

£6,000 uni fees? An offer we can refuse!

'Labour introduced fees in the first place - I don't think they're a viable alternative'

Students starting university this year face many obstacles to getting the most out of their time in higher education. Hundreds of courses have been cut meaning limited options; the vast majority of canteens, bars and student services have been privatised leading to poor quality and high prices; accommodation is expensive and hard to find; because of a cap on student places, 200,000 cannot go to university. And for those who do go, there are university fees currently set at up to £3,375 a year.

Next year the Con-Dem government has planned to raise the fees to a maximum of £9,000 a year. This plan sparked a wave of mass protest among young people at the end of 2010 - anger which is likely to be re-ignited. While most ordinary people supported their struggle, no political party in parliament defends education as a right for all young people.

At the Labour conference, party leader Ed Miliband has promised that annual university fees would be capped at £6,000. A-level student and Newcastle Slutwalk organiser Lizi Gray - who is taking part in the Jarrow to London March for Jobs (see pages 7-10) - told the Socialist what she thought of Labour's promises.

"I think it would be better than £9,000 but it's still disgraceful. It's

£1,000

Fees were first introduced by Labour in 1998

£3,000

Limit on 'top-up' fees introduced by Labour in 2006

£9,000

Con-Dem limit on fees from September 2012

still really unaffordable. I don't see why they should be charging for university in the first place. The only reason I see is to pay off the bankers' crisis. The fact is it would still be unaffordable for many young people wanting to go to university.

Labour have said they're not going to undo any of the cuts of the Con-Dem government either. Having Labour in power wouldn't be any better than the current government. I don't think they're making a case for themselves by saying they're not going to reverse the cuts and still charge extortionate

amounts for university.

There should be free education for everyone who wants it really and guaranteed jobs to go into. This could be paid for by taxing the businesses that aren't paying their tax [calculated by the PCS union at £120 billion a year], which is basically just stealing from the British public.

It was the Con-Dems who have put the fees up, but it was Labour who introduced fees in the first place so I don't think they are a viable alternative. Just like the other parties, they're trying to keep their friends, the bankers and the big corporations, happy.

The 'looters' in Tottenham and elsewhere are getting ridiculous sentences for stealing things like toilet paper and bottles of water. But the criminals who are avoiding taxes by registering their businesses abroad - they should really be sentenced for it. They're criminals in that sense.

Public services should be in public ownership. We know what we need - rather than being dictated to by big business.

I'm hoping to go to university, and I'm also hoping to go into youth work after I've finished uni, but jobs are being cut in that too. So it's not looking like anything I want to do is a good idea at the minute!"



Protests against £9,000 tuition fees in 2010 photo S Wrack

June 2001: Labour re-elected with a manifesto pledge not to introduce top-up fees

May 2003: Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith pledges all fees would be abolished under a Conservative government

December 2009: Lib Dems say they would abolish fees by 2015

September 2011: Labour leader Ed Miliband refuses to even guarantee that his £6,000 fee cap pledge will be part of 2015 manifesto

Fight fees and cuts - join Socialist Students!

Lincoln

Lincoln University Socialist Students gained hundreds of signatures on the 'No to £9k' petition during freshers week, with lots of people interested in joining the society.

Freshers told us that they would not come to university if they had to pay £9,000 a year. Many had cancelled planned gap year activities or turned down work to avoid the tripled fees.

Lincoln University was underprepared for the high intake of students, and ran out of existing accommodation. However, rather than find decent places for the 200 or so students without a place, they have rented poor quality "box" cabins.

These shack-like buildings have two people squeezed into each, with barely any room for personal belongings. Each cabin has a shower, but no cooking facilities, and it is likely that they are not built to withstand winter weather. Students have to pay £30 a week, yet if they find a decent place to live still have to pay rent for the "sheds" until the contract runs out in November.

Socialist Students is campaigning for good quality accommodation to be found for these students and the university to refund the "box" rents.

Socialist Students had a brilliant year last year, organising large demonstrations and leading an occupation. We are confident that this year we can build on this.

Alex Moore

Queen Mary's

Socialist Students got an excellent response at Queen Mary, University of London. Many people were just coming up to the stall asking to join, saying they wanted to get involved in a socialist society and campaigns.

A record 114 people joined during the freshers fair, and three more on the first stall which had new members helping out. Even more asked to join the email list.

Our main campaign is to stop the cuts at Queen Mary, where management is trying to cut over 50 staff, including almost one in four library staff, while they are planning to triple fees for next year's intake. In contrast to last year, hardly any-



At Queen Mary's freshers fair photo S Sachs-Eldridge

body was prepared to support cuts, and our petition against cuts at QM and for free education went down a storm.

Naomi Byron

Sheffield

At both the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University campuses, Socialist Students met a wide range of students keen to discuss the socialist alternative to the destruction of education being perpetrated by the Con-Dem coalition.

Freshers told us of their disbelief that new students could pay as much as £9,000 a year from next September. Many said that they were sure that it would prevent working class youth from attending university.

Throughout the week we sold 94 copies of the Socialist and 73 copies of the Megaphone magazine.

The first University of Sheffield meeting of the year was attended by 30 students, including 20 freshers. 27 students at Sheffield Hallam University also expressed interest in attending Socialist Students meetings.

Socialist Students are in the process of planning for the Sheffield leg of the Jarrow March for Jobs, on Wednesday 12

October. This is when the latest employment figures will be released, when youth unemployment could go over one million people.

Sam Morecroft

Portsmouth

"We've been out on the demos and seen your paper, we were anarchists but have started reading about socialism on the internet. We definitely want to join."

Jesse and Sinead were the last two students we signed up after a very successful couple of days campaigning.

Many students had been on last year's student protests. Some were mature students facing many difficulties due to the cuts. Others were interested in joining the Jarrow march.

20 copies of the Megaphone and the Socialist were sold.

Ben Norman

Kingston

"Have you read The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists? That's a really good book!"

This was one of the many comments received by people interested in socialist ideas at the Socialist Students stall at

Kingston University freshers fair.

Sandwiched between leafleters for free cinema tickets and free pizza we had a lot of interest in our campaign against tuition fees and against cuts in education. But students also wanted to discuss how we could effectively fight the cuts generally, with a lot of support being expressed for the public sector strike on 30 November.

Over 30 students filled in the forms to either join or find out more about Socialist Students with many of those also showing an interest in local Socialist Party meetings and activities

Chris Newby

Leeds

At Leeds University freshers fair, Socialist Students sold 21 papers and 30 copies of the Megaphone magazine and received around £10 in donations; ten people joined the society within the first week.

A joint Socialist Student and Socialist Party public meeting was held on Tuesday night with an introductory talk on socialism. This was followed by the first Socialist Students meeting of the academic year with a discussion on the recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. Both meetings were well attended, with lively and interesting contributions.

Joe Muller

Greater Manchester

During Manchester freshers fairs many students showed their hatred of the Con-Dem coalition, but also doubted whether New Labour would be any different, leading many to question the three party system we live under.

Those who spoke to us were enthused by the plans for the Jarrow march, and by the policies that Socialist Students put forward, of free education for all and a socialist alternative.

The Megaphone magazine was very popular. Socialist Students societies are now registered in both Manchester and Salford universities.

Katen Verma

Staffordshire

Stoke campus of Staffordshire University held its activities fair on 24 September, where 20 students signed up to be members of Staffs Socialist Students.

We met a number of workers who were going to university after being unable to find a job.

Towards the end of the stall we also had a discussion on how we would carry out some of our demands, such as the nationalisation of the top industries. Many students agreed to come to our meeting on the socialist alternative to capitalism.

Liat Norris

Socialist Students demands include:

- Abolish tuition fees! Write off student debt!
- Restore EMA! Full grants to cover the living costs of all students in post-16 education
- No to education cuts. Defend every course, job and service
- Stop the marketisation and privatisation of universities
- Lift the cap on places and publicly fund the expansion of high quality higher education
- Build local anti-cuts campaigns and Youth Fight for Education groups in every school, college and university
- Support action by education workers to defend their conditions and our education
- Transform students unions into fighting organisations
- For a fighting National Union of Students
- For education that is fully funded, publicly owned, democratically run and universally free at all levels - a socialist education system

Find out more and read Megaphone at www.socialiststudents.org.uk