

Youth Democratic Rights Campaign Student receives draconian sentence

EDWARD WOOLLARD, the student protester who has admitted dropping a fire extinguisher from the roof of the Tory Party HQ on 10 November 2010, has been handed a 32-month jail sentence.

Claire Laker Mansfield
Socialist Students

Although what he did was clearly extremely dangerous (and is not condoned by Socialist Students), this prison sentence is an utterly inappropriate response to what was a 'moment of madness' in which, thankfully, no one was hurt.

The incident took place in a very highly charged and unexpected situation, with the police behaving violently towards students - using batons and beating back the protesters.

Despite this, and the fact that 30 people attested to Edward's good character, the judge still saw fit to punish him in this way. The personal cost to Edward Woollard will be a high one, but the sentence was not aimed simply at him as an individual; it was an attempt to send a message to the whole movement.

The purpose of this long jail term, the judge even admitted, is to "make an example" of Edward and gives further evidence that the government plans to follow through on its promise to use the 'full force of the law' against protesters.

Over 200 students have been arrested so far. Clearly shaken by the wave of mass action that broke out in the autumn, the Con-Dems are keen to quell the student movement through victimisation and intimidation. They also wish to set a precedent, preparing the ground for dealing with the mass struggles likely to develop in the next months



Hundreds of protesters have been injured by police violence.

photo Senan

as workers move into action against the vicious cuts agenda.

The case also exposes the enormous hypocrisy of both the government and the police. What of the police who dragged Jody McIntyre from his wheelchair and almost killed student Alfie Meadows through a blow to the head with a baton?

And what of the MPs who, whilst protected by riot police assembled in their thousands, voted to sign

away the future of a whole generation?

There is clearly an attempt underway to put young people off protesting and fighting back. The treatment of students involved in the Millbank protest, demonstrations on 24 and 30 November and the march on 9 December, with hundreds of arrests being made, is all part of this.

We must argue for greater organisation and for elected stewards

to protect our demonstrations. We need democratic, anti-cuts and Youth Fight for Education groups in every school, college and university, linked on a regional and national level, able to organise and coordinate action.

Elected stewards from every anti-cuts campaign would have the authority to direct and protect the demonstrations, making them as safe and effective as possible.

The Youth Democratic Rights campaign has been set up by Youth Fight for Jobs and Education to defend the right to protest. We say no to the criminalisation of students and call for the charges to be dropped against protesters.

Although the government won the vote on tripling tuition fees on 9 December, this fight is far from over. Now we need to rebuild the momentum of the student movement.

Education Maintenance Allowance 11 January day of action

Nottingham

AFTER A small rally in the Old Market Square, we marched to a rally outside the Vodafone store resulting in it closing for the rest of the working day. When we felt we had made our point we marched to the Nottingham Conservative Party offices. The anger was so contagious that many students who hadn't heard about our march joined us and by the time we reached the Tory offices there were 200 or 300 of us.

When we got there one of our group was arrested for alleged vandalism. The brutal treatment he got was massively uncalled for, and when a few people tried to help the 16 year old student, the police started to lash out at them - kicking, punching and throwing them onto the floor.

We then decided to hold a small rally outside the police station, but the student was moved off to another location, so we marched to that police station too, still gathering numbers.

On the way to the station one of the school students saw a Vodafone store and immediately sprang towards it and the march then became an occupation of this store.

What impressed me most was people's ability to make an instant connection between EMA being axed and tuition fees being hiked, and Vodafone's £6 billion in unpaid tax.

Stuart Lambert

Halifax

AROUND 40 college and school students marched through Halifax chanting: "David Cameron hear us say, EMA is here to stay" and "No ifs, no buts, no education cuts".

We made our way to the town hall to demand that, should the government force through its cuts, then Halifax's Labour council should campaign for funds so that EMA can continue as well as the public services it is currently planning to cut.

We then moved on to the Halifax bank headquarters where we protested against the obscene bonuses that the bankers are yet again giving themselves and called for the wealth of the banks to be used to benefit all in society, not just an elite.

Iain Dalton, Youth Fight for Jobs and Education Yorkshire organiser

Truro, Cornwall

AROUND 40 students and activists marched over two miles to County Hall in Truro. The demonstrators marched with placards saying 'Don't Con-Dem us to unemployment', chanting: "Education for the masses, not just for the ruling classes". The march was met with huge support from members of the public.

Upon arriving at County Hall, the protesters continued chanting and many members of staff and councillors offered their support.

Six protesters got into the main council meeting and began putting up anti-cuts posters and shouting "no ifs, no buts, no education cuts", before being removed. The short occupation forced the council to debate education cuts.

Josiah Mortimer

Leeds

100 SCHOOL, college, and university students marched through Leeds to Leeds City Labour council. Following the protest, there was a public meeting of 55 people at Leeds Met university to discuss where to take the campaign to save EMA.

The protest and meeting had a ridiculously heavy police presence. Around 30 police surrounded the meeting, so we refused to start while we were being intimidated. Eventually the police left and the meeting agreed to build for walkouts and protests at schools and colleges on the national day of action and to mobilise for the national demonstration in Manchester on 29 January.

Ian Pattison, Leeds Socialist Students

See www.socialistparty.org.uk for full versions of these reports as well as an update on the Leeds Trinity occupation and plans to set up a student assembly in Calderdale and Kirklees, Yorkshire.

Urgent action needed to end youth unemployment

AS THE Con-Dem coalition and Labour engage in pointless bickering over who "caused" the current problem with youth unemployment, the fact remains that nothing is being done to combat it.

The Tories are blaming Labour schemes that did nothing to help people back into employment, whilst Labour blames the cutting of schemes such as the Future Jobs Fund. The truth is that both are to blame.

The Future Jobs Fund, by only giving temporary work, was used to massage the unemployment figures and did little to help those who were unemployed. Whilst obviously critical of such schemes, Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) condemns the coalition's decision to just get rid of it rather than improve it.

As they continue their brutal ideological attack on the welfare state we'll see unemployment, especially for young people, grow and grow. Instead of cuts and token schemes, we need socialist policies that offer a real future for young people.

We need proper training schemes, on agreed trade union

rates of pay, with a guaranteed job at the end. Then we could see people getting the skills needed to get employment and end the pointless cycle of young people learning skills only to be thrown back on the dole at the end of it.

We need genuine job creation schemes. For instance we have thousands of builders on the dole and yet there is a housing shortage. A mass programme to build social housing would solve both problems.

For those with the skills needed to help in green energy projects, a renewable energy building scheme would not only help with offering cheap affordable energy but would offer employment to thousands.

Only through measures like this will we begin to deal with youth unemployment.

Unfortunately none of these will come to fruition with the current parties vying for power. We need to build a mass campaign to demand these and other policies aimed at helping people rather than giving profits to big business.

Matt Whale, YFJ unemployed organiser