

Condemn brutal policing of students

AS PARLIAMENT prepared to vote on Thursday 9 December on the trebling of tuition fees, 35,000 marched to defend their futures.

Once again, many of the young people protesting will not be directly affected by these attacks, but are campaigning for the young people who follow them into education.

Joining them were trade unionists with banners from PCS, RMT, UCU, CWU, Unison, NUT, Unite and the National Shop Stewards Network, and many parents and family members.

Since Thursday's demonstration, many workers are expressing their sympathy with the young people who were caught up in the scenes of fury and frustration outside parliament.

As MPs voted to destroy the futures of young people, they were protected by massed ranks of riot police, vans and horses, intent on crushing the young people who had the courage to stand up to them.

For weeks, school, college and university students have protested, facing extremely heavy-handed policing every time.

Routes agreed with police have been blocked, young people have been viciously kettled for hours on end, taunted and provoked.

Over 200 had been arrested even

before Thursday's events. Despite all this, young people have continued to peacefully protest, retaining the support of their families, trade unionists and the general public.

And then on Thursday, when thousands upon thousands of young people marched in the hope that their voices might have been heard, they were faced once again with a massive police deployment.

The vast majority of Thursday's demonstrators were not involved in throwing missiles or any other violence, despite facing 'kettling' and police violence and intimidation.

Many students correctly expressed the view that the government would be defeated by mass action, not by a minority throwing things.

At the same time the blame for the scenes outside parliament was rightly laid at the feet of the government and the police.

As one student said: "We've been kettled for six hours, charged by police horses and batons, while the millionaires in government take our right to education away from us."

"No wonder students feel frustrated. The millionaires who own the press are reporting that we are violent, but in reality a whole generation is having its future violently torn away from it."

A student at SOAS university in London who took part in the dem-



Demonstrations need organisation and democratic stewarding.

onstration, said: "The police were responsible for the violence yesterday, it was after hours of provocative policing and students being denied democratic rights".

As the Socialist Party and Youth

Fight for Education have argued, the way forward is through organisation, democratically controlled stewarding to protect protesters, and the building of mass action of students and workers together.

I watched the mounted police charge three or four times and the riot squads baton people indiscriminately. I saw one girl hit who had turned to help her friend up to avoid her being trampled. People were screaming for their friends still trapped in the kettle and the police were pushing people over who tried to wait to meet them.

Rae Lewis Ayling,

The police were a disgrace, perhaps partly from nerves and over-exaggeration of who was in the crowd - to them everyone was an anarchist, when there were probably more school students in their uniform.

David Brook

Interview with 24 November protesters



Two of the school students with the police van.

photos Paul Mattsson

On the 24 November day of action, 8,000 people tried to march in central London only to spend nine hours being 'kettled' by police with no access to food, water or toilet facilities.

Many of the images used to depict that day showed a rusty old police van that appeared to have been left in the middle of the crowd to provoke an attack.

Here Suzanne Beishon talks to two of the school students who linked arms around the van to try to prevent this.

Why did you decide to join the protests?

We both strongly disagree with the increase in student fees and the cutting of EMA and thought it was a good opportunity to express that.

What was your experience of the protests up until the police 'kettle'?

At the beginning of the protest we thought that the atmosphere was great and it was all very peaceful and enjoyable.

How do you think the police handled the demonstration?

Although a lot of the police we came across were very nice, I know a couple of friends who were hit with ba-

tons unnecessarily who were both in school uniform, which shocked us.

What was it like to be 'kettled'?

Being kettled was definitely not very fun at all. It was very cold and neither of us were really dressed for it.

Why were you protecting the police van?

Because we knew that the media was going to focus on the vandalism of the van etc as opposed to the positive side of the protest. A small number of people were getting way too caught up in trashing the police and they were forgetting why they were actually there - which was frustrating.

What do you think of the media's response to the protest?

Most of the media did decide to focus on the small outbreaks of violence and they blew it up to seem like it was much more than it was, using the same clips over and over and not really showing all the good things that were happening elsewhere.

What has the response been like since the protest? Do you think students will be put off further protests and demonstrations?

Though the media made a big deal about the violence, we don't think that it has affected public opinion particularly badly and nobody we know has been discouraged from attending future protests. I think Tuesday's (30 November) protest also proves that students haven't been put off - even though it was snowing!

London students vote to coordinate with workers

STUDENTS HAVE shown their huge opposition to the cuts programme of the coalition government on many demonstrations and protests. On Sunday 12 December the London Student Assembly (LSA) met and agreed a number of campaigning plans.

On 29 January, the Young Members' Network of the PCS civil servants' union is planning a demonstration in Manchester to a TUC rally against youth unemployment.

Campaigning by Youth Fight for Education (YFE) supporters meant that the LSA, which brings together student activists from across London, agreed to back this demo.

A demonstration of young workers and students marching side by side against education cuts, job losses and other attacks will be a big step forwards for building a united fightback.

The LSA also agreed to back the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) anti-cuts conference on 22 January. Many students have been drawing the conclusion that their movement would be massively strengthened by uniting with anti cuts unions across the country and, crucially, with the trade unions, who

have enormous potential power.

The NSSN conference will provide the opportunity for such coordination.

Unfortunately, despite the Socialist Workers Party's participation in the leadership of the NSSN, their members sought to deny students this opportunity by arguing for a separate national assembly on the same day, led by students but aiming to appeal to trade unions and the whole anti-cuts movement. This proposal will be discussed at a planning meeting on 14 December, as The Socialist goes to press.

YFE argues for a conference that represents the whole of the education movement, with anti-cuts groups in schools, colleges and universities, as well as education-based trade unions, electing delegates to a national conference, which can then vote on motions and a strategy.

This should not clash with the NSSN conference. Some local groups may find a conference difficult in January given the exam period for some students so YFE argues for this to take place as early as possible in February.

See page 1 for NSSN details.
Ben Robinson

Socialism Today

The mass protests against the Con-Dem government's attack on students and young people has drawn comparisons with the events of 1968. So what really happened in that 'year of revolution'? On the 40th anniversary of May 68 the Socialist Party's monthly magazine, *Socialism Today*, produced a special commemorative edition, with reprints of articles from the time including the debates within the Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation on 'student power' and the role of the working class in the struggle for a new society.

Copies are available, for £2.50 including postage (cheques payable to *Socialism Today*) from PO Box 24697, London, E11 1YD.

