

# THE BEAVER

## EMERGENCY ISSUE

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS STUDENTS UNION

# Occupation For Divestment

## *Students Overnight in Connaught House*

By BEAVER STAFF

After eleven years of discussion and three months of campaigning, LSE students have finally turned rhetoric into direct action: students are currently occupying Connaught House.

Following discussions between Union General Secretary, Pete Wilcock, and other interested parties on Tuesday morning, a decision was taken to bring forward the occupation of Connaught House to the early afternoon.

This was done as news spread that porters had started as early as Monday to lock and secure the entrances of the building in anticipation of the planned occupation. It was realised that these actions by the school would make the original occupation, scheduled to take place after the 5pm Court of Governors' meeting, impossible. Also information from the Director of the School suggested that the Court of Governors' were unlikely to accede to student demands, regardless of the intense lobbying.

At 2:15pm, about forty students peacefully entered the main entrance of Connaught House, unopposed by the one porter on duty. After an initial period of confusion, the other staff left, allowing more students to enter and occupy the Second Floor.

Administrative staff who were asked to leave in view of the action, decided to

lock themselves in their offices until 5pm. The school Bursar toured the building to inform those present of the illegality of the action, telling them that permission was needed to start the revolution!

The numbers of those in occupation swelled on the hour to approximately 250-300 by 4pm.

Once Connaught House had been overtaken, the need to organise became apparent. This resulted in the previously scheduled Emergency General Meeting being held at 4pm in H216, on the Second Floor of Connaught House. When those stuck outside the room had gained entry to the meeting, the EGM proposed the following motion;

The Union notes the Divestment Charter and its backing by the UGM.

1. The Union notes the Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Court of Governors' on this day of 24th February at 5pm.

2. The Union believes that it is time to take action against the intransigence of the Connaught House bureaucracy.

3. The Union resolves to lobby the meeting of the Standing Committee to express our views.

4. The Union resolves to ratify the occupation of Connaught House effective from 2:15pm this afternoon on the demands of the Divestment Charter and calls for "no victimisation" of participants.

The status of the meeting was then transformed into an "Occupation Meeting" in order to select an "Occupation Committee". From the plethora of names proposed, the meeting narrowed down the list to twelve members. These members were selected to handle various aspects of the occupation including security, the availability of food and relations with the press.

Various points from the floor of the meeting included the bar staff of the Three Tuns offering their support by suggesting that they close the bar throughout the occupation. It was finally decided to shut the bar for two hours whilst the occupants picketed the Standing Committee of the Court of Governors', which was to be held in the Vera Anstey Room.

Before a number of occupiers left to picket the meeting, a letter from the Director of the School was received and read out to those assembled. Referring to the occupation of the building the letter pointed out that "...the school will take whatever steps may be deemed necessary to recover possession". The meeting responded by affirming the need to force a decision from the Standing Committee by maintaining the occupation.

The meeting closed with a decision to call EGM's throughout the occupation before many people left to confront the Standing Committee.



### Letter from the Director

To the unauthorised occupiers of Connaught House.

24 February 1987

Connaught House is owned by the London School of Economics and comprises the administrative offices of the School. Since about 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday 24 February, a number of people, other than members of the School on bona fide School business, entered and have been in occupation of Connaught House without any authority of the School or its officers. Those present in the building and any who may enter subsequently are not authorized by the School to be there for any reason and are all required to vacate Connaught House immediately and to refrain from unauthorised occupation of any part of the School's property, failing which the School will take whatever steps may be deemed necessary to recover possession.

I. G. Patel

It may be a less worthy cause, but on Tuesday, University College occupied the Student Union buildings, (mainly the bar, apparently), in support of their claims that they need new buildings for their Union. How much nicer can unions get?

Sussex University are attempting another occupation in order to protest over the fifty members of the University student population who were the victims of the last occupation. Unity, as always, is the keyword in these situations.

Support has been pledged from a member of Kings' Student Union. They welcome the initiative given by the LSE. They themselves are preparing for action over rising rents, and have invited LSE members to their UGM tomorrow to speak on the LSE insurrection.

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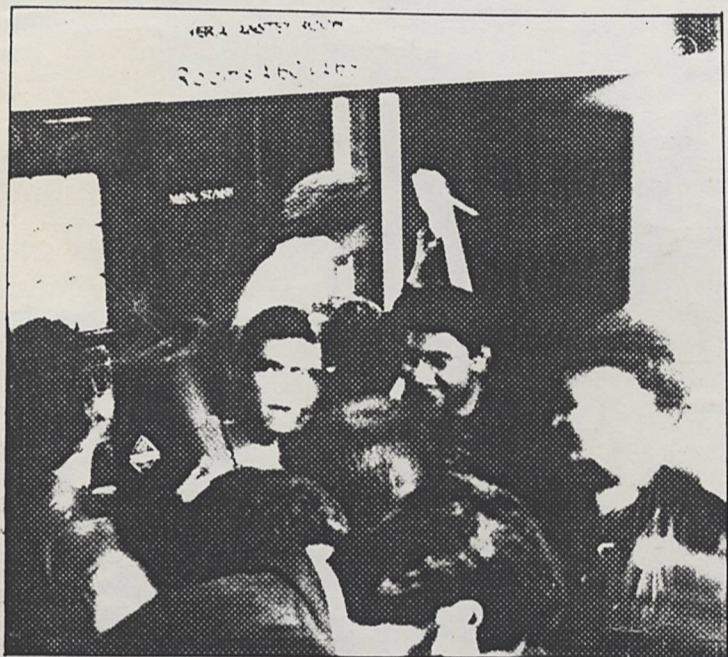
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18 JUN 1990

# The Occupation and the Future of Student Politics

## BEAVER

The London School of Economics Students' Union has dramatically escalated its long-term campaign to force the college's Court of Governors to divest its substantial holdings in apartheid-linked firms. The occupation which began on Tuesday afternoon has involved more than 250 students expressing their outrage at the School's implicit support for the apartheid regime in South Africa. It marks the culmination of an intensive campaign of education and agitation, of petition drives and candlelit vigils, of videos and rallies. Since 1978 divestment from apartheid had been official Student Union policy but only now have such numbers been moved to direct action.



This attempt to apply unprecedented pressures on the School comes against the background of mounting repression of dissent and resistance in South Africa and substantial threats to Student Union autonomy in Britain itself. The Botha regime has twice imposed state of emergency regulation since June, 1985, detaining without trial thousands of trade unionists, community leaders, and youth including children under the age of twelve. Amongst those in South Africa's gaols are strikers from the British Tyre and Rubber dispute, triggered by the sacking of 1,000 workers. BTR is one of the companies which LSE holds in its share portfolio.

At Sussex University the Student's Union confronts the loss of control over its assets, the prosecution of some officers, and disciplinary action against 48 students in the wake of a 10-day occupation. The LSE authorities have already issued a thinly veiled threat of "whatever action may be deemed necessary" to secure the premises - injunctions could soon be issued. Already, special branch officers have appeared on campus before the occupation even began. Our ability to take meaningful action to defend grants and welfare benefits or to express support for others in struggle is very much in jeopardy.

The Court of Governors has clung stubbornly to its shares in corporations such as Shell which literally fuel the machinery of the apartheid state. Regardless of the professed moral revulsion of individual members of the Court at the plight of South Africa's blacks, the LSE has continued to derive profits linked to the exploitation and oppression of black workers under apartheid. We are determined to make the LSE the first British university to cut its economic links with apartheid and toward this end the Students' Union asks for the understanding and active support of staff: lecturers, researchers, clerical workers, and porters.

We will attempt to maintain a clean Connaught House and assure that wages are paid as per usual. Thus far the Court refuses to even negotiate with student representatives -- MAKE THEM TALK -- MAKE THEM DIVEST.

It has often been lamented by those of an older generation that political apathy reigns among the students of today. Even at the LSE, the dichotomy of a past of militancy and an apathetic present has proven difficult to surmount. Until now.

Political participation by the LSE student body in the governing of its own college has faced a variety of difficulties and constraints. It is facile to group these factors together under the meaningless umbrella-term "apathy".

Fear of victimisation is, for many, a very real problem. In the words of one South American student, "I was at all the student demonstrations in Brazil; I haven't been to a single one here. I don't want to get kicked out. Possible punitive action by the school or the British authorities has kept many students, particularly those from overseas, from voicing their opinions. Clearly it is in the interests of the School to protect its reputation, here and abroad, and this will not be helped by the

sacrificing of students. The School must defend the right of political participation by its students if it is to secure its own future standing.

Political factionalism has led many students to identify issues along party political lines. Effective action has been considerably curtailed by different factions cancelling each other out. Political efficiency and unity has been difficult to achieve, and this in turn has led to the fizzling out of many important student campaigns. Insufficient and inefficient publicity has had the same effect. The spectrum of cliques in the LSE student body combines with poor advertising to limit the easy flow of communication throughout the School.

The absence of a fluent forum for student communication had equally played its part in preventing the emergence of a united student body. It is salutary to note, in this context, the resuscitation of "Beaver" as a channel for student dialogue.

To a large extent these factors explain the mediocrity of student

politics, and the preponderance of that paper tiger, "apathy", as a justification for such mediocrity. Last night's action has shattered the myth of apathy because it has surmounted the constraints upon student unity.

The present occupation will have a lasting effect on the reformulation of the LSE student politics. The realisation of this occupation will show that we can unite over an issue which crosses party lines and restores communication amongst the whole of the student body.

Thus undergraduates and postgraduates, Communists and Conservatives, home and foreign students can, despite such diversity, unite to challenge the administration over an issue which is an affront to the moral dignity of the LSE. The seizure of Connaught House has brought students closer to an understanding of their real power and responsibility in determining the nature of their college. The Occupation has already been a success in that it has achieved this much.

## Inside an Occupation

An elected committee in Connaught House has made an extremely proficient effort in organising the occupying students into an effective working body, provided with nearly all the comforts of home life.

The twelve committee members have all been allocated responsibilities in this time of action. Sleeping arrangements for the approximately 200-strong force have been made. Single sex and mixed sex sleeping rooms are on the seventh floor, along with a study area in the sumptuous surrounding of the committee rooms.

Food has been brought in from outside. Breakfast will be requisitioned from the students union shop; chocolate bars, fizzy drinks and crisps. A television and video have been brought in, and it is rumoured that the "Secret Society" film may be shown - the one the police have a great interest in.

A brisk look around the second floor of Connaught House and the activity in it is amazing. People are making sandwiches, organising security tours of the building, and setting up the occupation disco.

Security is very tight. Watches of at least four people are outside the only entrance which can be used. The many volunteers for the one-and-a-half hour long vigils are prepared to stay up around the clock.

Obedience and self restraint are high priorities for the committee. No smoking and restraints on drinking are going to be enforced, an indication of their moral conviction. So far, all has gone well, and the movement is looking strong and organised.

## London Wakes up to the News

Reactions to the occupation were numerous. Within hours of the occupation members of outside student unions and other bodies came in to express their solidarity. A student from King's College said, "It's exciting coming into a buzzing room, especially when you come from a staid college like ours". Virtually all London's colleges and polytechnics expressed immediate support for the action and pledged to give

more direct support as soon as physically possible.

Various student unions also put forward the idea of occupying their own colleges as a sign of support, including some outside London. A member of the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group said, "We think this is fantastic ... people are coming to support you from up and down the country". Support was particularly strong from UCL, already

on a 24 hour occupation, though not in connection with divestment, and Sussex University who are due to occupy again in support of their dispute with the college authorities.

The National Union of Students have also given their full support to the action, and promised "to give as much concrete support as necessary". Total support from the national student movement now seems guaranteed.