

Youth Fight for Education launch



The movement against fees and cuts needs organisation and strategy to defeat the government. photo Senan

SUNDAY 5 December saw the launch rally of Youth Fight for Education (YFE) – a campaign formed by Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) to help coordinate some of the actions taking place in defence of education and with the aim of giving a strategy for victory to the protests.

Michael Wrack
Westminster University YFE

The first speaker was Jethro Waldron, Youth Fight for Jobs college organiser. Jethro outlined the determined mood on the recent student protests, especially amongst college students.

They have often been the most interested in the wider questions around the cuts and the keenest to link their campaigns with workers fighting job cuts.

The attacks in the further education sector (including a 25% total budget cut, the dropping of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and attacks to the Adult Education Grant) means that many working class people will be priced out of any post-16 education.

The next speaker was Lenny Shail, who took part in the recent occupation at Warwick University.

In Warwick they were able to build a fighting anti-cuts group which united the students with staff and acted as an attractive alternative to students angry at the lack of leadership by the National Union of

Students (NUS) since the national demo on 10 November.

Lenny also spoke about the potential for victories in the movement as in Scotland and Wales, where EMA has been saved. These gains should be used to inspire students across Britain and to push the struggle on.

Claire Laker-Mansfield, national organiser of Socialist Students, was the final platform speaker. Claire outlined the background to the current struggles as the most far reaching attack on young people in decades. The Browne review, the Comprehensive Spending Review, the betrayal of the Liberal Democrats, the planned trebling of tuition fees, and the cutting of EMA, have all left students with no option but to fight back.

Since the NUS demo, there have been days of action on 24 and 30 November, with another planned for 9 December when the parliamentary vote on tuition fees takes place. Claire explained that whatever the outcome of the vote it will not be the end of the campaign to defend education. The protests need to be escalated, with the aim of a national education shutdown in the new year.

There were plenty of speakers from the floor including college students, university students, education workers, and other trade unionists showing the breadth of support for YFE and the kind of unity that will be necessary to defeat these cuts.

Youth Fight for Jobs conference report

AN EXPLOSIVE new period of mass action against the government and its cuts agenda has opened up. Students have protested in their thousands and have walked out and occupied colleges and universities up and down the country.

Jethro Waldron
YFJ colleges organiser

Despite the extreme weather, the Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) conference on Saturday 4 December was attended by students, young workers and trade unionists sharing their experiences and debating the way forward.

It was decided that our urgent priority is to unite the fightback at both local and national level.

The government has been stunned by recent actions of students and their supporters, and our movement has already won victories in Scotland and Wales where EMA has been saved.

But anger alone will not defeat this government. We need organisation, both at local and national

level. United for education and for every job and service this government wants to slash, we can defeat the Con-Dems.

YFJ and its new initiative Youth Fight for Education (YFE), with the support of six national trade unions, and with the ideas we need to win, is uniquely placed to help give this organisation and lead the movement to victory.

There are almost one million people aged 16 to 24 who are out of work, and this figure looks set to grow. A lengthening dole queue, coupled with massive cuts in benefits, will mean condemnation to many years of poverty and joblessness.

As well as getting involved in the campaigns against education cuts, YFJ will continue its important work in the trade unions and amongst the unemployed to fight for a decent future for all young people.

After the opening discussion we broke into sessions on various aspects of the campaign (see reports below)

Jethro Waldron, YFJ colleges organiser

Are cuts necessary?

TIME AND time again YFJ activists are faces with the argument of the supposed necessity of the cuts. This discussion focussed on developing effective arguments against the practically unchallenged view of the mainstream media and politicians.

Topics included how the government justifies the cuts, how best to expose the lies and inconsistencies within their arguments and what counter-arguments are most effective in building a mass movement. For many, myself included, the discussion helped to inspire new ideas and build confidence for the long debate ahead.

Joseph Muller

Youth Democratic Rights Campaign (YDRC)

THIS SESSION discussed the need to build the YDRC to defend our right to protest, which is under attack on several fronts. A legal defence is necessary for those who have been charged with offences

on the various protests. The YDRC is working with a solicitor and we talked about the need to protest outside the courts when cases are heard.

In some schools and colleges we also need to campaign against people losing their Education Maintenance Allowance or being disciplined in other ways for missing lessons.

We also need a political campaign to highlight that the reason the police have been so heavy handed with some of the protests is to scare young people off from continuing to campaign.

Sarah Wrack

Welfare reform

THE DISCUSSION on welfare reforms looked at campaigning against attacks on the unemployed and connecting this to the wider anti-cuts movement. It was said that welfare minister Iain Duncan Smith's plans to force the unemployed to work for benefits are an attack on the jobs and pay of all workers. Unemployed young people are not 'work-shy', but

victims of the capitalist economic crisis. Matt Dobson gave good examples of campaigning by Dundee Youth Fight for Jobs which could be replicated across Britain.

Bob Severn

Organising in schools, colleges and universities

THIS CRUCIAL discussion focussed on the role YFJ and YFE could play in coordinating and sustaining the movement against attacks on education.

It was agreed that we should support and build grassroots campaigns against fees and cuts and that these campaigns should be as democratic and open as possible. There was consensus that occupation can be a useful tactic but that to be effective it is essential that they be based on mass activity. Activists agreed to help build alliances with the trade unions and to connect student struggles to generalised campaigns against public sector cuts.

Tom Creek

Socialist Students conference

ON 5 December Socialist Students members met for our conference to discuss how we can build the fightback against the government's brutal onslaught on education.

In the opening speeches we heard from Neil Cafferky from Ireland and Navid Lari from Belgium giving an insight into youth movements in Europe.

Closer to home, Claire Laker-Mansfield gave a speech summarising the excellent work done by Socialist Student members in the movement against cuts and fees in higher education over the past month.

In the discussion we heard about the successful protests that had happened across the country and how our members played a key role in organising them, including from some who had come straight from occupations at Leeds and Brighton universities. We also discussed the demands that socialists should raise regarding tuition fees and how we can help sustain and build the movement into the new year.

We ended by voting on a resolution describing our view of the movement and potential developments within it, as well as one on fundraising for Socialist Students. We also elected activists to the po-

Our members played a key role in organising many protests, including some who had come straight from occupations at Leeds and Brighton universities.

sitions of National Organiser, Chair and Treasurer.

All those who attended should now be ready to go back to their universities and colleges and take a lead in building a movement that can defeat the Con-Dems' attacks on our right to a decent education.

Nick Hart



Socialist Students members are playing a key role in the movement.