

Pay more for less?

hundreds of redundancies already planned at scores of universities. This will mean larger class sizes and fewer contact hours for students. With this latest and greatest raft of cuts, even prestigious universities like Oxford and Cambridge are feeling the pinch - a pinch university management has shown itself all too eager to pass on to students and staff while awarding themselves massive salaries for doing so (last year, despite industry-wide cuts, the average raise awarded to a university vice chancellor was 10%).

In addition to cutting staff, closing courses and shutting down faculties, universities result in what amounts to an all out attack on students' standards of living and quality of education.

Even before this latest and most sweeping range of cuts was announced universities bosses had begun to swing the axe, with

What higher education cuts mean for students.



towards chasing investment from big businesses. The result will be a creeping privatisation of education, with students needs falling by the wayside in the process. As students, we can't allow these cuts to pass without a fight. Last year saw student resistance flare up across the country, with occupations and strikes against cuts at several universities, where students and university workers stood shoulder to shoulder in our opposition to uni management and the government on whose orders these attacks are being carried out. Now, facing a fresh round of cuts, we have to build on these struggles and fight back at a national level, or we'll pay the price in rising fees and a declining quality of education for years to come. It's time to get organised; it's time to resist!

AGITATE! EDUCATE!

Anarchist Education Workers

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Living with the axe



Work in the education factory.

For workers in universities cuts are nothing new. For years, retiring academics have been replaced by cheap contract teachers, or by no one at all. Cleaners, porters and administrators have been 'rationalised' and their contracts attacked. Except for a minority of academic superstars and, of course, an increasingly bloated management, everyone in the education sector is now doing more work for less money. University workers have lived with the axe for a long time now - many of us have never known anything else. The coming 40% cut and Browne's 'reforms' are the brutal climax of a process that's far from new.

The process began in the 1980s with years of chronic underfunding, made worse in 1992 when former polytech-

nic converted to universities and were brought into the same, inadequate, funding model. In 1997, the Dearing report, commissioned by Tories and implemented by Labour (sound familiar?), first introduced student fees. The student grant was already long gone and the Student Loans Company already up and running ready to take over the (mis)administration of fees. In 2004 fees went up as the cap was raised. Now, with variable fees and the almost complete removal of government funding for teaching yet another crucial step is about to be taken.

These attacks are not 'Tory cuts', they are part of a consistent policy going back decades through different governments. The Browne report builds on Labour's 2009 Higher Ambitions strategy which all

rests on years of 'reforms' and cuts. This is not about saving money. It is about who should benefit from university education and how.

Browne makes it clear that students choosing between courses and universities should be forced to make an economic choice - how much money will I make out of this degree? The massive debts that students will be forced to take on ensure this. What this means, of course, is that it is employers who decide what matters in a degree - not students and certainly not staff. Indeed, Labour made this very clear suggesting that businesses should "have a crucial role in the funding and design of programmes" and that "universities should become more flexible in providing for business demand". To make this possible, universities should compete for funding "with the winners being those universities who can best respond to these evolving economic changes". Higher education is to become an appendage of business, with universities competing for scraps and students bending over backwards to meet employers demands. Business is to use the university system to dump its training costs onto first the government and then, through the loans system, onto its own workers.

This is yet another massive transfer of wealth from ordinary workers to businesses and corporations. University workers will have their pay and conditions slashed, students will sit in bigger, more expensive, 'business aware' classes simply for the chance to keep their head down for thirty years to pay off crushing debts, while bosses and the city make out, once again, like the bandits that they are.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Stopping the cuts at Sussex: lessons from the anti-war movement

As the scale of the budget cut-backs begins to sink in, there are signs of a nascent movement against the cuts, with hundreds attending public meetings across the country, including a packed-out meeting in Brighton for the local launch of the Stop the Cuts Coalition. The last time this many people were mobilised, over a million marched through London with the Stop the War Coalition against the Iraq war. But Blair called our bluff and the war went ahead. What can we learn from these experiences for the fight against cuts? After the massive demonstrations in London, many in Brighton felt that sheer numbers alone weren't enough. Instead, the anti-war movement in Brighton took a different path, based on mass direct action.



The usual large demonstrations were organised, but instead of predictable A-B strolls these became mass acts of civil disobedience. Roads were taken over and blocked all over town, hundreds of school kids walked out of school to lead the demonstrations and the town hall was stormed and briefly occupied. While some of these actions remained as symbolic and spectacular as big A-B marches, peoples' strong feelings of anger changed a usually passive form of protest into something with the potential to be more. This sense of possibility not only shaped the actions but also the participants. For a while, it really seemed possible to actually stop the war through civil disobedience and mass direct action. Alas, it was not to be. Which brings us to the


anti-cuts movement. The current cuts are a direct attack on our livelihoods in a way not seen since Thatcher. This raises the possibility of industrial direct action – strikes, occupations, work-to-rules, sabotage – as well as street-based civil disobedience. This starts to sound like something which really could force the government to back down as the 'necessity' for the cuts is revealed as plain old-fashioned class war. What we need is direct action organized from below. With sufficient rank-and-file anger, the TUC may be pushed into calling only the second general strike in British history. However, it's us, not the union bosses who can stop cuts. Most importantly, we need to recognise that stopping the cuts is more than just

a numbers game. The biggest imaginable march past parliament won't reverse policy. Mass direct action, especially industrial action, just might. On campus, we need student action in supporting staff as they face the inevitable next round of cuts in education. We need students organising in our own workplaces. And if we want to see that happen we can't put our faith in anything other than our solidarity and ability to organise. We must take a lead in organising ourselves rather than waiting on the TUC or anyone else to do it for us.

casualised, flexible workforce created. The mass redundancies and course closures are all part of making this possible. Coordinated action between workers and students to make business as usual in the university impossible is what is needed. Strikes and occupations as we have seen in Sussex, Nottingham Trent and elsewhere are needed, but on a grander scale. This is a difficult fight, but it can be won.

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However, all this can be resisted. The plan in 2004 was for variable fees, which was defeated by the lecturers' strike of 2006 – the new money went to increased salaries rather than into cut price, 'business friendly' courses. This time, with the axe swinging harder than it ever has before, it will take much more than that, but it can be done. To get what they want, national pay agreements must be broken up and a new

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We will ask for nothing, We will demand nothing, We will take, We will occupy.

The Case for Occupation

Postgraduate study should be open to all

ger and stronger protests, let us look back to the Iraq war as an example. Throughout 2003 we, like many other students at the time, were involved in the "Stop the War" demonstrations. Then, as will undoubtedly still be the case now, a million strong demonstration in London, the largest in UK history, was not enough to change the government's mind. Over the following two years successive demonstrations dwindled into nothing as people became increasingly disillusioned with the process. This cannot be allowed to happen again!

We need a united, sustained fight back against attacks on education; a fight back that not only hopes to bring university workers and students together on the streets but also in the workplace. We also need to recognise that only direct action gets the goods. A to B marches may bring a temporary boost to the egos of union bureaucrats and an opportunity for recruitment for the various Left

do nothing for us, the students, in the long-run. Last year Universities across Britain staged relatively successful occupations to win aid for the people of Gaza. This tactic has worked before, not just in the UK but all over the world, and can work again. We need to be applying pressure at the local level building momentum toward a national wave of strikes and occupations to fight both cuts and future fee hikes. Only when we can demonstrate that we have the power to bring the education system in this country to a halt will the government listen. Similar movements have emerged across Europe, in Italy, Greece, Germany, Austria and Spain, and have proved militant enough to make the state pause education reform. We need to not just preserve what we have, but fight for a better system where education is truly open and available to all.

The time for occupation is now!

addition to an already hefty level of personal debt following higher education. For many the only viable route is to apply for research funding either through external bodies like the Economic and Social Research Council. However, these sources have also seen massive funding cuts in recent years. They are also highly politicised with, for example in the social sciences, funding councils favouring applicants who can demonstrate their research has some application for the business world or bureaucratic state management. The result is that radical research, and those most likely to pursue radical research, are effectively excluded from postgraduate study. This also fosters a competitive environment, ment loan can help ease the financial burden, but not everyone will be eligible (those with a bad credit history will be refused) and these loans are often an

Every time we have been confronted with attacks on our education system - from the grant, to "top-up fees" to the latest wave of cuts - the response of the NUS, UCU and other related unions has been the same: national, lawful protest. This is exactly what was proposed for the 10th November and likely to be the limit of what is proposed in terms of future action. This is despite the fact that, going right back to the reforms against grants, this has never proved to be a successful tactic. If people believe that all we need to build is big-



continuing into academic life, where students are encouraged to compete with each other's research instead of looking for areas for co-operation and common study. Initiatives like the "anarchist studies network" represent an alternative to these structures – effectively building a self-help network for anarchists in the academy – but what is really needed is a generalised fight back uniting all those involved in the higher education system, from the support staff right up to the full-time academic staff. Only then can we start re-shaping the kind of education system we want - one open to all who desire to study, not one based on economic advantage.

You will be well aware of the general squeeze in higher education funding, places and teaching and support staff for many the only viable route is to apply for research funding either through external bodies like the Economic and Social Research Council. However, these sources have also seen massive funding cuts in recent years. They are also highly politicised with, for example in the social sciences, funding councils favouring applicants who can demonstrate their research has some application for the business world or bureaucratic state management. The result is that radical research, and those most likely to pursue radical research, are effectively excluded from postgraduate study. This also fosters a competitive environment,

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