

We can win: student struggle must escalate

ON 24 November 130,000 school, college and university students walked out in the biggest education action for 25 years. There was a mood of jubilation in discovering their strength, and determination to defeat these brutal cuts.

Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) called for action on 24 November and led many of the protests, organising many directly and campaigning for students to walk out and join the protests.

YFJ is organising as Youth Fight for Education (YFE), and its call for local organising meetings across the country to discuss what next went down a storm.

Most of the population supports the student protests. The Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament have already announced that Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) will be saved in their areas. This is a victory for the movement throughout Britain and shows that the pressure is having a real effect.

Get organised for day X

THERE IS the potential to defeat these EMA cuts and fees increases, and to do that we need to escalate the action. With greater organisation and preparation we can sound a real warning that government plans can be disrupted. A national, coordinated shutdown of education through both student and education worker participation could do this.

YFE calls for school, college and university meetings as well as city and regional coordinating meetings to discuss the next stage in the struggle.

Nationally, Youth Fight for Jobs is holding a meeting on 4 and 5 December. Students who have organised and led protests will speak and there will be the opportunity for democratic discussion to agree a way forward for this movement.

Such coordination would also mean we could organise protests and demonstrations with proper stewarding, an agreed route and rallies, etc. Organising ourselves in this way would help ensure the police could not prevent our right to peacefully protest (see box on far right).

The date of a vote in parliament, possibly before Christmas has to be the main focus point for the movement - a 'day X'. Plans should be made for the shutdown, for mass walkouts of all students. Those who can should come to London to protest outside parliament in a mass show of opposition. Further away, demonstrations should be held in city centres, or outside town halls or MPs' offices.

NUS

THE NATIONAL Union of Students (NUS) refused to build for 24 November and president Aaron Porter condemned the call for a national day of walkouts. If

the NUS had put its weight behind the protests, they could have been even bigger and more coherent.

Porter has now apologised for failing to give a lead and has agreed that NUS should back a day of action on 'day X'. Whether he follows through with this remains to be seen but if NUS is not going to lead the fightback, we need to build bodies that can.

The London region of the UCU lecturers' union has called for a demonstration on 'day X' and other unions should come behind this and send delegations along.

Local student unions should put on transport from their institution for all who want to come to London to demonstrate, but also for others from the local area including school and college students and local trade unions.

This is a fight for all of us. Links must also be made and strengthened with the trade union and anti-cuts movements that exist outside of education.

Alongside students losing their right to education, government cuts are also an attack on many workers' jobs - part of a huge attack on all public services. Some of the protests on 24 November were initiated by local anti-cuts alliances, and many of the following occupations had speakers from education unions.

Students by themselves cannot have a significant impact on profits, which is at the end of the day what this government and their big business backers care most about. But by uniting the struggles we can defeat the government.

Even if this undemocratic government ignores the vast majority of the population and votes to increase fees, it will not be the end of the movement. Laws can be changed and repealed, such as Thatcher's poll tax which was defeated by a mass movement 20 years ago.

In the local elections in May students and student bodies should stand and support candidates who oppose cuts in education and all cuts and pledge to fight back - individual councils could continue to pay EMA from their own budget for example.

Need to continue

THESE STUDENTS, with a large proportion from working-class backgrounds are fighting for their future. A small but significant section is open to socialist ideas. The 24 November protests surpassed the hugely significant student walkouts against the Iraq war, and made it clear that this is a serious, determined movement with the potential to force back the government.

Saving EMA in Wales and Scotland can be the first victory of many, both locally and on a Britain-wide level. We need to continue to escalate the action and build for a 'day X' mass show of opposition.

And elsewhere...

400 students and staff protested in support of an occupation at the University of Birmingham. 500 demonstrated in Oxford followed by 50 sixth formers occupying the Radcliffe Camera Building of the Bodleian Library. 200 students and trade unionists rallied in Hastings. 70 students occupied Portsmouth university and forced a commitment from the vice-chancellor to publish details of the cuts planned. 100 protested in Southampton. 150 students occupied the Jeremy Bentham Room at University College London. 100 school students from Great Marlow school walked out along with 6 from Borlaise Grammar in Marlow.



Over 100,000 have taken part in the protests.

photo Senan

Reports from 24 November day of action

Leeds

STUDENTS FROM all three universities and many colleges joined the walkout and demonstration in Leeds. At Leeds University, Socialist Students members helped run the Leeds University Against Cuts (LUAC) 'picket lines' to persuade students to walkout. 3,000 marched to the city centre.

Afterwards students marched back to the university where 700 occupied the Michael Sadler building. The occupiers tried to take demands to the vice chancellor (and head of the Russell Group) Michael Arthur, but were stopped by security staff. However we did stop Arthur passing a resolution condemning the London demonstration.

Ian Pattison, Socialist Student member and LUAC press officer said: "There is a positive mood in the occupation that has been boosted by the news that EMA is going to be saved in Wales."

Iain Dalton

London

FROM 11AM waves of chanting, angry and determined students poured into Trafalgar Square. Some in school uniforms, many carrying homemade placards, they were all clear: 'these cuts are unfair and we will fight them'.

YFE activists were surrounded as students filled in join forms and discussed how to build the movement.

Just before 1pm this whirligig mass assembled for the YFE march - but the 8,000 didn't march - they ran!

Absolutely disgracefully their right to protest was brutally attacked as the police kettled the entire demo, only releasing the last protesters after 10pm! But their intention to frustrate the movement will not succeed.

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Cardiff

A 2,000-strong demonstration in Cardiff, including students from half a dozen colleges ended with 300 people occupying Cardiff University.

Action Against Cuts - Cardiff (AACC) held two mass rallies outside Cardiff University's main building which showed the enormous support for the occupiers. The occupation ended in success as

the university gave in to two demands of AACC. Not only have occupiers won freedom from victimisation for taking part in the action but the university's vice chancellor, Dr David Grant, has invited an elected delegation from the occupiers to a meeting to discuss students' concerns.

Cardiff Socialist Students

Bristol

'A LARGE game of cat and mouse' is the term that has been adopted by many to describe the demonstration that took place in Bristol. 4,000 students and workers took to the streets.

The march began at Bristol University's Senate House, surrounded by riot police. We marched onto College Green, where the police expected us to stop our protest but students wanted to march into the city centre.

After trying several routes, it became clear that we had been 'kettled' by police. A trickle of news came though that some students had managed to occupy the University of Bristol's student union building.

In solidarity with these students, the demonstration marched to join them, despite efforts of the riot police to block our way. There was also an attempt by 300 students to occupy one of the colleges.

The occupation of the University of the West of England which started the week before 24 November is continuing.

Frankie Langland

Newcastle

"FACEBOOK CLASSES warned over joining fees rally" was the headline of the local paper.

However, the Facebook generation took to the streets in their thousands. More than 3,000 young people joined the YFJ demo to show their opposition to the brutal attacks proposed by this rotten Con-Dem government.

As the first noisy wave of students approached the Monument, shoppers stopped and applauded. Many of the students had homemade placards: "I'm so angry I made a sign. You had your education - Now let me have mine".

School and FE students had their faces painted with 'EMA' on their cheeks. Our YFE leaflets hit a chord - espe-

cially amongst school and FE students. As we handed out 1,000 leaflets we were swarmed by young people grasping for them out of our hands. Over 70 students then occupied Newcastle University.

Elaine Brunskill

Manchester

ABOUT 3,000 people marched through Manchester city centre. The plan had been to march to the town hall but we were informed at the last minute that this would not be the case and were taken to a desolate part of the city.

Disgruntled students decided to relocate to the town hall where we felt our position would be more prominent and our voices given more chance of being heard.

The student union executive did not follow the majority's decision and so, at this point, the march was divided.

Later on in the day, the two groups joined together again and an attempt at occupying a building was made.

When this was unsuccessful, we opted for a peaceful 'sit-out' in the middle of Oxford Road, one of the busiest roads in Manchester. This lasted for about 15 minutes before being broken up by the police and police horses.

Anna Tully

Bury

1,400 STUDENTS from Holy Cross Sixth Form College and Bury College walked out on Wednesday and marched to a huge rally outside Bury Town Hall. Students simply surged round the ring road bringing traffic to a halt.

With home-made placards such as 'David Cameron education snatcher' and 'Nick Clegg Liar' (and worse!), and with deafening chants against the Tories and Lib Dems, workers and shoppers were left in no doubt about the strength of feeling. Lorry and bus drivers hooted or gave the thumbs up.

In a fighting speech often interrupted by cheers Paul Gerrard, a Socialist Party member and retired teacher, congratulated the students on their organisation and attacked the coalition's plans for education.

Manchester Socialist Party

Liverpool

24 NOVEMBER was the day the young people of Liverpool showed their resilience to government spending cuts with 2,000 school, college and university students protesting.

We ruled the streets of Liverpool, traffic was stopped, police lines were broken and the city was disrupted, gaining applause from members of the public, who flooded out of shops to commend our protest.

The police presence in the city was over the top. Helicopters, horses, CCTV vans, and police filming and taking pictures of the protesters (90% of whom were under 25).

Tara Staunton

Winchester

THERE WAS an electrifying buzz as hundreds of students from Peter Symonds College poured onto the streets of Winchester, joining up with students from nearby colleges in Eastleigh in response to the YFJ call.

Staff joined students on the gate to give their support. Over 1,000 students rallied in the town centre with home-made placards venting their anger at the Con-Dem government who had "lied their way into power". YFJ leaflets were snatched up as students wanted to discuss the way forward for the campaign. Socialist Party member and president of Peter Symonds NUS, Toby North, appeared on regional TV in the evening making it clear: "We can defeat these plans."

Nick Chaffey

Sheffield

A DEMONSTRATION of 3,000 in Sheffield town centre was followed by over one hundred students moving swiftly into the Hicks building at the University of Sheffield.

A programme for the occupation was agreed - opposition to all tuition fees; opposition to public sector cuts and solidarity with every person affected by the cuts. Also, a demand for the right to recall all MPs found to be breaking their pre-election pledge not to raise tuition fees.

The occupation received support from unions including PCS, Unison and UCU. When threatened with forcible eviction, we decided to leave the Hicks building and moved the occupation to the corridors outside the vice chancellor's office. But when the police were called, we marched out to continue building for the next day of action.

Chaz Lockett

Brighton

3,000 MARCHED in Brighton. Following the call from YFJ, students in at least three schools walked out of class to attend. The mood on the day was electric. Many students (some as young as 11) were attending their first demonstration. When the march had completed its route it did not stop but carried on!

Around 50 students, including members of Brighton Socialist Students, then occupied the Pavilion Parade building of Brighton University. After riot police stormed the building and attempted to remove us, we agreed a set of demands issued to the vice chancellor of the University and the government.

Since then we have been holding regular teach-ins, discussions and talks with staff who are sympathetic to our protest. At times numbers in the occupation have grown to over 100.

Jack Poole and Jon Redford

We are unfortunately unable to carry all the reports we have received. Please see www.socialistparty.org.uk for more



School students attempt to stop protesters attacking the police van.

photo Paul Mattsson

Defend student protesters!

FOR THE 'crime' of protesting, a new generation is facing police repression and huge intimidation from the media and head teachers. Our movement must oppose all police intimidation and victimisation of protesters, including those arrested for protesting, college students who lose their EMA and school students who walk out and are victimised by head teachers.

In London Youth Fight for Jobs had agreed a route with the police to march through Parliament Square. This was ignored by the Met Police who were clearly out for revenge for the Millbank protests two weeks earlier.

Most of the media has repeated the lie that the demonstration was kettled because of an attack on an old, rusty police van that had been left in the middle of the road. However, this was only attacked after protesters had been kettled for some time.

Many school students explained that smashing up the van would be used by

the media to portray them as violent. In fact they and a YFJ activist physically blocked the van.

Our movement must oppose all police intimidation and victimisation of protesters, including those arrested for protesting, college students who lose their EMA and school students who walk out and are victimised by head teachers.

YFJ is organising solidarity action and a legal defence campaign and is appealing for donations. In London a protest has been called at New Scotland Yard on 11 December and we are appealing for statements to hand in to the police to make it clear what really happened on 24 November.

To donate, please send cheques made out to Youth Democratic Rights Campaign at PO BOX 858, London, E11 1YG. If you are one of the students accused, please get in contact with Youth Fight for Jobs for advice and more - youthfightforjobs@gmail.com 020 8558 7947



Students demonstrate in Newcastle.

photo Newcastle Socialist Party



Students carry YFJ placards.

photo Suzanne Beishon