

Urgent action needed as EMA scrapped

ORGANISE TO STOP EDUCATION CUTS!

THE GOVERNMENT definitely Con-Dem-ed young people with the cuts package in the Comprehensive Spending Review!

Jethro Waldron
College student, Nottingham

The Browne Review put forward the spectre of limitless tuition fees with the Lib Dems talking about a cap of £12,000. Meanwhile, 80% cuts in the funding of universities are planned. But the government has also announced £343 million worth of cuts to colleges and that the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) will be scrapped.

EMA is paid to students in colleges from lower income households, who receive between £10 and £30 a week. Before the Con-Dems got into power, it also included a bonus of £100 every term for good work and attendance.

The EMA system had many failings – recently, it became notorious for failing to pay out money to students. This was partly due to the administration of EMA being farmed out to a private company who, predictably, sacked many workers in pursuit of profit, overwhelming a workforce of a few hundred who had to process thousands of claims.

In addition EMA payments are rarely adequate. I receive £10 EMA a week. EMA is intended to pay for all incidental costs associated with continuing in education after the age of 16 such as transport

costs and equipment. Seeing as my weekly bus travel to and from college costs £14.50, my EMA, although better than nothing, is not enough.

There are also many costs that you don't anticipate, and that EMA can help with. For example, my college runs theatre trips for English students. Although the tickets are heavily discounted, they cost at least £5 a time.

Another big cost this year has been to do with exams. I sat my AS-levels last year and wanted remarks on four of my papers. If my marks had stayed the same or gone down, this might have set me back £300. Why should these things be reserved for only the richest students?

What this shows is that cutting EMA is going to price a lot of students out of post-16 education. Ability, motivation and ambition are going to mean little in a Con-Dem Britain – if you can't pay you

would not have much of a choice but to join the dole queue.

The value of EMA was confirmed in a 2004 study by Loughborough University, which found that staying-on rates at college improved by 5.9% between 2003 and 2004 (the year EMA was launched).

If anything, EMA should have been extended. The government never made provision for students who come from families earning more than £30,000 a year, but who have high mortgages or big childcare costs.

Scrapping EMA is not fair. But doing nothing while the government walks all over us is not an option. Students need to get organised to defend their rights and defeat the cuts.

Youth Fight for Jobs and Socialist Students will be at the forefront of this movement, and I suggest that every student joins us.

See page 8 for reports of youth and student protests.

Fund our future: stop education cuts

National Union of Students (NUS) demonstration 10 November, Horse Guards Avenue, London SW1, 11.30am.

College students will be hit hard by these cuts and should be on the NUS demonstration. Get in touch with Youth Fight for Jobs and start organising at your college to attend on 10 November, even if that means walking out. Your teachers' union, UCU, even supports the demo!

Email youthfightforjobs@googlemail.com or call 020 8558 7947

whatwestandfor

The Socialist Party fights for socialist change – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also fight, in our day-to-day campaigning, for every possible improvement for working-class people.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a democratic, socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Work & Income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retire-

ment pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstatement the link with average earnings now.

- Reject 'Welfare to Work'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Public services

- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!

- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

New workers' party

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party!

Socialism and Internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Iraq and Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neo-liberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!