

# 10 November demonstration: Students fighting back

Three east London students in their first year of college spoke to Sarah Wrack about the protest at Millbank.

## Why did you go on the demonstration?

Olivia: My EMA bonuses have been stopped already and my EMA will be cut in April and I don't think I'll be able to afford tuition fees and university.

Jack: I went to the demonstration on 20 October. I'm doing a BTEC course which should directly lead on to university but I just can't afford it.

## What made people go into the building on Millbank?

Olivia: I didn't know before that day that that was Tory HQ - I'm pretty sure nobody did. We walked past it looking for the speeches and things at the end. But we thought it was rubbish and were thinking of leaving. So we walked back to Millbank and there was a huge crowd and a fire going.

Jack: The feeling had gone from 'look how many of us there are' to 'hang on, what are we doing? Where are we going?'

Tom: The police started pulling people in at the front. We were pushing to get in but we wanted to do it en

masse.

Olivia: Some people rushed straight for the elevators but other people were just trying to get out.

Tom: Yeah, I thought, there are loads of police, not many of us, I want to be with the crowd outside!

Olivia: Then once the first window broke, everyone poured in.

## What happened once people were inside?

Jack: Things were still packed but we were wandering around and meeting up with the friends we'd lost earlier and talking to people.

Olivia: Someone had brought an amp on a bike and was playing music. There was a vibe, people were dancing and drumming. Everyone was united.

## And how did it end?

Jack: As the sun started going down, we saw the police coming round the sides and we didn't want to get kettled and arrested so we left at around 5 or 5.30pm.

Olivia: I read an article the day afterwards that said 'unlike what we saw at the G20 with all the hard old anarchists, there were young, fresh faced teenagers looking angry' and that's all it was!

Jack: At least 60 or 70% of the people there were 18 at the oldest and I can't imagine many of them had been to a protest before.



Socialist Students on the march.

photo Sarah Wrack

## It must have been pretty horrendous to see Aaron Porter on the news?

Olivia: Why should we listen to someone supposedly representing students who doesn't support what students have done? He should be backing us with every bone in his slimy body!

## What did you think of how NUS organised the demonstration?

Jack: No one really knew what they were doing. Lots of the people there had just been told by their friends and seen it on Facebook. They expected something at the end. Not just a few hard to hear speeches and dreary videos.

## Do you think other students will be put off because of what happened at Millbank?

Tom: I think that any other students

who are concerned will be more inclined to demonstrate. People are actually starting to listen, people are waking up and thinking 'maybe we should get out of bed too'.

Jack: There's a general feeling that what's going on isn't right and it's time people started reacting. We're meant to be a generation that just lives off their ipods and blackberrys and now we're using our ipods and blackberrys to spread awareness.



Students are angry about rising fees.

photo Sarah Wrack

Lucy and Hannah from a south east London sixth form spoke to Sarah Sachs-Eldridge after the demonstration.

## Why did you go to the demonstration?

Lucy: I think it was hearing about all the other cuts, talking about them at school and then when it was education, everyone thought, no we've got to stop this. It's the first time what the government's doing is directly affecting us so everyone got involved.

Hannah: Fees of £9,000 will scare people off. It is direct class segregation. The government think they can do this and because a lot of us are too young to vote, it's not going to affect them but it's my parents who are going to be paying for it.

## How was it organised at your school?

Hannah: The day before the demo, I wrote the details out in Microsoft Word, printed it out and left it round the common room. We kept saying

we need to get organised, meet and all leave together but it was hard.

## What did you think of the demo?

Hannah: It was amazing. It showed that loads and loads of people care. We were waiting for ages to go past these traffic lights. But when we got to the end we saw there were thousands of people in every direction and we thought 'wow!'

There was someone whose sign said 'I will fight for my grandson'. And at one point everyone stopped and clapped him.

## What was the response like afterwards?

Lucy: As soon as we told everyone about it they wished they'd come so I think there will be more people on the next one.

Some of the richer kids don't care - they're still taking a gap year. We both planned to take gap years but we're too afraid to do it because we'd be hit with the higher fees. And it means we can't re-sit any exams - can't spend any more time at sixth form. A lot of people had to change their plans last minute.

## Solidarity

ON 10 November, almost 100 students gathered in Truro, Cornwall, to march against the cuts to education and the rise in tuition fees.

Students from Truro College and local sixth forms gathered around 700 signatures for a petition against the fee rise. We marched to the Lib Dem office, where students chanted 'shame on you' and filled the office with their placards. We then went down to the local Tory HQ.

The protest went on for around three hours and gained a lot of public support and media attention. But the main aim of the protest was to show solidarity with the 52,000 students and activists in London demonstrating against the cuts.

It showed that even in rural Cornwall, young people are standing up against the cuts and fighting for a decent education.

Josiah Mortimer

*It was the angriest protest I have ever been on. Whatever your opinion of what happened at Tory HQ, at least it got the demo on the news! I have been on equally sized anti-war protests that didn't even make the regional news.*

Ian Pattison  
Leeds Socialist Students

*Once Millbank entrance was filled with riot police, we stayed for hours demanding the release of those held. This was democracy, solidarity, the 'big society' and the true meaning of 'we're all in this together' rolled into one.*

Higher education worker

## Planning the next steps

### Leeds

LEEDS UNIVERSITY Union of Students and Leeds University Against Cuts held a lively meeting of students and local anti-cuts campaigners the day after the massive demonstration in London (which 700 people from Leeds attended).

Everyone present agreed the demonstration must be a springboard for further mass action against fees and cuts.

It was also agreed that the student union would condemn the right-wing media's witch hunt against the Millbank occupiers and hold a referendum on whether to support the

occupiers' actions.

The meeting was attended by two uniformed police officers who clearly intended to intimidate those present. The meeting voted for them to leave before the tactical discussions started. A journalist from the Daily Mail had been found sniffing around campus earlier too.

Socialist Student members spoke out strongly in support of a student strike on 24 November, followed by a united march of all Leeds universities and colleges to the Department for Work and Pensions offices in the centre of town. This is only the beginning.

Joseph Muller and Dave Younger

### Nottingham

STUDENTS IN Nottingham organised a public meeting of people from both universities, colleges, and the lecturers' union, UCU and other education workers to fight the cuts and increase in tuition fees.

25 people attended, selected a committee and agreed to hold a second public meeting on 16 November to prepare for student walk outs at both universities on 24 November.

This is a really great step to bring together people from all over Nottingham.

Helen Pattison