

## Students to choose between Viking Raid and ethical merchandise



By [Sian Turner](#), Deputy Editor (2008/09)  
Thursday 10 January 2008

This term's Viking Raid bar crawl is facing cancellation after YUSU revealed that it would be forced to scrap its Ethical Merchandising Policy in order to source t-shirts for the event.

"The popular event, Viking Raid, is unlikely to run this term as planned unless urgent action is taken to repeal the Ethical Merchandise policy currently in place," stated a YUSU press release.

On Wednesday's meeting of YUSU Executive, Service and Finance Officer Matt Burton was forced to admit that the ordering of the t-shirts had been left too late, leaving him with a choice between using unethically sourced garments or cancelling the event, which is set to run in Week 5.

The Union developed an Ethical Merchandise policy in 2006 following criticism for sourcing merchandise from companies accused of sweatshop production. The motion mandates Union officers to only order merchandise from companies approved by People & Planet's Ethical Merchandise guide. Burton claimed that "turnaround time issues" meant the only possible option would be to order t-shirts from Gildan, a company not on the approved list and which has been accused of sweatshop production in the past.

An Extraordinary General Meeting, entitled 'Save Viking Raid', has been called by YUSU President Anne-Marie Canning, to gauge student opinion on the issue and decide on a course of action. "This is definitely an occasion where we need to be led by our members and let them tell us what to do," said Canning.

The debate and vote will be held at 12.15pm on Tuesday, 15 January in V/X/001. A vote against the motion to break the Merchandising Policy, or a failure to reach quoracy would almost certainly lead to the cancellation of the bar crawl.

Cancellation could potentially damage the overall success of RAG week. "Last year, Viking Raid made RAG a significant amount of our total charitable income for the year. It also raises the profile of RAG amongst students. If it got cancelled, it would seriously affect the amount we could raise in the week and we would have to quickly organise another event," said YUSU Student Development and Charities Officer Joey Ellis,

The motion to be debated at the EGM will also call on YUSU to develop a more flexible approach to ethical supply for future events. YUSU Communications and Services Officer Sam Bayley said: "It's important to get the balance right between having a good ethical policy and one that can be followed to the letter without causing a detriment to our students," .

YUSU Environment and Ethics Officer Tom Langley said: "The [current] policy poses several serious logistical problems for the organisation of events like the Viking Raid. These companies are either too small to deal with an order of over 1,000 items or are unrealistically expensive."



11 comments

[Sam Bayley](#)

10 Jan '08 at 7:04 pm

To clarify, this isn't really a YUSU Exec or Officer blunder; because of the way Viking Raid works, the policy that we currently have will always make it difficult to run Viking Raid whilst following it to the letter! It's due to the turnaround of bar sponsorship and sourcing and printing times...

The motion that has been put forward would hopefully still provide a strong ethical grounding while making it easier for events such as this to run effectively - so everyone wins - students, events organisers, and people affected by unethical clothing companies.

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[A former Nouse Columnist](#)

10 Jan '08 at 7:36 pm

Yet again poor planning in YUSU and a lack of regard for previous policy is demonstrated, a trait that has occurred far too often in YUSU's history with amendments made on a monthly basis to best aid the governing group of the day. To introduce an ethical clause and then wish to opt out for the sake of a money making scheme is morally reprehensible!

YUSU should cancel the raid and make a substantial contribution to RAG as compensation, that is unless the team haven't blown the budget on drugs and hookers a kin to last year!!

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[Colin Hindson](#)

10 Jan '08 at 10:30 pm

I started to read the comment above to see if it was a coherent argument. Then I reached this:

'that's is unless the team haven't blown the budget on drugs and hookers a kin to last year'

and then the authors level of ignorance and blatant stupidity ruined any chance of me thinking it had been written by anyone other than a petty child.

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[A Raiding Viking](#)

10 Jan '08 at 10:54 pm

The blunder was not changing the policy for a more flexible one earlier, in time for the Viking Raid. We've known about the problems with the existing policy for ages. It should not contain a link to an external website, and should account for the need to order high volumes of t-shirts within a limited timeframe, whilst still encouraging the use of ethical merchandise and banning use of companies like Fruit of the Loom who show no regard for ethical concerns whatsoever.

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[Sam Bayley](#)

11 Jan '08 at 11:25 am

Just for info, "A former Nouse columnist", YUSU can't just give its students' money to RAG, because that would be Ultra Vires (illegal).

And, Mr/s Raiding Viking, whilst the officers in question did attempt to come up with a correction to the policy last term, trying to get everyone to agree to something for submission is about as easy as trying to order merchandise in time for Viking Raid from the current motion's list - which is to say, impossible.

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[Oliver Lester](#)

[Oliver Lester](#)

13 Jan '08 at 3:11 pm

I like the photo you used for this story!

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[Michael Rutherford](#)

14 Jan '08 at 6:41 pm

Sian and "a former Nouse columnist", I'm interested to know how you think YUSU should pay for its t-shirts if they're being bought using sponsorship money? Do you really think that a bar is going to pay in the summer for an event happening in February?

Very poor journalism in my opinion.

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[Steve Jones](#)

16 Jan '08 at 12:49 am

Absolute Idiots.... I have read on facebook that you have managed to buy your t-shirts from Starworld... and kept to ethical sourcing.

Only 1 problem.....the absolute morons than try to run this SU should have listened to Carnage people a few months ago. Their t-shirts are from exactly the same company...Starworld! I have 3 of them from their other events in the country, the labels are the same!

I should imagine however that due to scale of economy, they were offering these SAME t-shirts to YUSU cheaper! The same damn t-shirts that the morons in charge of YUSU payed over the odds for!

Well done!

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[Sam Bayley](#)

16 Jan '08 at 2:12 pm

Steve, it appears you've just identified the problem behind the dynamic motion. Back then, we were forbidden to use Starworld because People and Planet hadn't updated their list. On Sunday, they became "ethical" according to our policy, because People and Planet decided to change the list.

And we did listen to the Carnage rep, who told us that the t-shirts weren't ethically sourced - straight from the horse's mouth.

You'll also remember that we didn't think the event fitted in with our welfare policy and some of the photos on the Carnage website illustrated that quite well.

So I think we'll stick with our event formula, which generally sells out and still manages to offer much better value to students (such as free entry to Gallery or Toffs), thanks all the same.

PS. Seeing as you don't seem to be on the student database, are you just another alias for John Thomas, Sarah Collins, Adrian Bolton or Ryan K?

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[Chris Northwood](#)

16 Jan '08 at 5:47 pm

Not quite sure I really understand the ramblings of the Carnage shrill above. iirc the main difference between Carnage and the Viking Raid is the profits from the Viking Raid go to charity, the origin of the t-shirts is irrelevant...

Sam Bayley hits the point bang on the head though. Why is Starworld more ethical than Gildan? The decision seems to have happened behind the closed doors of P&P with no accountability, and allowing YUSU to continue to be held hostage like this is undermining the democracy of our own SU :/

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Tom Langley

23 Jan '08 at 5:51 am

Chris,

The People and Planet list was not originally intended to be proscriptive but a helpful starting point for student societies. The research that went into it was massively helpful to the YUSU exec, and P and P have certainly never 'held YUSU to ransom'. As one of the YUSU environment and Ethics officers, I was one of the people involved in the decision to use Starworld as a supplier, so perhaps I can offer some insight.

Some of the main concerns about Gildan were over allegations of closing plants on a days notice, and reports of aggressive Union-busting over the last few years. Although the company have made some good steps forward in their policy, these issues were very worrying - attempts to stop workers unionising are usually a sign that other working rights are being abused.

Starworld, from what we can tell, are slightly different in set up. Although the difference in price is minimal, Starworld have far fewer overheads because their entire chain of production is in one site in Egypt (while Gildan, Hanes and Fruit of the Loom will have each stage in different countries, having to provide profits at every stage of production and having to pay for shipping between sites). From what we can tell they have saved on their infrastructure rather than their working conditions.

Research into these companies is obviously very complicated, and to an extent we are reliant on the examples of other organisations - Starworld are used by several NGOs like Oxfam, Banardos and People and Planet themselves. Given that ethical merchandising is one of P and P's national campaigns, we can be reasonably confident in our decision to endorse Starworld. If evidence emerges to the contrary we will of course have to reconsider.

People and Planet were more than happy to oblige by adding Starworld to the list, as they would have been if they had been asked to add them earlier - the reason that Starworld had not previously been suggested was that based on previous prices they did not seem economically viable, and it was only when they were contacted for a bulk order quote that we realised they were. It was not a behind the scenes decision made by the society.

Next week a motion will be put to the UGM proposing that the YUSU E and E officers, in co-operation with other officers, research and maintain the list.

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