

No to victimisation, defend the student protesters!



Thousands protested at the Tory headquarters at Millbank.

photo Senan

Paul Callanan
Youth Fight for Jobs

ON 10 November over 50,000 students took part in a demonstration against the massive assault on the right to an education.

The Con-Dem government had already announced plans to cut higher education teaching budgets by 80%, raise tuition fees to £9,000 a year and scrap Education Maintenance Allowance.

What these attacks add up to is kicking out hundreds of thousands

of working class young people from education.

The demonstration was a huge show of opposition from students and education workers who see these attacks as an attempt by the government to blame young and working class people for an economic crisis not of their making.

Their anger was heightened as the demonstration marched past Conservative Party headquarters at Millbank, where a number of students

took part in an occupation.

For most involved this was the first demonstration they had been on and the occupation was a way of expressing their anger and frustration at their future being stolen from them.

A few broken windows is not significant damage when compared to the damage this government is inflicting on the lives of millions of young people.

However, instead of hounding

lying politicians and big business-people, sections of the national press organised vicious campaigns against young protesters, harassing parents and searching through Facebook pages to try to come up with incriminating evidence. If a university vice-chancellor was subject to such a smear campaign there would be widespread outrage in the papers.

On Saturday 13 November, around 20 members of Youth Fight for Jobs

and the Socialist Party lobbied outside a police station in East London to show solidarity with a student who had been arrested.

In 2003 a determined campaign of lobbies, hearings, protests and mass court attendance ensured that anti-war protesters threatened with jail sentences were found not guilty. We believe that the best defence is through a resolute show of support for victimised young people.

In February 2011, 57 of the students are expected to face trial. Many are also being threatened with disciplinary action by their schools or colleges.

This is an attack on the democratic right to protest. It is important that we defend this right for all of us. That is why, to aid the defence of the students involved and to campaign for the right to protest, Youth Fight for Jobs is appealing for donations to fund a defence campaign.

This national campaign must go hand in hand with action in local areas to defend protesters from being excluded from their education simply for taking a stand to defend their right to it! It is not just an attack on students but on everybody's right to protest.

Defend university access for all!

THE OFFICIAL figures of how many young people were denied a university place this year have finally been announced. Disgracefully, 209,000 were left disappointed.

Louise Campbell

Less than 70% of students desperate to learn and make the most of their skills were given the chance to do so because of the government's cap on places.

Unsurprisingly, this was more than 10% higher at independent and grammar schools. But instead of trying to reduce this gap and make sure students from poorer backgrounds have the same opportunities as the rest, the Con-Dems are attacking that right from every angle.

£9,000 fees will mean the prospect of finishing university with an unheard of amount of debt for many young people. And now the few schemes designed to encourage working class students into university are under attack. The £100 million a year funding for the largest of these, Aimhigher, looks set to be axed from July next year.

I went to school in Bethnal Green, east London, one of the

poorest areas in the country.

Most of my friends came from families where neither parent had been to university and a lot of people received free school meals. Often even people who enjoyed school and did the best in exams hadn't really considered university.

Our school took part in the Aimhigher scheme and we went on several visits to universities - including a couple of times to Sussex University where three of us ended up going.

We saw what lectures might be like and met students who were already there. I think a lot of people started thinking about it as a real option after that. Aimhigher also came to our school and organised mentoring and revision sessions to help people meet the grades they needed.

It wasn't perfect but most of my friends did go to university in the end and I think Aimhigher played a part in that.

This government doesn't care about working class young people reaching their potential. £100 million is nothing compared to the deficit - it's a conscious decision to put us in our place. But the protests over the last two weeks have shown that we won't put up with it.

Universities occupied over fees and cuts

Sussex

ON 15 NOVEMBER, 170 students, including Socialist Student members, occupied a lecture theatre at Sussex university.

On the first night there was a positive mood and we drew up a statement about why we had occupied along with some demands. We also spoke to the local press.

The numbers dwindled as time went on, partly because of a lack of organisation and because we were in a lecture theatre which didn't disrupt management too much.

However on the fourth day more people joined us for a discussion about the controversial appointment of Nato director of policy planning, Jamie Shea, as a lecturer in International Relations.

On the same day we received the welcome news of a potential occupation at London's SOAS university which many regarded as the accomplishment of one of our goals - to encourage other universities to occupy.

We stayed for four nights after which it was decided that it would be tactically better for us to leave. Although not a raving success, the occupation was a starting point and we will learn from our mistakes. We are now focusing on the national

day of action called for 24 November and preparing for future struggles.

Jack Auvache
Sussex Socialist Students

UWE

AT THE time of going to press, 60 students from the University of the West of England (UWE) were occupying the 'core 24' building at the university's main campus in Frenchay, Bristol for the second day.

This occupation started in anticipation of other events later in the week including a demonstration on 24 November where students from UWE will link up with students from the University of Bristol, City College of Bristol and secondary schools around the city.

Students inside held discussions about why they are protesting and the way forward for the anti-fees movement. Food was provided by lecturers at the university and the UCU lecturers' union sent speakers to talk to the students about how the cuts will affect them. A local branch of the National Union of Teachers also brought food and solidarity greetings.

Nigel Varley, Chair of the Bristol Anti Cuts Alliance, came down

to speak to us about the anti cuts movement in Bristol and how we are all being hit by Tory cutbacks.

Messages of support and solidarity have come in from Socialist Party branches and Socialist Student societies across the country. Messages have also come in from local community groups and trade unionists.

In the evening a sound system was brought in so we could have a party, which brought in more students who we could discuss with.

The success of the occupation and the support shown from outside led us to vote to continue the occupation, hopefully until 24 November when we will join students walking out in protest over tuition fees and education cuts in the centre of Bristol for the student demonstration.

Frankie Langland
Bristol Socialist Party

As we went to press, students at Manchester Metropolitan, SOAS and Royal Holloway universities were also occupying in anticipation of 24 November.

SOAS will almost certainly lose 100% of its teaching grant as a result of the funding changes because it offers only arts and humanities degrees.

To donate, please send cheques made out to Youth Democratic Rights Campaign at PO BOX 858, London, E11 1YG

If you face victimisation, please get in contact with Youth Fight for Jobs for advice and more - youthfight-forjobs@gmail.com 020 8558 7947