

Fight Welsh universities' fees hike

Dave Reid

The Welsh Assembly government's promise to keep down annual fees at Welsh universities lies in tatters. A basic degree at University of Wales in Newport will now cost £27,000. No Welsh university announced an upper level below £9,000 a year.

Glyn Matthews from Youth Fight For Education called for the National Union of Students (NUS) and NUS Wales to organise a mass campaign to defeat the UK government's fee rises.

"There's no way I could have afforded £27,000 to go to University of Glamorgan. Even £3,400 a year, the current fee, is steep but reducing the subsidy will price thousands of working class people out of education."

Clearly university vice-chancellors (VCs) have a completely different agenda from most of Welsh society. The Welsh government is being led by the nose by these profit-driven executives. The VCs award themselves six figure salaries while courses are cut, jobs lost, working class students work 30 hours a week in jobs to get through their course and lecturers lose 18% of their salaries in real terms.

Welsh universities are being turned into businesses to service the wealthy with no sense of serving the community. The education system should be brought under public control and run by elected representatives. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales should be wound up and replaced with a



UCU members striking in defence of pensions photo Socialist Party Wales

public body genuinely accountable to the people of Wales.

If the Welsh Assembly government does cut its subsidy Wales would be forced to adopt a similar higher education model to that in England with high fees combined with bursaries for a few 'deserving poor' students.

In effect this would be a return to the pre-war model where the rich have open access to university regardless of ability, while working-class students go cap in hand to bursary boards to plead for lower fees. The "scholarship children" of the Victorian era would be back in the 21st century.

Same scam, different wrapper

Cardiff University UCU (lecturers and college workers' union) member Edmund Schluessel commented: "This exposes Labour Assembly education minister Leighton Andrews' claim of a 'Welsh approach' to education. This is the same scam as in England, in a differently-coloured wrapper."

"Talk of removing the rebate for Welsh-domiciled students shows that rebate to be another sham, a pre-election promise which the Socialist Party predicted months ago Labour would not keep."

"Aberystwyth University openly

admits £7,500 fees would keep their books balanced but charged £9,000. These vice-chancellors are tin pot chief executives, cheerleaders for the worst excesses of big business."

"Meanwhile, as the whole higher education sector savours the prospect of these billions of pounds coming in, they offer the providers of education, lecturers, an insulting 0.31% pay rise. They also keep attacking pensions, victimising trade unionists and slashing jobs by the thousand. The market has no place in education."

The Labour-led Welsh government has meekly accepted cuts passed on by the Con-Dem government. Before the cuts hit, many people blamed the Con-Dems more than the Welsh government. As the Welsh government initiates more cuts this mood could change.

Socialist Party Wales believes that the Welsh government should not pass on horrendous cuts. The futures of thousands of Welsh young people will be devastated by the fees increases as they are barred from a university education. The Assembly should initiate a mass campaign together with trade unions, students, service users, disabled organisations, carers and working class people as a whole in Wales to resist all the cuts.

Welsh Labour has complained about the cuts but then implemented them. The Labour leadership believes that "cuts are necessary" but wants the Tories to carry out the messy work while Welsh Labour washes its hands of them.

But with its university strategy in tatters and whispers that EMA might also be threatened in Wales the Welsh government cannot escape responsibility for its policy forever.

It's not just education - the NHS cuts in Wales will be even more devastating with an 11% cut budgeted for compared to 4% in England. Working class people in Wales will have no option but to fight to retain basic provision and the Welsh government had better get out of the way.

Earthquakes, explosions, water poisoning... End the 'insane' pursuit of oil profit

Pete Mason

In parts of the USA you can set fire to your tap water. Now an enterprising company seems to want to bring the practice to Britain. Cuadrilla Resources has been drilling for gas, the first company to introduce the notorious technique of "hydro-fracking" into Europe.

Cuadrilla had to stop, however, over suspicions that it caused two earthquakes in Blackpool, one of around 2.2 magnitude, centred around the drilling site.

Local resident Caroline Murphy, told the Blackpool Gazette: "I was literally shaken from my bed at 3.40am yesterday. I've never felt anything like it, it can't be coincidence they are drilling nearby. I want to know who is regulating it."



Cuadrilla - bringing 'fracking' to Britain?

industry - is said to contain the carcinogens benzene and formaldehyde, but companies will not disclose their "trade secrets."

Videos showing people setting fire to their water supply went viral in the US last year - two US states have stopped all fracking activity. You can imagine someone leaving their tap running for a while, then turning on the cooker and blowing the roof off their home.

The US Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration astonished and outraged environmentalists by predicting that shale gas will provide 45% of the USA's gas by 2035. US oil imports are predicted to be halved, with fracking producing 4.5 million barrels of oil a

day, twice the Gulf of Mexico's output, by 2020.

Global warming is currently heading to the very worst scenarios discussed by climate change experts.

Even the highly conservative International Energy Agency (IEA) declares that the era of cheap oil is over. But the oil companies, rather than moving to clean, cheap, renewable energies, are moving to new, expensive and explosively dangerous methods of gas and oil extraction.

US government data shows that the world's carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels "peaked last week at the highest levels on record" while 2010 was the worst ever year for carbon emis-

sions, leaving the "climate on the brink".

At the current rate, the world will hit levels even the IEA consider dangerous next year, instead of the predicted 2020.

Even Fatih Birol, chief economist of the IEA which puts pressure on OPEC oil-producing states to "drill, baby drill", told the Guardian that the clear risk of catastrophic warming is "a risk any sane person would seek to drastically reduce."

Fracking appears insane. But it is driven by capitalism which has no ethics or concern for the environment.

The methane gas released into the environment by fracking is 20 times more dangerous than CO₂. Yet the US oil rigs in operation went up from 200 to 800 over the last two years, egged on by the high oil price.

An estimated 40% of oil rigs are

located in Texas. Leaving aside the explosions, poisoning, earthquakes and global warming, a small cloud appears on their horizon. Fracking uses a huge amount of water, but Texas is experiencing its driest seven-month span on record.

So ironically, the global warming which will be accelerated by fracking is depriving Texan oil merchants of the water required to do their dirty work. Even so, we have been warned.

A socialist economic plan would be able to allocate resources based on the needs of people and the environment, not on profitability. It would allow money to be invested in research for new, clean energy sources or for real improvements in existing technology.

Capitalism, however, is interested in profit not safety - it is the main enemy of the earth.

Gas in tap water

The government told the Financial Times it had "no current plans" to carry out a review over shale gas drilling, which it believes to be safe. Under extremely high pressures, hydraulic liquid fractures rock containing gas or oil.

The gas and hydraulic liquids escape - despite denials by the fracking experts - and enter the groundwater. Rural communities and farms that draw water from wells find explosive gases emerging from their tap water.

The water is only good to burn in any case. The hydraulic liquid - dubbed "water" by the fracking



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