

Demands are (Almost) Being Negotiated — 28/05/2024

Fourteen days into our occupation, the School Management Committee (SMC) offered to begin negotiations. They emailed at 1:31pm, asking to meet at 3:15pm. Obviously such short notice does not constitute a good-faith engagement. In the two weeks spent waiting, Oxfam International estimates that 3,500 Palestinians have been killed. Now is not the time for silence, complicity, and inaction.

This meeting most likely was proposed in response to our decision to expand the encampment in the early hours of Monday morning. In contrast to the SMC's narrative that they are unwilling to negotiate until we respect their 'red lines' (by dismantling our encampment), they have shown a willingness to engage with us only when we have expanded our presence on campus. The SMC, or at least those members who saw fit to be present yesterday, declared that our expansion is their new red line, citing disingenuous health and safety concerns. However, it became clear during yesterday's meeting that they are far more concerned about the presence of posters on the Portsmouth Street side of the Marshall Bloom Building*. As we suspected when entering the meeting, it is the politics of our increased visibility, not specious safety risks, that concerns them.

The SMC claimed that an independent fire safety assessment was conducted today. This assessment alleged that our encampment is hazardous due to obstructed exit routes, the design of the Marshall Bloom building's atrium, and "unproven electoral equipment". Our exit routes are clearly marked and unobstructed. The atrium design is, of course, an architectural issue. And last we checked, electoral equipment is used for conducting elections, not electricity. It defies logic to take such slapdash warnings seriously. Moreover, we have arranged for the Fire Brigades Union to come make an independent assessment, and we will enact any and all recommendations to ensure that we pose no health or safety risk to anybody within the school community.

A lack of good faith unfortunately has defined the SMC's approach to negotiation. Intentionally or not, yesterday's meeting was proposed during the exact time the (Egregious) Investment Sub-Committee (EISC) was meeting. The EISC drafts proposals for higher committees regarding LSE's investment portfolio, which are made in line with the university's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) policy. The LSESU Palestine Society, authors of the *Assets in Apartheid* report, presented a draft of its divestment report to members at the previous EISC meeting in late March and requested a place at yesterday's EISC meeting. The EISC refused. Their refusal is particularly concerning given that the report shows that LSE is non-compliant with its own ESG policy. Moreover, the SMC were informed in January of our concerns surrounding LSE's financial complicity in the arms trade, fossil fuel extraction, and crimes against the Palestinian people. Despite this months-long emphasis on divestment, neither the LSE Liberated Zone nor the LSESU Palestine Society was given a seat at the table at yesterday's EISC meeting. The lack of outreach is especially worrying as the next meeting of the EISC is not until October, marking one year of genocide in Gaza.

We remain sceptical that the SMC are a reliable partner in negotiation. During yesterday's meeting, the SMC claimed to already have written their response to our demands. How can we expect our demands to be taken seriously when they have nearly finalised their public response prior to any actual negotiation? They also stated that they would negotiate only if we reverted the encampment back to its original size. Hours later over email, they changed their mind, demanding we disband the encampment entirely. Their expectations are unclear.

As such, we remain steadfast in our commitment to maintaining pressure until SMC offer a serious and substantive proposal for negotiating with our demands. Every day, new members of the campus community join the Liberated Zone. Every day, new support pours in from around the world, including a video message yesterday from Gaza itself. But also every day, more Palestinians are killed.

Disclose. Divest. We will not stop. We will not rest.

*Renamed in memorium after Marshall Bloom, an American anti-apartheid and anti-war student activist who was suspended from LSE for leading the first student occupation in the UK here in 1967 against LSE's complicity in Rhodesian apartheid. Bloom subsequently committed suicide following his draft call into the Vietnam War. The building is formally (and now formerly) known as the Marshall Building, but the students condemn any official association of LSE with Sir Paul Marshall, the major owner of GB News and exposed racist, for whom it is named.