

No cuts to English language classes!

Neil Cafferky

In November 2010 the Con-Dem coalition announced huge cutbacks in English for Speakers of Other Languages (Esol) services.

Under the changes, public funding for Esol classes from September 2011 will be limited to people from 'settled communities'. To this day it remains unclear what 'settled communities' actually means.

But it seems clear that many, including asylum seekers, will lose out on the chance to take part in affordable language classes.

Remission of tuition fees will be limited to those on 'active' benefits such as Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment Support Allowance. People on other benefits including working tax credit, housing benefit, income support, council tax benefit and pension credits could have to pay up to £1,200 a year.

Funding for Esol in the workplace will also be removed and course fees will increase.

The provision of Esol services has been a key part in providing people with the language skills they need to

find work, access education, health and other services and settle in their local communities.

The devastating changes to funding will mean access to Esol will be far more difficult for the poorest sections of society.

People on benefits could have to pay up to £1,200 a year

It is worth remembering that at the same time as these cuts in Esol are being carried out there is an ongoing crusade from the government and the right wing media to cut back on providing information about public services in other languages in the name of savings and cutting 'red tape'.

Capitalist politicians are conducting a continuous onslaught on immigrant communities, implying that the problems poor immigrants face, such as unemployment and low educational attainment, are of their own making and result from a 'fail-

ure to integrate' and learn English.

But the government's plans to halve spending on English classes and to cut translation will massively exacerbate these problems.

These cuts, which are part of the overall austerity drive of the government, are being resisted with the lecturers' union, UCU, leading a campaign of teachers and students called Action for Esol along with other groups.

On Sunday 19 June a day of action will take place across London protesting against these cuts. This can be the stepping stone to a broad trade union campaign to ensure Esol gets the necessary funding to protect language services and jobs in the teaching sector.

The east London protest will meet at Hackney Town Hall at 12.30pm and Stepney Green Park at 12.30pm to march to Bethnal Green Gardens for an afternoon of celebration and activities from 2-5pm.

And at the sister event in south London, meet at Windrush Square in Brixton at 12pm to march to Kennington Park for 2pm.



Comment: To hell with for-profit education

Rising fees, scrapping EMA student payments and devastating cuts to further and higher education budgets will mean that working class young people have little to no chance of a decent education.

Britain's third private university will open in Bloomsbury, central London in the autumn, funded by private equity. The initiative has gained support from all those who defend the marketisation of education, including the Labour Party whose university spokesperson praised the university as a "private initiative to drive new investment in arts, humanities and social science courses". Here TOM ROLLINS explains the situation.



Anthony Grayling will join other 'celebrities' to teach at the college

New College of the Humanities (NCH), describing itself as a "new concept in university level education", is a private for-profit university. After the most controversial education policy in recent years – trebling fees to £9,000 – a group of "liberal" academics and businesspeople have decided to provide higher education for £18,000 a year.

Posing as a prospective student, I spoke to the college's Oxford-educated chief executive officer (CEO), Jeremy Gibbs. He has come from a specialist venture capital consultancy firm, where he was also CEO.

The college trust also includes former computing and consultancy CEOs, chairs and upper-class big

wigs and dons. It all sounds like a neoliberal dream, where education is very big business.

"I should probably get out of sales mode," laughed Mr Gibbs at one point. He was telling me about the founding of the college, and its 'liberal' ethos. But what is NCH when it's not in sales mode?

"It's Anthony Grayling's brainchild," he says. Mr Gibbs describes Grayling, celebrity philosopher and academic, as "one of the foremost liberal public intellectuals in the country, as well as an extremely nice man". Nice enough, and liberal enough, to plan to offer the super-rich the 'best' education and ignore the rest.

Grayling's private university was

launched on 5 June. It will open its doors in September 2012, but is taking applications now.

Naturally there has been a positive reaction from the rich. NCH will offer one-to-one tutoring from world-famous academics like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Ricks and Niall Ferguson; an "almost pinko" teaching board, apparently. Although the Guardian revealed that some of the 'stars' will only teach for an hour in the first year.

Pinker still, 20% of NCH first years will receive scholarships or "exhibitions". Scholarships offer free education, while those on exhibitions will pay £7,200 annual net fees.

I raised the issue of a 'less advantaged' 18 year old from Sheffield mixing with the very privileged. "Yes, there's going to be rich kids there – it's just a fact of life", Gibbs said. "They've had the money to pay fees at independent schools. Nevertheless we will be selecting bright kids".

Gibbs explained that at Oxbridge there are six applicants for each place so most students miss out. Meanwhile other universities are dogged by cuts to funding, students squeezed into bigger classes; with the looming threat of lay-offs. "It's not what we call high quality education", Gibbs says.

Where does the rest of the population stand? Others facing £9,000 fees do not seem to factor into the NCH scheme of things. They may not be getting an education at all. "I wish education could be free, but it can't", says Gibbs. To hell with the lot of them then!

Instead, we need a fully funded, publicly owned and democratically run education system, free to all from nursery to university.

Hands off our pensions!

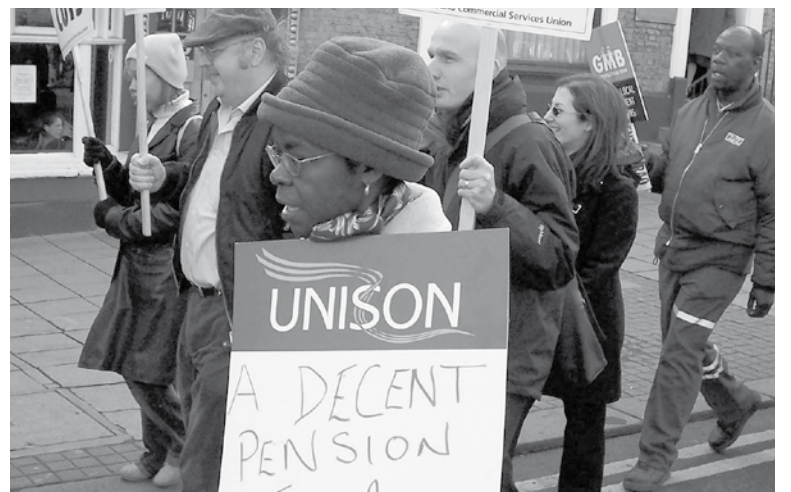


photo Dave Carr

Paul Couchman
Save Our Services in Surrey

The leafy lanes of Surrey will reverberate to the chant "hands off our pensions" on 30 June.

A meeting of Save Our Services in Surrey (SOSiS) attended by reps from NUT, UCU, PCS and Unison, as well as student reps from Royal Holloway university, agreed to organise a demonstration on the afternoon of the strike, assembling at Camberley railway station at 1pm and marching to the offices of Michael Gove MP and minister for education.

There will be pickets at many

schools, tax offices and colleges and we are coordinating support for these with a small fleet of cars armed with flyers and papers.

A Hands Off Our Pensions in Surrey (HOOPS) committee was elected to build for and organise on the 30th and beyond. Unison members on the committee look forward to joining the strike action in the autumn to drive the final nail in the coffin of these savage pension attacks.

Apologies and messages of support were received at the meeting from GMB, FBU and POA reps who also want to be part of the action. The NUT thanked SOSiS for pulling the meeting together and coordinating action.



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