

National education shutdown needed

DESPITE THE government rail-roading its attacks on young people through parliament, the 29 January demonstrations showed that there is still willingness to fight back. The young people who turned out on the protests in London and Manchester demonstrated to everyone that they understood that what parliament has made law can be made inconsequential by mass movements.

Claire Laker-Mansfield
Socialist Students

Now young people will be looking forward, asking what is needed in order to win. If students are to win victories, escalating student actions and linking with workers in trade unions will be vital.

The lecturers' union, UCU, is currently balloting for strike action over attacks to the pensions, pay and conditions of workers. But it is also about the general attacks on education, including tripling tuition fees, scrapping Education Maintenance

Allowance (EMA) and slashing the budgets of higher and further education.

If UCU members vote to strike in defence of education then students must give mass support - attending picket lines and organising demonstrations. But more than that, what's needed is for students to go out on strike too, in support of their teachers, lecturers and support staff and in defence of their right to an education.

So far, walkouts have been staged in schools, colleges and universities across the country but what's needed on the strike day is something bigger. We need a national education shutdown with every school, college and campus in Britain closed for a day of mass protest against this brutal government of the rich.

Added significance may well be given if, as is likely, the strike takes place on or around budget day on 23 March. If, on the day the government announces its next dose of pain, thousands of young people and workers are out on picket lines



UCU members on strike at London Met university in 2009.

photo Paul Mattsson

and protesting on the streets, it will send a very powerful message to the politicians in Westminster. It will let

them know that if they think that they will get away with making the worst attacks on ordinary people for

generations, then they are mistaken. The fightback is not over, it is only just beginning.

PCS young members' network conference

THE CIVIL servants' union, PCS, held its annual Young Members' Forum in Manchester from 4 to 6 February. 75 delegates, 33 of whom were attending their first ever union event, came together from every region.

Nick Parker

Alan Warner, outgoing Young Members' Chair, kicked off by making some remarks about the leading role which PCS young members have played in building the union's campaigns over the last year.

He was followed by Tracy Edwards, National Young Members' Organiser, who explained that the campaigning approach of young members in PCS has spread to other unions. For example, it forced the TUC to call a demonstration on 29 January to defend young people's rights.

I then gave a short talk about the campaign of PCS in Jobcentre Plus contact centres to defend the conditions of staff. We are regularly forced to put meaningless statistics and arbitrary targets before the interests of the vulnerable peo-

ple we serve.

It is now likely that a ballot will take place involving all Jobcentre Plus contact centre members. At the end of the weekend, I was proud to announce that over £250 had been raised towards the hardship fund.

There were workshop sessions including representing members in personal cases, a history of trade unionism in the civil service and how to build a community campaign. There were also plenary sessions about how to fight the cuts and the unfolding revolutionary events in North Africa and the Middle East.

Left Unity, the socialist group in PCS, held a fringe meeting at a nearby venue on Saturday night. The meeting attracted over 20 young members eager to hear about what they can do to make sure PCS further develops as a campaigning, fighting union.

The weekend demonstrated that a united and campaigning network of activists can be constructed. I would encourage everyone to join a union and to help re-build the trade unions as an effective campaigning and democratic movement.



PCS members on strike in 2008.

Yorkshire: organising the student movement

Calderdale and Kirklees

THE LAUNCH meeting of the Calderdale and Kirklees Student Assembly (CKSA) took place on Sunday 30 January in Halifax. The Assembly heard from several speakers including Sam Garrett, a student who took part in the occupation of Leeds Trinity and Mike Forster, an activist in Kirklees Unison (speaking in a personal capacity).

Tom Walpole, an activist in CKSA, reported on what we have done so far. The meeting discussed practical issues, including an upcoming demonstration in Halifax on 12 February. We also discussed linking up with others in the fight against cuts and we will be sending representatives to the local anti-cuts campaigns

both in Calderdale and Kirklees as well as seeking to affiliate to them and to Youth Fight for Jobs and Education.

Katie Bates, Secretary CKSA

Leeds Trinity

LEEDS TRINITY Students Against Cuts won a victory with two of our demands met by university management and we have gained a permanent campaign office to organise further action from. We intend to continue campaigning to raise awareness of the cuts and the impact they will have at Trinity. We want to thank Youth Fight for Jobs and Education - to which we have affiliated - for their help and

advice during our struggle.

Leeds Trinity occupiers

Leeds College of Music

STUDENTS FROM Leeds College of Music (LCM) met with Leeds Socialist Students for the first meeting of the new anti-cuts group Leeds College of Music Students Against Cuts (LCMSAC).

The group discussed the fact that LCM is facing the abolition of its entire teaching budget and fees could go up to £7,000 a year. We will raise awareness of this and try to get the support of the student union to get cheap or free transport to national demonstrations.

Jonny Mawson, LCMSAC

Demonstrating against cuts in Grimsby

ON 29 January, students and workers united in a bid to make their voices heard about the recent cuts brought about by the coalition government.

Across the country demonstrations were held in some of the country's biggest and most vibrant cities including London, Manchester and...Grimsby.

Known for its fishing heritage and very little else, Grimsby is perhaps the last place you would expect to find any kind of political activism. But although the demonstration lacked the numbers in Manchester and London, the group more than made up for this in terms of their

spirit and determination.

The 150-strong march, organised by Grimsby Socialist Party members and Youth Fight for Jobs, took place in the town's main shopping area and ended with a rally outside the town hall. Marchers were invited to take the stand and expressed passionate views about what they are fighting for.

By the time the group reached its destination many more had joined in. The atmosphere surrounding the crowd was electrifying and infectious. Shoppers stopped to watch and give support, showing that it's not just the student population who are in uproar about the recent cuts.

At the rally, we heard a series of heart-felt and emotional speeches stressing the importance of education and investing in the future. One woman discussed her family's financial difficulties and someone else talked about the problems his younger sister will face with the increase in tuition fees.

The general vibe from the crowd was extremely positive suggesting that future marches in the area will have even more attendees, receive even more press coverage and help to spread the message across North East Lincolnshire.

Emily Clegg

Volunteering 'plaster' for unemployment

ON 7 February the government approved plans for charities including the Prince's Trust to set up stalls in Jobcentre Plus offices across the country.

What a fantastic alternative the government is offering whilst they raise university fees, scrap EMA and preside over youth unemployment of nearly one million!

Volunteering can be a good way for people to gain personal fulfilment, experience in a particular

field or to do something productive with spare time or a gap year. However it is no alternative to paid employment.

Young people will be expected to survive on the poverty living that benefits provide whilst doing work that could be used to undercut wages in existing public sector workforces.

Whilst the government freezes recruitment across much of the public sector and slashes wages and

jobs their answer is to put a plaster over the 20% rate of youth unemployment, the highest figure since records began in 1992.

If the government was serious about tackling unemployment it would put money and resources into mass employment and apprenticeship programmes that offer young people decent wages, decent conditions and a chance to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Suzanne Beishon