slots could help mitigate pressure on room bookings. Additionally, providing timetables before Welcome Week would help students avoid last-minute costs and shocks.

Financial support is equally critical, as commuter students report higher shortfalls at the end of the month. Expanding bursaries and stipends, or offering travel subsidies, could make a real difference, and so would expanding student spaces on campus.

Finding a study spot has become nearly impossible following the closures of key areas like the 7th and 8th floors of Bush House as well as ground-floor rooms in King's building. The University of Manchester, by contrast, has a dedicated Commuter Hub, offering lockers, study areas and social spaces. A reliable safe space on campus would go a long way to ease the pressures of a commuter's long day.

But first of all, visibility and recognition are crucial. When I started, I felt like the only one lugging a packed breakfast, lunch and dinner around all day. Realising there were others like me was a lifeline. King's must acknowledge and support its commuter students - in policy and in practice. With nearly half of students commuting, it's time to rethink a university that works for all of us.



THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN CONTINUES: IN CONVERSATION WITH MALALA'S FATHER



THOMAS NOONAN

Staff Writer

Staff Writer and Photographer Thomas Noonan spoke with Malala's father, and a veteran education activist himself, Ziauddin Yousafzai to understand the fight of the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

This January, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai addressed Muslim leaders at the inaugural Muslim World League's International Conference on Girls' Education in Islamabad. In her speech, she urged the political and religious leaders of the Muslim world not to normalise relations with the Taliban regime and to condemn the system of "gender apartheid" in place in Afghanistan.

The Nobel laureate also called on them to support the ongoing diplomatic efforts towards a

Crimes Against Humanity Treaty in this rare visit to her home country where she endured the Taliban takeover of her province from 2007 to 2009, and an assassination attempt in 2012.

"Malala is not a keyboard warrior; she is a real warrior" - Ziauddin Yousafzai

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THE ROOTS OF RADICALISATION: WHY YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK ARE TURNING TO EXTREME POLITICS

AHMED IQBAL

Staff Writer

Staff Writer Ahmed Iqbal examines the growing disillusionment of young Britons with democracy, exploring the economic and social factors at play and proposing what can be done to restore faith in democratic institutions.

A majority of young people in Britain now believe that the UK would be better off under authoritarian rule, according to a major new poll. Nearly half of young people also believe that British society needs to be radically changed through a revolution and a third even believe that we'd be better off under direct military rule.

The poll highlights a concerning shift in political attitudes among young people in Britain. Gen Z has become increasingly drawn to radical political ideas and more accepting of authoritarianism. These shifting attitudes are driven by two fundamental issues: economic grievances and social isolation. Without addressing these, the UK risks fostering a generation that is not just politically disengaged but actively disillusioned with democracy itself.

Economic Grievances: A Generation Left Behind

Britain's 'social contract' is the unwritten agreement that people who work hard and contribute to society should be able to build a stable and decent life in return. Yet, for many of Britain's young, the social contract is broken. Housing costs have skyrocketed, wages have stagnated, and living standards are in decline. The traditional markers of adulthood, like homeownership and financial security, are increasingly out of reach.

The housing crisis is par-

ticularly acute for young people, with average house prices now nine times the average income. As a result, homeownership is now only affordable for the richest ten per cent of households. At the same time, privately renting is also becoming increasingly unaffordable, with private tenants now spending over a third of their income on rent. Worse still is the fact that Britain's rental market is showing no signs of improving anytime soon, with the so-called "Generation Rent" bearing the brunt of this economic failure.

Meanwhile, wage growth has been sluggish. Real wages have seen an unprecedented level of stagnation, with no real wage growth for fifteen years following the financial crisis. Young people are also twice as likely to be in "severely insecure work" than their older counterparts, which is often underpaid with unpredictable hours and poor protections.

It should come as no surprise then, that an authoritarian leader who could replace our seemingly ineffective political system appeals to young people. If our democratic system is unable to address the basic economic concerns our generation faces, the desire for a radical alternative becomes much more understandable.

Social Isolation: A Disconnected Generation

Beyond the consequences of economic grievances, social isolation is also impacting young people's worldviews. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated trends of social isolation, leaving young people feeling socially "stunted" at a crucial stage in their lives. Lockdowns meant missed opportunities for personal development, whilst continued remote working has further reduced social interaction.

Young people today are spending much more time alone than in the past. Not only that, but they are also spending less time socialising and doing things they find meaningful, and more time alone on unfulfilling activities. The rise of digital entertainment and social media has fostered a lifestyle that is more insular, with many young people stuck in a "digital bubble."

The rise of remote working is also having a clear impact on isolation. Remote workers report feeling significantly more lonely and isolated than their hybrid or onsite counterparts. Along with working from home, we're now also more likely to shop, eat and entertain ourselves at home, moving beyond remote work to something more like a "remote life."

This isolation has consequences. The growing sense of disconnection fuels resentment and provides fertile ground for extreme ideologies to take root. A generation that feels economically insecure and socially disconnected is more likely to lose faith in democratic norms. If traditional politics and institutions do not provide meaning or solutions, alternative, often more extreme ideologies will fill the void.

What Can Be Done?

Reversing these trends requires policymakers to address the root causes of young people's growing economic and social dissatisfaction. Rebuilding our social infrastructure to tackle growing isolation is vital. Encouraging more in-person engagement, through community programmes, cultural initiatives and hybrid work policies, can help counter the rise of social isolation among young people. Schools and universities should play a proactive role in fostering real-world social connections, while policymakers should invest in "third spaces" that encourage community en-

gagement.

It is equally important that economic policy prioritises affordable housing by focusing on planning reform to drastically increase housing supply where homes are desperately needed. Policymakers must also deliver fair wages and job security to restore faith in our democratic system. Without tangible improvements in economic conditions, the appeal of authoritarian alternatives will only continue to grow.

The political radicalisation of young people in Britain is not happening in a vacuum. Rather, it is the product of growing economic and social discontent. At its heart, this growing attraction to authoritarianism reflects the dissatisfaction of a generation of young people that are desperate for change.

The challenge is clear, to restore trust in institutions young people must see that the system works for them, not against them. If these issues are left unaddressed, the risk is not just growing disenchantment but a generation that sees democracy itself as solete.



GOVHAR DADASHOVA
FEATURES EDITOR

THE PERENNIAL POWER OF HOPE IN POLITICS

Features Editor Govhar Dadashova implores us to return hope back into politics as she relates her personal experience to the greater international political issues of today.

As my undergraduate experience draws to a close, I cannot help but reflect on what it has been like studying History and International Relations (IR) for the past three years. The general expectation from my friends and family is that my view of the world has probably become more pessimistic. After all, I spend the majority of my time at university learning about the tragedies and complexities that have shaped modern life.

From bitter civil wars to the rise of far-right populism, it is easy to lose one's optimism and enthusiasm for politics in a sea of sombre research. How many times have I walked into the Media Suite and dramatically exclaimed to Roar's editorial team about how overstimulated my brain feels? The answer is too many to count; I am grateful for their timely distractions.

For me, the personal has always been political. I have never been able to separate what is happening in the news with its very real and profound impact on the lives of people across the world. That being said, doom-scrolling on TikTok – sorry, I mean The New York Times or insert a prestigious newspaper here – is not the answer. Neither is falling into a trap of ignorance or complacency no matter how tempting it may seem.

Protecting your mental health is first and foremost, so is living a happy and full life outside of reading the news. Howev-

er, I believe that being politically informed and politically engaged can co-exist with maintaining a strong sense of optimism.

This is what I have learnt in the past three years: We all have the power to choose what we believe in. Following that logic, if you can choose to believe in anything, why would you not choose to believe that things can and will get better?

I know many will read that question and dismiss it as out of hand. There are important caveats to be made and indeed hope alone will not solve everything. But how we see ourselves and our power in the world is deeply connected to our ability to advocate and enact meaningful change.

No-one is saying that politics is not deeply distressing; genocides, wars, and crises have permeated every inch of this globe. But to give up when we have the privilege and power to make even tiny steps towards progress? That is inexcusable.

I have lived a privileged life – only because of the resilience and sheer power of my ancestors, many of whom fled persecution and sacrificed their lives to do so. My great-grandmother was born and grew up in Nagorno-Karabakh. After moving to Baku, the capital of Azer-

baijan, she would visit her home regularly, but once the war broke out, she would never be able to return again. Instead, she would watch as it went up in flames on TV; the country simultaneously struggling with the collapse of the USSR and forming its new identity on the world stage.

Going back further than my great-grandmother, just after the end of the First World War, my great grandfather stood in a cave off Kafan, not knowing if he would be shot by the officers

searching for him and other Azerbaijani civilians. The history books might not remember all of the stories of my ancestors but I carry them close to my heart.

There is no light without darkness. What once felt like a child-

ish sense of hope has now become a burning flame within me, one that only grows stronger as the world appears to grow colder. Hope is not silly, ephemeral, or finite. It is the belief that one can and should be knowledgeable about what is happening – seeing the world as it really is – but never giving up the fight that things can and should change for the better.

Political actors like populist and authoritarian leaders want you to believe there is no hope. They want you to feel like you should give up, because there is no way of fighting their inordinate amount of wealth or power. Yet, politics is as much about perceptions as it is about reality. When they flood the media with hatred and vitriol, our best defence is remembering that illusions are not as powerful as they seem – eventually, the truth comes to the surface.

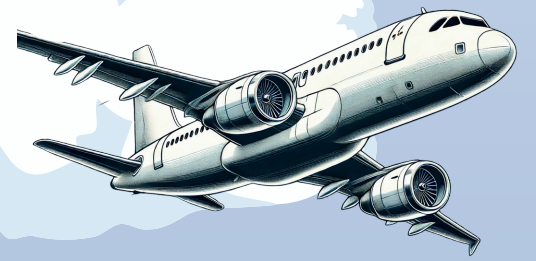
This is where not only impactful journalism comes into play, but the narratives that we all create and tell ourselves about politics. Therefore, I would argue that hope should not be viewed as an optional or flimsy idea, but a powerful political tool for change. It emboldens all of us to believe that we can overcome obstacles, connect with one another, and combat division with unity.

As Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." I hope my grandchildren will feel the same one day.



THE COMPLEX DYNAMICS BETWEEN PILOTS AND AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

ABYAN MEMON
STAFF WRITER



Staff writer Abyan Memon unpacks the delicate balance of authority between pilots and Air Traffic Control, asking how clearer communication could help prevent aviation disasters.

Following a devastating mid-air collision between a commercial aircraft and a military helicopter on 29 January in the capital of the U.S., questions are being asked about how the worst U.S. aviation disaster in nearly 25 years could have been prevented.

Following a preliminary investigation, reports show air traffic control (ATC) at Ronald Reagan Airport issued a warning to the helicopter crew minutes before the collision. Then seconds before the crash, ATC asked the helicopter if they had eyes on the airliner. The crew affirmed an aircraft visible in their sight and requested “visual separation” - confirmation from both parties there is a clear separation and the movements from a pilot party to avoid another aircraft, which ATC granted.

Aviation experts suspect the circumstances of the situation - the dark hours of the night and the low altitude of the aircraft flooded with city lights - may have caused the helicopter crew to miss the airliner, leading to the tragedy.

If the helicopter crew misjudged the position of the airliner, could the collision have been prevented if ATC had stricter command over the pilots and had denied visual separation? This is the case over the Atlantic Ocean

in Europe where ATC has greater authority over pilots and would not typically approve visual separation in a controlled airspace.

The relationship between ATC and pilots is complex but crucial. The deadliest phases of an aircraft journey are take-off, climb, approach, and landing, where most accidents happen. Therefore, it is essential to ensure the right balance of authority between ATC and pilots. However, in these stressful life-or-death moments where hundreds of lives can be changed in seconds, human error is often at the centre of aviation crashes. Therefore, what are the boundaries of the relationship?

A case that strongly supports greater ATC control is Pakistan International Airlines Flight 8303 which crashed in 2020. The senior pilot ignored multiple warnings from ATC and on-board instruments regarding excessive altitude during the approach. The plane devastatingly crashed into a densely-populated neighbourhood after losing power in both engines.

On the other hand, a case where the pilot ignoring ATC instructions saved a plane from potentially crashing into a neighbourhood is that of the famous US Airways Flight 1549 in 2009. Following a bird strike that caused both engines to fail, ATC instructed the plane to return to LaGuardia Airport. The captain, Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, upon realizing the plane would not be able to make it back to the airport, decided to attempt and successfully managed to land the plane in the Hud-

son River, an extremely difficult maneuverer.

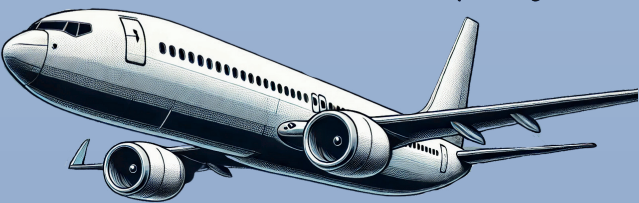
The 2002 Uberlingen mid-air collision tragedy is a unique case highlighting how complex the relationship between pilots and ATC is, especially when multiple aircraft are involved. Minutes before the collision ATC granted a DHL airliner permission to climb to flight level 360 (36,000 feet), putting it on a collision course with a BAL airliner. About a minute before the collision, the traffic collision avoidance systems (TCAS) onboard both aircraft alerted the crew of BAL to climb and the crew of DHL to descend to avoid collision. Seconds later ATC contacted BAL instructing them to descend to avoid collision. The BAL crew followed the ATC instructions and the DHL crew followed the TCAS warnings leading to both airliners descending and colliding in one of the worst mid-air collisions in the history of Europe.

The Tenerife Airport disaster of 1977, the biggest crash in aviation history, further stresses the complexity but importance of ATC-pilot communication. In a tragedy that was caused by a series of unlikely unfortunate events leading to a KLM jumbo jet crashing into a Pan Am jet on the runway, one event stands out. Due to both the ATC and Pan Am crew conveying crucial messages through the radio at the same time, a heterodyne -the mixing of two signals- was heard in the KLM cockpit. The KLM crew did not receive either of the two messages that would have informed them about the Pan Am's presence on the runway and they started their take-off without explicit

clearance. Seconds later the two planes collided on the runway leading to the devastating loss of 583 lives. In the aftermath Captain van Zanten was heavily criticized for his decision to take off without explicit ATC clearance.

Finally, returning back to 7 years ago, ATC control avoided a Tenerife-level disaster over San Francisco. Air Canada Flight 759 in their approach was mistakenly heading for the taxiway, holding four fully loaded planes, instead of the runway at San Francisco International Airport. ATC caught the mistake in time, ordering the airliner to go around. Providing a great example of the power and authority ATC can wield.

Deciding how much authority to give ATC and when to allow pilots to overrule ATC instructions is a complex matter, one that requires constant evaluation, training, and adaptation. Both pilots and ATC play critical roles in life-or-death situations and there is no one-size-fits-all solution as every circumstance is unique. Moving forward it is vital to ensure effective communication is prioritised and human error is minimized. The industry can only hope to improve its safety record and prevent another catastrophe by deeply understanding and consistently refining these authority dynamics.



THE BFI IMAX: AN EXCLUSIONARY ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECE

POLLY SYMES
Staff Writer

Staff Writer Polly Symes reflects on her struggles to find a way into London's most noticeable cinema, drawing attention to the dangers the BFI IMAX underpass poses for women.

Built in 1999, the BFI IMAX houses the largest cinema screen in the UK, reaching almost the height of five double-decker buses. Largely, it screens the blockbusters: recent showings include 'Wicked', 'Gladiator II' and 'Mufasa: The Lion King'. Arguably, it is one of the biggest attractions of the Southbank. As a King's student, you'll recognise it as the ginormous, translucent cylindrical structure right at the centre of the roundabout by Waterloo Bridge and the KCL Waterloo Campus.

Unfortunately, my first visit to the BFI IMAX was less than ideal. I had been wanting to secure 'Wicked' cinema tickets and I thought, since I'm often walking around here, why don't I buy them in person? That turned out to be a huge, BFI IMAX screen-sized error.

Could I make my way into the cinema? Absolutely not. There were no clear entrance signs, and there wasn't a way to reach the centre of the roundabout (warning, don't try it unless you want to become roadkill). Even if you survive the near-lethal sprint across the roundabout, you are only greeted by green foliage, and no doors. After hazzarding said sprint, I was stressed and sweating, thinking: am I so incompetent that I cannot find my way into

the cinema with the largest cinema screen in the UK?

So, I gave up and consulted Google: "how do I enter the BFI IMAX?". Reassuringly, I was not the first to have had this conundrum. Some kind soul had typed out access instructions on the South Bank London website – I needed to find the underpass. If you are a woman and hear the word "underpass", you know things will only be going downhill. Despite the absence of signage, I managed to locate said entrance. It is more than likely that this lack of clarity has prevented some from visiting the cinema at all.

As I reached the bottom of the stairs, I was met by the stench of urine and piles of rotting rubbish. It was dark, as there were no lights. I steeled myself: "this is a hugely famous venue; it cannot be that dangerous". But as a woman alone, it definitely felt dangerous. Beyond the grime, I got the shock of my life when I spotted a man lying amongst it. Any woman will know that the prospect of being alone with a male stranger underground, without any witnesses, is terrifying. Hence, in that viral TikTok video

asking women if they would rather be on their own in a forest with a man or a bear, seven out of eight women chose the bear. Whilst it is likely that the man I encountered was homeless, not wanting to be lurking in the BFI underpass (homelessness is a real and significant issue in London), it didn't make the discovery any less petrifying. Eventually, I reached the cinema. "I survived", I thought.

The next time I visited the IMAX, I armed myself with a pair of (female) friends. "It's creepy down there", I warned them. Still, when we arrived below in the underpass, they couldn't comprehend how this was the entrance to one of the most famous cinemas in Europe. "It was scary", one has since commented. The other added: "it just looks really abandoned [...] thinking about it gives me chills".

It was clear that the entrance was a problem. So, I posed the question to the BFI IMAX Vanguard Community – what do you think of it? Public opinion was that the underpass, owned by TfL, was "dangerous" and "a failure of development and urban planning".

One user com-

mented, "If I'm paying £25 to see a movie, the least they can do is clean up the underpass". Another, having already contacted the BFI IMAX about the issue and received no response, lamented how the BFI IMAX is commonly referred to as "the stinkiest screen in Europe". They concluded that "as a woman I would not feel safe or even with a young family [...] and the BFI refusing to acknowledge or address these issues only makes it worse".

In the brilliant book 'Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men', Caroline Criado Perez discusses how urban planning is biased against women, in favour of men. She outlines how architectural design does not account for violence against women because the majority of data focuses on male bodies – hence, women are at the mercy of the gender data gap.

It is clear that the designer of the BFI IMAX (Bryan Avery - a man, coincidentally) did not take the experience of the average woman into consideration.

Will I visit the IMAX again? Probably. It's a cultural hotspot and somewhat iconic.

Will I feel at all safe in doing so? Absolutely not.

What needs to happen then? Lights, clear signage and a full-on guttering and clean-out of the underpass. Oh, and some security. And that's the bare minimum.



CHURNING THE LAYERS OF WOMANHOOD: A REVIEW OF 'BUTTER' BY ASAKO YUZUKI

LYDIA BRUCE

Staff Writer

Staff Writer Lydia Bruce analyses 'Butter', the Waterstones Book of the Year 2024, through the lens of feminist critique, engaging the senses to explore what it takes to be a woman.

On a random Tuesday morning I find myself walking to Borough Market. The only thought on my mind: butter.

I felt like a woman driven mad. Never has a novel had the capacity to entice in me this much of a hunger for such a specific commodity - and hardly even that, given the thing's ordinariness. Never had I thought any more about 'butter' than as simply something salty I'd spread on toast every once in a while. Yet, there I was, like a frenzied addict, salivating at the thought of overpriced dairy. My feet, one in front of the other, in pursuit of purchase.

As I walked, I could hear the lyrical voice of Yuzuki's protagonist Kaji reverberating in my mind. Her lavish descriptions of food; her uncomfortable yet all-consuming obsession with flavours and textures; the capacity for the act of eating to elicit joy beyond comprehension. Her words created this new reality for me, where food becomes not just sustenance, but passion, poetry and purpose.

I found myself lost in bewilderment about how a book which details one wom-

an's passion for a certain product had become so central to my imagination. Then I realised this novel wasn't at all written to inspire the next generation of foodies - rather, it harbours a much deeper, more painstaking meaning.

Yuzuki's 'Butter' prevails as a sharp commentary on female beauty standards, particularly their intensity and pervasive nature - especially in Japan. The novel entertains and unpacks the origins of the resultant internalised hatred harboured by women whom these standards are indoctrinated into, by no fault of their own. Yuzuki's message resides in subterfuge, robed by a much simpler story surrounding a bored journalist's pursuit of an obscure murder case. Throughout the novel, this gambit is untangled, unmasked: shed of its myriad layers.

What has consistently impressed me about books coming from Japan is their characterisation. I haven't yet encountered a translated piece of Japanese fiction which failed to impress me, in which the characters haven't wowed me with their detail and immaculate construction. There is something that feels so real about the ways in which Japanese authors place immense emphasis and careful focus onto their heroes. And this is no different when it comes to Asako Yuzuki.

Yuzuki presents her readers with such a wealth of complexity that each character could have their own novel written about them. This is especially true for her antagonist, Kaji. Upon introduction, Kaji embodies every physical aspect that a woman in theory should actively despise and strive to move away from.

She is immediately stripped of her womanhood due to her voluptuous appearance, with suggestions

floating around that she must have "lost herself" or "let go" in some way. Here, it is clear that what is considered "feminine" has nothing to do with anatomy or biology - rather, it is solely the result of socially constructed ideals. Such standards align with pressures and expectations from men. Crucially, Yuzuki perpetuates the message that women are not free subjects in charge of their own identification, but puppets in a box controlled by male strings, by male puppet masters.

This message becomes even more pervasive as the novel continues. As a symbol of the liberation of the female identity, Kaji experiences a sense of incongruence with those around her. She is assured in her own body and way of living to such an extent that she harbours hatred towards almost everyone else due to their pursuit of unrealistic and harmful norms. Her friends, colleagues and lovers are constantly perplexed by how a woman embodying so much of what she shouldn't be seems to be so content in her identity. They develop a near-fascination for her, as if she was a foreign object in a museum or a glass box - not unlike the prison she is held in throughout the novel's timeline.

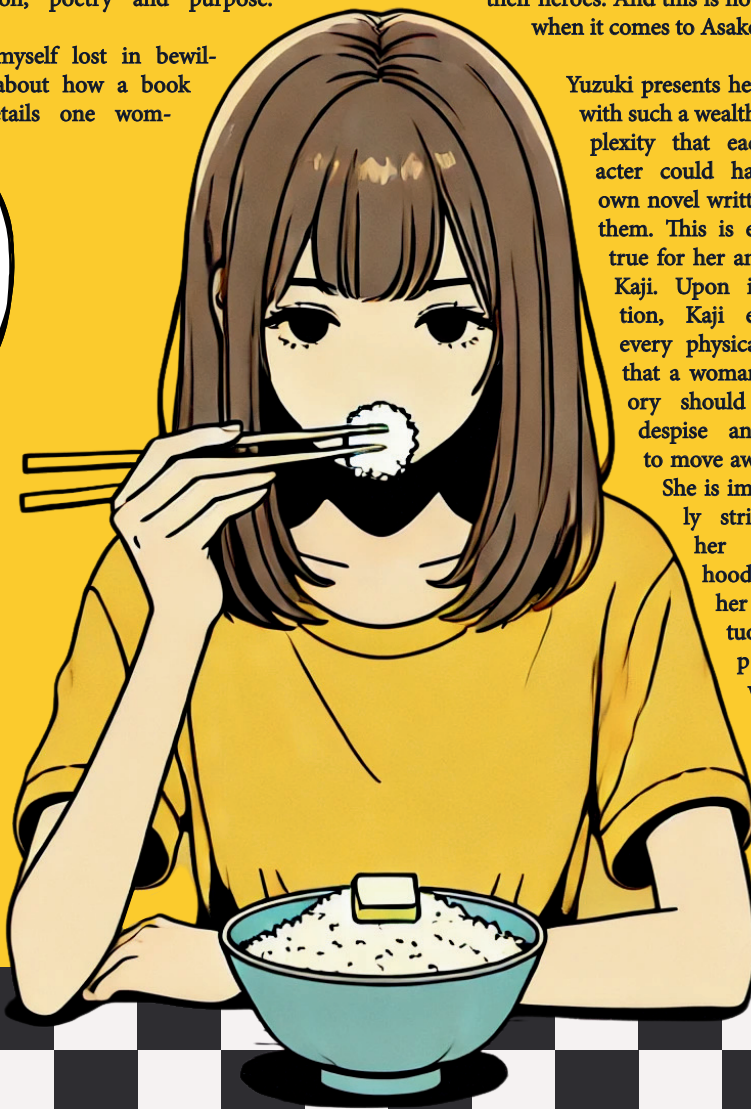
Her main admirer goes by the name Riko and acts as Yuzuki's protagonist in a sense. A woman who begins the novel trapped in a blind state of alignment with damaging societal expectations (such as her refusal to exceed 55kg, despite never having been overweight), ends in a state of holistic self-approval. Through Kaji's guidance, her lavish descriptions of food and prevailing self-love and appreciation, Riko too discovers a state in which contentment exists outside of adherence to unrealistic standards. She changes profoundly, as do the readers.

Our expectations of women: transformed. Our perception of self-acceptance: transformed. Our appreciation for the shared female struggle: transformed.

The layers of womanhood are churned into a beautiful blend of what femininity means in the 21st century - much like the very butter Kaji describes. And we are left amazed. We are left salivating.

We find ourselves walking to Borough Market on a random Tuesday morning. The only thought on our minds: butter.

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I'M JUST A (BRAINWASHED) GIRL: IS SOCIAL MEDIA MAKING YOUNG WOMEN MORE CONSERVATIVE?

CHARLOTTE GALEA
Staff Writer



Staff Writer Charlotte Galea takes a look at social media trends promoting conservative gender norms and considers their possible impact on the socio-political beliefs of young women.

Growing up, all I heard about was the “girl boss”. She juggled business meetings and cocktails with her friends, she didn’t have to choose between kids and a career, and her heeled boots click-clacked as she walked. Now, though, it seems more women believe having it all is far too difficult. Become the stay-at-home girlfriend (STAG), instead!

This girl does not have a care in the world. The STAG wakes to fresh sheets and a matching PJ set (that you can buy on her TikTok shop!). She brews coffee and displays the machine she has to make it. She pops vitamins out of a carefully-placed, labelled bottle. She does her twenty-step skincare routine and includes names of all the products she uses. Some STAGs are only ever at their kitchen countertops, cooking in floral dresses. Each one is so heavily branded that she herself could be mistaken for a product.

Despite a childhood of promises that I could have it all, I find myself surrounded by women stating they’re “just a girl” while their STEM boyfriends complete “big-boy work”, or explaining how I can “access my divine femininity”. The past decade has seen the rise of the ‘trad-wives’, a collective of women adhering to ‘traditional’ roles in the home.

I can’t help but wonder: are young women becoming more conservative? I asked thirty peers about those social media trends - whether they’d heard of them and what were their thoughts. Many chose to remain anonymous, so, based on their responses, I divided

them into four categories based on the original ‘girl bosses’ from the popular show ‘Sex and the City’. Thus, we have the “Carries”, the “Charlottes”, the “Samanthas” and the “Mirandas”.

The Carries, the largest group, either hadn’t heard of the trends or didn’t think they impacted society.

When asked about the line “I’m Just a Girl” derived

from

the Gwen Stefani song, the Carries used it without considering the consequences: “it never occurred to me that this could be sexist, even though it’s a clearly gendered phrase”.

The Charlottes often believed women “want to accept their femininity” and that it “should be protected in the same way masculinity ought to”, according to one respondent who thought the ‘I’m Just a Girl’ trend was “a fun celebration of girlhood and womanhood”.

The “Samanthas” firmly asserted that while what women do is their business, it also comes down to the patriarchy. One said, “men have gotten away with

lots worse because of the phrase ‘boys will be boys’”. She added: “it definitely does play into sexism, but it’s manipulating men so that we have an easier life”.

The Mirandas were the most extreme. Like the Samanthas, they believed the trends were harmful, but also

asserted that choice feminism is “dangerous”.

One Miranda stated she’d experienced a “sudden backslide,

where being employed and having a job and your own money is a sign that you’re losing your ‘feminine energy’”.

She and fellow Mirandas had similar responses when

asked whether they thought social media were promoting more conservative lifestyles, such as the STAG or the trad-

wife. “There’s a real idea of ‘screw feminism, I just want to be a mother and not work’”, I heard. She also stated that current trends are “diminishing of feminism, of what it achieved for a woman to safely be a housewife with protections, or to work”.

The Carries had a different stance. “If a woman makes a conscious decision to have a family and get married over a ‘career’ so what?”, one of them asked,

though made it clear that women should be able to “have it all” if they wanted to.

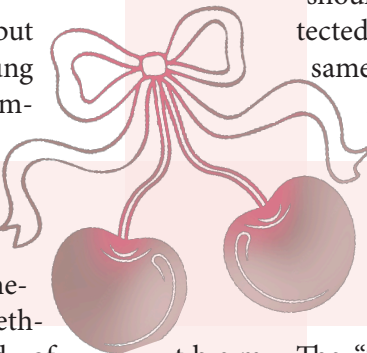
Meanwhile, a Charlotte claimed it makes sense: “The idea of having a relaxed lifestyle is appealing to all people. It’s fine that women can settle down as long as they are aware of the possible consequences of not having a career and if it’s an informed choice, why not?”.

The Samanthas consistently blamed men, suggesting that the tradwife movement is “a male fantasy”, so it is male attitudes that need changing. “Enough is enough. We think we’ve reached an end goal in feminism, but we are really just chipping the top of the iceberg”.

My friend, a staunch Miranda, argued that late-stage capitalism is the root of our problems:

“That influencer with the thousand dollar kitchen set making homemade fruit gummies is lying to you in the most obvious way; you will never be her because SMEG and their line of stand mixers are not paying for your lifestyle where you only make aesthetic food and always look gorgeous! This is a product, and women are buying it, hook, line and sinker, and worst of all, the price is their autonomy.”

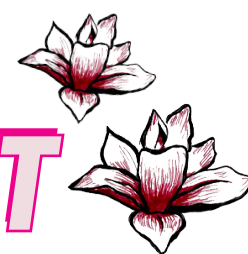
So, the question is: are you a Carrie, Charlotte, Samantha or Miranda? And if you’re a Charlotte - have you ever stopped to actually question why?



IN THE DIGITAL AGE,



MAKE LEARNING YOUR DEFAULT



JAGODA ZIOLKOWSKA
Culture Editor

Culture Editor Jagoda Ziolkowska highlights the paradoxes of learning in today's world, arguing that overdependence on short-term technological solutions decreases humanity's long-term prospects.

I assume that as you're reading this sentence, you're not actively thinking about the fact that you understand the words, but rather focus on what it is that I'm saying (I may be too optimistic: there's a good chance you're simultaneously scrolling on your phone). But what if I switched to Polish now? Czy przeraziłaby Cię ilość kreszek nad literami, które nie mają dla Ciebie żadnego znaczenia? Confusing, but you could always use Google Translate. Right?

Given we speak English, the dominant lingua franca in much of the world, such instances of consulting a dictionary seem more like satisfying curiosity than a necessity. But in a not-so-distant future, this may well change. The 2024 EF English Proficiency Index report found out that global English competence is in decline. Although the numbers aren't yet striking, the fact remains: people are becoming less interested in learning the language.

Of course - and as usual - it's not all that easy. Access to resources is not distributed equally and the command of English in a country is correlated with levels of income, welfare and international integration, among other indicators. Still, for most of

us, developing language proficiency has never been easier and cheaper thanks to technology. Countless websites, videos and free online courses not only provide the necessary materials, but also help structure the entire learning process. Technically, all we need to do is just sit down and start.

But whenever motivation comes, the insidious question of: "what for?" follows. And, in all fairness, there seems to be no pressing need. Online dictionaries are ubiquitous. Earbuds translating languages in real time are no longer a sci-fi dream. Why devote tens of hours of your week to memorising vocabulary when taking out your phone is enough to communicate with a foreigner?

Because, to put it dramatically, the very act of learning anything is, in itself, our best bet at survival.

It's no secret that the carousel we call the world spins so fast that we barely manage not to fall off our seats. What we need though is not stronger muscles; it's stronger thinking.

Acquiring new skills and seeking stimulating experiences can significantly enhance the brain's functioning, improving mental faculties and slowing down the age-related decline in cognitive abilities. We badly need this intellectual agility. Despite the common view that information equals truth equals knowledge, it is often the misuse rather than omission of facts that leads to not only flawed, but also dangerous beliefs. With so

much geopolitical landscape shaped by the digital realm driven by monetisable impulsive clicks, it goes without saying that staying critical and resisting the oversimplification trap resulting in tribalism, skewed processes of deduction and vulnerability to emotional manipulation is our strongest defence. Yet, the reality is quite different: we rely on technology to solve the problems with our knowledge instead of using our knowledge to solve the problems with technology.

All of this, of course, relates to the elephant in the room: the future labour market. While AI will certainly render some jobs obsolete, humans are unlikely to be left out altogether. Instead, we will need to constantly retrain and assume varied professions, some of which may not even exist yet. Therefore, the challenge will be to master developing skills quickly and efficiently in order to keep up with the pace of emerging sectors. This fact, although widely acknowledged, is rarely followed by the connected pertinent question: how do we do that? We need to know how to learn, unlearn and relearn - fast. And while we can use technology to help us, we can't expect it to perform our CVs on our behalf.

What a luck then, you might think, that universities so fervently claim to render their students into critical thinkers. But wallowing in the recruitment-friendly perceived 'analytical skills' is equally dangerous. Just because you convince yourself that you can think critically, doesn't mean you consistently do it. To be absolutely clear, I don't mean we

should question every single thing - how bleak life must be when happiness is just a socially-manufactured idea and people are defined solely by their circumstances. Enjoy yourself a little. What I am saying is that seeing criticality as a skill acquired once and for all rather than a continuously practiced habit can lead to complacency and, paradoxically, lack of questioning your own thinking patterns. Insert Descartes's "Cogito, ergo sum". (Tempted to now proceed to postcolonial critiques of European philosophical thought? Go ahead. As Fitzgerald elegantly observed: "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function").

In the end, we all just try to make sense of the world. What we need to remember though, is that while the resources we have to help us do that are abundant, the same is not true for attention and energy. So let's spend our time wisely. Observe carefully. I do hope you just learnt something new.



THE L.A. FIRES THROUGH THE EYES OF A FOURTH GENERATION CALIFORNIAN

KATE BENT

Staff Writer

Staff Writer Kate Bent provides a powerful reflection on the physical and emotional damage caused by the recent fires in California. Drawing from her own personal history, she brings light to the memories which have shaped how she views home.

I am a proud fourth-generation Southern Californian and my family has lived and worked in the Los Angeles area for over 100 years. This might not seem like a long time by London standards but in L.A. terms, we basically fought alongside William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings.

The Eaton fire destroyed much of Pasadena/Altadena where my family is from. I haven't been able to bring myself to check if my father's childhood home still stands. The area several blocks away from where my grandparents used to live was under mandatory evacuation for weeks. I doubt if anything remains of my grandfather's memorial bench in the nearby mountains. The streets where my grandma used to take my cousin and I to look at Christmas lights each year now lie in charred ruins.

Being from a Pasadena family is at the very core of who I am. It is a town steeped in memory and tradition.

Pasadena is most famous for the Rose Parade and the Rose Bowl college football game. The Parade is an annual New Year's Day tradition since the late 1800s, notable for its beautiful floats covered entirely in floral material like seeds, barks, spices, vegetables, flowers from all over the world and of course, roses.

For several decades, my family business built over half of these floats along with floats in parades around the country and world, including the opening ceremony of the Olympics. Every member of both sides of my family since my great-grandparents has built floats. In fact, my parents met when my mom began working for my grandfather, so I am literally a flower child.

We weren't just a Pasadena family, we were THE Pasadena family. My grandfather had his funeral reception and my parents got married at the Wrigley Mansion home to the organisation running both the parade and the game, the Tournament of Roses Association. They were only the second wedding ever held at the mansion and I believe the last - probably because a family friend who was unable to attend hired a streaker.

Over 20 years after we sold our company, I still had people recognise my last name when I would pay with a card at restaurants and ask if I was related to Bent Parade Floats. It is a town that remembers.

And now for large sections of Pasadena, Altadena, the Pacific Palisades and areas all over L.A., those memories are all that remain.

For weeks, every time I went on social media or talked to loved ones, I learned of someone else who lost their home. I would anxiously scan Google Docs of those affected, looking for names I knew. It felt like checking casualty lists after a battle. Loved ones told me that some areas are just gone; that it looks like a bomb went off.

There is basically nothing left. Those first few weeks felt like the beginning of the pandemic when I would read the news till I sobbed, self-medicate with cat videos, then go back to reading the news in an endless cycle. Now the grief and fear is no longer at the forefront of my mind but I know that I have only begun to process this loss.

I found after experiencing a massive trauma, you can't go back to who you used to be. People talk about closure but you never really get that. Immense grief imprints on our very cells and changes our brain chemistry and structure. Loss on that scale never truly goes away but you learn to live alongside it. Slowly, you begin to be able to think about other things, and one day, you realise that it no longer hurts to breathe.

When I was a child, my hometown of Laguna Beach, located about an hour's drive south of L.A., suffered a devastating fire and I knew many families who lost their homes.

After a fire you never forget the smell. The smoke permeates your clothes and hair and doesn't leave for months. The scent of a charred building or hillside soaked by a firefighter's hose is pungent, acrid, slightly sweet and remains for years.

To this day, even the smallest whiff of a wild-fire makes me anxious. The colour the sun turns when there's smoke in the sky sets me on edge.

Many years ago, I evacuated my parents' house after a landslide and we were displaced for a while. I know what it is like to have to assess which of your possessions are worth saving in a matter of minutes and to flee with only the clothes on your back. Our house was fine, but the confusion and fear I felt in those moments left me feeling hollow and numb long afterwards. As I watched interviews with evacuees from the safety of my London flat, I saw those same feelings reflected on their faces.

Part of attending university thousands of miles away from home means that things will happen - you will want to be there but can't be. I knew this when I applied to King's but that doesn't make it any easier now that I'm experiencing it. It's been isolating to not know anyone here from L.A. to commiserate with, who understands the magnitude of what is now gone and the arduous road that lies ahead. While FaceTimes with people at home have been great, it's no replacement for being in the same room with someone.

I want to hug them, laugh, cry and get so wine drunk that we end up belting out Alicia Keys' 'Girl On Fire' or

Billy Joel's 'We Didn't Start the Fire' at one a.m. People ask me if any of my family lost their homes and when I say no, I usually get a dismissive shrug and a response like 'well, that's good at least' in a tone that implies the conversation is over. I don't know how to explain to them that this is bigger than destroyed homes and businesses. I can't put into words what it's like to suddenly have entire towns wiped off the map. That it's so much more than the burnt buildings - this is about the feeling of home being lost and the concept of safety being gone.

The widespread damage caused by all the fires is hard to wrap my brain around. Fifty thousand acres burned. For comparison, that is larger than Washington D.C., almost as big as two Manhattans and amounts to about 13% of the greater London area. The estimate for the economic damage exceeds \$250 billion. L.A. has been irrevocably changed by the fires but it is not broken.

I recently visited a church in Liverpool that was bombed out during the Blitz. I sat there in the cold for about an hour looking at the charred ruins of its gothic architecture and it made me think of home. I realised destruction doesn't entirely erase the beauty of a place.

Columns that used to hold stained glass currently cast arched shadows on the ground. Where there was once a roof is now open to the sky but I wasn't thinking how it used to look. Instead, I thought about how the empty windows let more light in and the lack of a roof allowed me to see birds circling overhead and smell the water of the ocean mixing with the nearby river. The church is now a music, arts and cultural venue. It acknowledges the loss but also grows from it.

Being at that church made me think about the Japanese art of kintsugi.

Meaning 'golden seams,' it is the act of repairing broken pottery with gold. Instead of seeking to hide the damage, kintsugi celebrates it. It is a symbolic representation of resilience and the strength that comes from putting the pieces back together after they have shattered.

In my life, I have experienced several massive traumas but refuse to be defined by them. Knowing that I can turn my scars into golden seams is something that can never be taken from me.

I am confident that L.A. can do the same.

Maybe instead of adding a Hollywood ending to the fires, we let the brokenness be for a while understanding that it is not forever. Maybe we shouldn't entirely rebuild but leave some place like the church in Liverpool to honour the lives lost, the communities devastated and the places of collective memory that now only exist in our minds. Maybe we show our scars with the knowledge that one day they will become our golden seams.



CAREERISM IS A SILENT HAUNTING



Reginald, ‘Reggie’ the Lion

Current Occupation: Mascot

London, United Kingdom

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RUTH OTIM
Comment Editor

Comment Editor Ruth Otim scrutinises careerism at university and how graduate precarity inclines students towards ‘profitable’ and ‘secure’ degree pathways.

Isabella Glassman’s guest essay at The New York Times perfectly captures an overwhelming sentiment across universities that we all know so well, but have yet to diagnose: careerism. As she illustrates, careerism is the inclination to prioritize career development and orient your attitudes and activities towards said goal.

In her opinion piece, Careerism is Ruining College, Glassman walks us through how the pre-professional pressure of American Ivy Leagues has consumed the academic pursuits and extra-curricular choices of undergraduates during her time at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn). With students battling for coveted internships and pinpointing the exact career they seek to get at exclusive firms, American students are not alone in filtering through the careerist haze; students in the UK and internationally are experiencing the same phenomenon.

You can’t help but relate to Glassman’s honesty about tailoring her academic and extracurricular activities to get into UPenn’s Wharton Business School. The language and attitudes of pre-professional university culture in London is a suffocating one too, where the modules you take, societies you join, and networking events you attend aids in curating a marketable image of yourself after graduation. Where then does this leave space for you to engage with programmes, classes, and events that exist outside of what is best for your CV?

This is a question I’ve had to wrestle with throughout my time at university when what I hear around me is – if I can’t post it on LinkedIn, is it really worth my time?

In short, yes, we should be able to enjoy university without thinking about the ‘next steps’ from the moment we begin university. However, the longer answer tells us a far more interesting story about how careerist university culture is a symptom of graduate precarity and why students today can’t seem to stop doom scrolling on LinkedIn.

Graduate precarity and the careerist mentality that follows

When I was first told to sign-up for LinkedIn by my fellow classmate – who had a LinkedIn

well before they even reached 18 – I couldn’t help but look at them in utter confusion. For years, I had assumed LinkedIn was reserved for an older, employed demographic who wanted to share ‘amusing’ stories about the ‘exciting’ aspects of asset management. My disillusionment disappeared when I actually did sign up on LinkedIn to see what all the hype was about.

A social media app has never made me more stressed out in my life.

As I began connecting with some university and highschool classmates, I was awestruck by how accomplished they all were already. With posts celebrating remarkable research opportunities they had gained the summer, the conferences they attended and the internships they met the way, I was quickly hit with the overwhelming feeling like I was falling behind my peers.

I was thoroughly convinced that their achievements were by solely virtue of their academic aptitude or that they had always been go-getters. However, while I was at a networking event – ironically enough – talking to my peers made me realize that many

of the LinkedIn posts, extra-curriculars, and endless nights at the library were also a response to how daunting the graduate market currently is.

With the graduate job market growing increasingly competitive, it is certainly no wonder why undergraduate students have begun thinking about career options so early at university.

Bloomberg reported last year that graduates from English universities are increasingly seeing fewer opportunities, reporting that graduate postings fell from 20,500 to 12,200 between May 2018 and May 2023 in London alone.

Focusing on London, for the graduates who are able to get a job in the city, fresh graduates are spending a significant portion of their wage towards rent. Even though London has the highest median wage at £31,300 in 2022 comparable to many other major cities across the UK, they spent disproportionately more of their salary on

rent. With a wage-to-rent ratio of 1.19 in comparison to cities like Manchester at 1.83 and Sheffield at 2.52, new graduates in London are increasingly seeking out higher paying jobs to compensate for the rising cost of rent and living.

What seems apparent, with this in mind, is that the stress of being on LinkedIn is nowhere near that of the graduate world. I must admit, however, that my realization of the contemporary careerist nature of university – and the daunting graduate landscape that awaits – was quite belated. For some, pre-professional pressure began far before they even finished their

A-Levels or IB diplomas, let alone completing their undergraduate degrees. Careerist culture has also seeped into sixth form/high school students’ degree choices, where the humanities and the arts have been pushed aside for the ‘most profitable’ and ‘secure’ degrees options.

The educational hierarchy

Last August, The Guardian published a piece detailing how A-Level students are ditching the humanities/arts for STEM/social science subjects, with many more students exclusively either studying STEM and/or social science. With many students believing in the presumed practicality of STEM/social science over the humanities/arts, our educational system – as hierarchical as it already is – has intensified another

pecking order that stigmatizes the latter over the former.

While this educational hierarchy can be boiled down to the relatively higher income STEM/social science generates and the simultaneous cost-of-living crisis, there is something else quite alarming about this trend which is the social stigma that follows suit.

STEM/social science degrees have become synonymous with practicality and lucrative quality whereas humanities/arts degrees are faced with the same, tiring question of: what exactly are we doing to do with this [insert humanities/arts degree here] anyways?

To those who relentlessly ask this question, I would like to ask one back: why do we give STEM/social science degrees unquestionable utility while humanities/arts degrees require endless justification? Careerism frames the inability of STEM/social science to elicit economic utility whereas humanities/arts only become legitimised knowledge it produces is marketable.

I want to stress here that this is not an argument against those who genuinely enjoy their STEM/social science degrees or that financial security is a valid concern – wanting a stable future for yourself is completely legitimate. Rather, I am compelled to write this knowing about how many people choose STEM/social science degrees by virtue of its employability; for those who had to make the hard decision to look away from humanities/arts for a ‘practical’ career route.

I must confess, I wish I had done far more activities in the arts now that I am approaching graduation. I was not able to strike the balance between the person who loves studying a social science and exploring the creative side of myself that I had kept to a lull note. Careerism quietly creeps up to you like a silent haunting. It followed me into my classes, the activities I joined and, ultimately, how I viewed myself.

For your sake and mine, take the module that does not fit into your CV, turn off the notifications on LinkedIn, and go onto campus not thinking about the career university will give you, but rather the life that awaits you at this current moment.

BENJAMIN EVANS & JOAO LEVY MELANCIA

Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Staff Writer

A PATRIOTIC PLATFORM IN DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Benjamin Evans and staff writer Joao Levy Melancia argue that progressives have allowed the far-right to appropriate the ideas of patriotism and freedom, it is now time for a reclamation of democracy.

The shadow of populist-nationalism is consuming democracies worldwide, fueled by the language of hate and politics of division. The nasty by-product of an inflationary surge that has ripped through people's budgets like a hot knife through butter, a brutal pandemic that atomised our communities and perpetuated by the 'robber barons' of the new media age: Zuckerberg, Bezos and, of course, Musk.

Our world is addicted to the digital and devoid of the detail, the ancient distractions of bread and circuses have dissolved into an age of flat whites and football, the fleeting sensations of doom-scrolling and sports betting. An age in which a convicted felon has taken the White House with thunderous applause and populists across the world threaten the integrity of the democratic institutions so many paid the ultimate price to preserve.

As international law and basic human rights are flouted by tyrants, multi-national firms wield hitherto untold levels of influence and the climate crisis burns our Hollywood land of make believe – the time for niceties is past. For those who treasure the politics of duty, of love over hate, who look outward instead of cowering inward and who hold dear the doctrine that all people are created equal – now is the time for action.

The progressive centre has failed to address the populist ascension. In the past year alone, we have seen Kamala Harris convincingly defeated by Donald Trump, Macron's self-inflicted implosion in the French parliamentary elections and Labour's poll rating disintegrated. This year, despite a post-Trump bounce, Justin Trudeau left 24 Sussex with widespread discontent for his Liberal Party, as Olaf Schulz was defeated by both Merz's CDU and, frighteningly, Musk's new found political allies the far-right AfD. Ultimately, progressives across the world are failing to connect with everyday people, the symptom of a strategy that has failed to take people's lived experiences into account.

Is it true that the US economy fared better under

Biden compared to other nations? Of course, but many don't feel it. Is it true we are all better off after 40 years of globalisation? Definitely, but those in left behind areas, reliant on redistribution have not felt included in the spoils. The top-down elitist instincts of those who govern in the aggregate over the individual, have led to millions feeling overlooked and under-appreciated for decades.

If the status-quo is felt to be failing and exclusionary, many will seek disruptors to upend the liberal consensus. We live in a world where many of us are over-qualified, yet under-demanded. The once prevailing social contract that promised hard work begets just rewards has been torn up leading to many our age willing to trade their democratic rights for perceived dictatorial efficiency. To trade a life of freedom for an iron cage of authoritarianism in a desperate thirst for certainty.

This dark prospect is not the answer to our woes. Authoritarian regimes are highly efficient oppressors, but notoriously poor economic stewards. So in the context of declinism and despair, how can we re-light the fires of democracy and make the case for progressive politics once again?

The Democrats' attempt to fight Trump with simplistic policies and broad slogans failed. We must learn a valuable lesson from this, one cannot fight fire with fire, instead one must pour cooling water on the flame. This means re-taking the positions that have been monopolised by the populists: patriotism and freedom.

Reclaiming Patriotism

Progressives need not indulge themselves in nationalist mythology, which pits one culture against another to defend policies against the people's interests. True patriotism can be demonstrated by an unwavering devotion to public service and strong commitments to our military alliances, such as NATO, to uphold our shared values of democracy, self-determination and the open society. No where does this apply more than the need for the Western alliance to stand alongside Ukraine in steadfast opposition to Russian aggression. Progressives need to maintain their strength in standing up for these causes, and against

those all who wish to subvert them. As the world becomes more volatile and violent, true power will come through this unity in defence of our democracies and very way of life.

A sense of pride and unity through shared historical ties is not the private property of the far-right, who portray themselves as the defenders of national identity against a globalising elite. Where does patriotism lie in allowing our Parliament's agenda to be dictated by the whims of a foreign billionaire? Where's patriotism as populists weaken democratic institutions and sow division at the moment when unity in the face of evil is more essential than ever? As polarisation hits new highs, we live in a country of two nations, progressives must work to unify the public through defending the issues that matter most. This will require cooling down our debate by, for example, acknowledging that many see immigration as a threat to their livelihoods, whilst continuing to recognise the universal rights and humanity of all people. Ultimately, we must work to improve the lives of all citizens, instead of stoking up division to distract from managed decline.

Fighting for Freedom

Extremist and populist forces are adept at appropriating abstract nouns, 'freedom', 'patriotism', 'common sense', as justification for their radical visions. In his historic State of the Union address, as Europe wilted under the vile thumb of Adolf Hitler, President Roosevelt set out the alternative to the world of tyranny and strongmen that fascism represented. He said democracy is for Freedom of Speech, everywhere, Freedom from Want and Freedom from Fear for all the peoples of the world, and Freedom of Worship for all.

These are simple ideas, yet rife with idealism and moral rectitude. Our point is this: We can sell that. Instead of cowering in a corner and telling people how democracy is threatened, the centre needs to stand up and make its case for the kind of world we want to live in. Let the electorate see the contrast as to whose intentions and beliefs are right. Much is said about freedom of speech, but freedom from fear and from want are just as crucial. Democracy cannot function if people distrust institutions and feel themselves pauperised and disrespected. It is when people are afraid that they seek out strong, confident voices rather than those of nuance.

There is an appalling lack of talent and initiative from the centre. Figures like Keir Starmer and Olaf Scholz are borderline soporific and cannot compete for the spotlight with Donald Trump.

The Last Full Measure of Devotion

We believe FDR's four freedoms are just the sort of idealistic, easily grasped message that the standard bearers of democracy should carry into battle.

In 1926, it was Joseph Goebbels who observed, "the big joke on democracy is that it gives its mortal enemies the means to its own destruction." This was prescient of the events that would come to pass, but equally captures the inflection point of today. The crucial question is: tolerant and pluralist by nature, how does democracy deal with the intolerant and the would-be despots who seek power through electoral politics? How do you unmask someone who is willing to play the game, but is hellbent on changing the rules as soon as they have the advantage?

In this crisis, the partisans of democracy must conduct themselves as joyful soldiers, not frightened victims. The prostrate sulk the Democrats have indulged in since November is utterly desultory and tantamount to dereliction of duty. Democracy is embattled, granted, but reports of its demise are greatly exaggerated. People demand strength and enthusiasm, not lofty patronisation or prophecies of doom; to paraphrase President Kennedy, we must refuse to curse the darkness, and choose instead to light a candle.

We must acknowledge that democracy requires tireless work and good faith to be maintained, not merely because it provides the means for its own undoing, but because it requires the population to believe in its virtue. Disillusionment affects the body politic like tetanus - it first manifests in feverish outbursts, but quickly ends in paralysis.

Many of us will have ancestors who sacrificed themselves to preserve democracy. Some of us will even have ancestors who perished in that Homeric struggle, giving what President Lincoln termed the 'last full measure of devotion' in pursuit of the celestial goal that is freedom. The present occasion demands no less effort from us. Any attack on our democracies, their laws and institutions, should be branded and retaliated against as an affront to those who died so we could inherit them. Neither appeasement



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