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YFJ national chair

On 1 October, Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) activists start a 330 mile march from Jarrow to London. Why? Because we've had enough, and we know that it doesn't have to be this way.

Why should we let pro-big business politicians get away with condemning the young and the unemployed as a 'feral underclass'? Why should millions of public sector workers have to strike against working longer while the job rejection letters pile up for a generation?

While universities spend millions on rebranding, new students have to live in caravans and temporary accommodation because there aren't enough affordable halls. The government has cut EMA student payments to save a measly £500 million but fritters away huge amounts on consultants and PFI schemes.

We're being made to pay for a crisis



photo Paul Mattsson

not of our making. And this isn't the first time in history either. The great depression of the 1930s saw our grandparents' and great grandparents' living standards decimated. But there was also mass resistance then. In 1936, hundreds of unemployed workers marched from their homes in Jarrow to London. It's in the traditions of such protests that YFJ is marching today.

No choice

The 1930s were a period of mass unemployment and few public services, with the vast majority of people forced into being dependent on the charity of the rich. It is exactly these conditions that the Con-Dem coalition is seeking to bring back into existence. They say that one man's rubbish is another man's treasure, but there are few so low as to warrant comparison with Clegg and Cameron.

Young people have no choice but to fight back. In Spain, Greece, Chile, Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere young

people are and have been to the fore of mass movements and revolutions. The Spanish movement of unemployed and angry young people is organising similar 'long marches'.

In Britain too young people have moved into action with the student movement at the end of 2010 and the thousands of new young trade union members taking part in demonstrations.

Why should millions of public sector workers have to strike against working longer while the job rejection letters pile up for a generation?

The riots over the summer showed that there is huge anger building up. The paths traditionally seen as routes out of misery and desperation turn out to all lead to dead ends. Graduate unemployment has risen dramatically over the last few years, and half of those on internships are receiving no pay whatsoever. Fees of up to £9,000 are a massive deterrent to all but the richest.

With the abolition of EMA college

enrolment has already slowed down significantly. Government plans will push many 14-18 year olds into years of meaningless work experience. This will only add fuel to the fire.

For those out of work, there are half a million jobs for over two and a half million unemployed – but even this national average does not reveal the full scale of the problem. In some areas there can be over 50 Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) recipients chasing every single job.

The government's plans are, unbelievably, to make these people work for free through 'work experience'. Not only will this free labour be used by bosses to increase their profits, but will also lead to fewer paid jobs available.

Cuts in careers advice, such as Connexions, and youth clubs mean young people have literally nowhere to go. After anger exploded on the high streets in August, a YFJ activist asked a young man in Tottenham where his nearest youth club was. Pointing at the wall he was sitting on, "this is my youth club" was his reply!

Mass movement

But the riots only gave the government an excuse to heap more misery on the shoulders of the most-burdened. Instead we have to work together to build a positive movement that will tackle the root causes of the conditions we face.

In doing that we have to use the best ideas of the past and the best ideas of today and tomorrow. With these and with a clear message, we can defeat these attacks and defeat this government.

We're marching to demand the reopening of all closed youth services, creating jobs and offering a vital lifeline for young people. For a restoration of EMA and access to a decent education for all. For 'workfare' schemes to be scrapped, for a day's pay for a day's work.

We demand that the government creates jobs rather than destroying them. During the course of the march youth unemployment is likely to go over one million. Public services are understaffed and facing cuts and there are millions of talented young people who are desper-

ate to put their skills to use.

As a start, a programme of building and restoring high-quality council housing would end the cramped conditions that many young people live in and create a huge number of jobs.

These are big demands. But battles like this are won all the time on a local level. Just recently, a mass campaign in Renfrewshire in Scotland, including a rally of a thousand and a successful ballot for strike action defeated plans to cut 60 teachers' jobs.

The trade unions have massive potential power. When the RMT and TSSA have taken strike action, they've brought the City of London to a standstill.

Support

Since we announced the Jarrow march in February we have received the support of hundreds of trade union branches, anti-cuts groups, political organisations, student activists and many, many of those individuals who aren't organised yet.

We have received the support of eight national trade unions - Unite, UCU, Bectu, CWU, TSSA, RMT, PCS and the FBU. YFJ supporters have been on the TV, radio, newspapers and the internet. And this is just the start.

During the march, thousands will take part in local rallies and demonstrations, culminating in a big demonstration on 5 November, when we arrive in London. But that won't be the end of the campaign. Afterwards we want to build on all the links we have made and all the young people that we meet during the course of the march.

We need to develop mass campaigns around the country, taking up the demands of the march and building a movement that'll force the government to listen to the powerful voice of young people, linking it in with the trade unions.

The 30 November could see three to four million workers taking strike action to defend pensions.

Youth Fight for Jobs will be campaigning for support for these strikes, among young workers, the unemployed as well as among university and college students.

My impressions of the Work Programme

A year of countless hopeful, un-replied-to applications and a few disappointing interviews. My sense of dread in the jobcentre was even greater than usual with the prospect of the Work Programme.

The adviser talked me through the paperwork. My eye was drawn to the motto underneath the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) logo "when you must take part". It was hard to conceal my teeth gritting in anger.

As if I hadn't been taking part! As if I had sat passively, content on poverty benefits watching a whole year of my life pass by! On every sheet of paper, the same sentence: "If you do not undertake the activities required, your benefit could be affected".

My first appointment. I get lost as I think my appointment is with Working Links, who according to their clear-as-mud website description are "a public, private sector, voluntary organisation". Shareholders in Working Links include Manpower, a large employment agency.

But although Working Links, as the "prime provider", has coordinated my

Work Programme, the actual staff I see and facilities I use are from Triage another "public, private...", who I'm told are partners of Working Links in providing the Work Programme.

Paperwork

I shiver in a building that looks like it's been unoccupied for some time. The rooms are bare apart from a few computers. Things are familiar. A lot of the staff are the same people that I've encountered on courses run by other "public, private..." organisations I was sent to by the jobcentre.

The appointment is mostly about filling in paperwork. They explain that "everything has to be signed by the customer" so they can claim the money for their services from the DWP.

I am booked onto courses that also sound familiar to what I have had before. But one course is the 'goals workshop', which I am especially dreading. Apparently the outcome of this course is that you are able to "look in the mirror and tell yourself you're marketable and great".

They ask me to sign a form giving

my consent for Working Links to use me as a success story - this would include a photo and caption article. Working Links and Triage would use this to prove to the DWP that they are worth the contract but also for publicity material to win more contracts and as an encouraging example to other Work Programme customers. I politely refuse.

After doing a little research on the Work Programme and its providers I feel like a powerless guinea pig in a free market experiment

I am told I have to fulfil my part of the Work Programme agreement, which includes responding to activities with enthusiasm. Future activities may include supervised cold calling of employers to ask for work and working for benefits for firms like Poundland and Tesco.

After doing a little research on the Work Programme and its providers I feel like a powerless guinea pig in a free market experiment. The Work Programme was part of David Cameron's 'Big Society'.

Coalition ministers claimed they have changed New Labour's 'welfare to work' to give the task of finding work for the long term unemployed to the 'specialists'. These specialists would treat the unemployed as customers who are given a choice to 'take part' or be punished.



photo Alex Ivanov

Work Programme contracts were tendered out to organisations. For every 'customer' these organisations get back to work they receive thousands of pounds. There is an initial fee of £1,200 if the claimant gets a job and more if they stay in work. The money will come from the taxpayer and the European Union's social fund.

These specialist organisations had to have at least a £20 million turnover in order to take the risk that they wouldn't meet their targets and incur losses from taking on customers that continue to be jobless. Organisations including Working Links, Triage, A4E, Serco etc were already involved in New Labour's Flexible New Deal and the Future Jobs Fund. In every area two providers will be awarded con-

tracts so they can compete with each other, they also will be able to sub-contract to other providers and each other.

The Work Programme is not aimed at finding people jobs. How can they when there are so few? There are an average of six jobseekers for every vacancy, with a much higher ratio in some regions.

The London School of Economics has produced a study showing that the providers will miss 90% of their targets. But it introduces a ruthless competition between unaccountable private companies. This, for the Tories, is easily worth the increasing misery of the unemployed.

A (reluctant) Work Programme participant

Get your Jarrow march t-shirt now!

£10 (+ £2 p&p)

Available in sizes:
Men's S, M, L
Women's M, L
Pre-order online at
www.jarrowmarch11.com



Youth demand a future in Tottenham

On 4 October there will be a protest outside a meeting of the cabinet of Haringey council as part of the ongoing campaign to save youth services in the borough. Young people warned the council of the effects of closing eight out of 13 youth clubs as part of recent cuts.

The August riots started in Tottenham, an area of Haringey, and since then Youth Fight for Jobs has been campaigning with local people for all of these clubs to be reopened.

The protest will take place at 5.30pm outside the Civic Centre, High Road, Wood Green, London N22 8LE. Below is an interview with a young person in Tottenham on the 'Give Our Kids A Future' demonstration that took place in the immediate aftermath.

What do you think of the riots?

I think if you're going to forget about a generation, you're going to raise university fees, you're going to take away EMA, there's no jobs... young people don't have a voice.

People are frustrated that there's no money in the community. The government talk about 'greed', that it was



photo Paul Mattsson

'pure greed'. Is it not greed of the government and politicians that's the reason why we're in the recession in the first place? If the kids see that in the government there's greed and criminality, considering the hacking scandal, how can they talk about criminality?

Cameron has directly attacked the community here, calling it a 'sick community'. What do you think about that?

He doesn't live our lives. His life is pampered, he doesn't know what it's like to live out here. Look at this place! It's not exactly the Ritz is it?

All these riots happened in the poor areas, where there's high unemployment. When this was going on he was on holiday. Half of those kids can't

even afford to go on holiday! Come down to where we live, live our lives and then tell me if the community is sick or not.

What do you think should change?

There needs to be investment, there needs to be education. People need to know that if they get an education there will be jobs for them. We want investment in things to give people opportunities so that people can get jobs. That way, instead of looting the shops they can afford to go into the shops and buy things!

The politicians need to come out of parliament and talk to the people that took part. Don't just label them, come out and find out why this has happened.

What I spent my EMA on

Jack Walker
Hull

The college I attended had a well thought out policy: 'In order to save as much money as possible, we will supply the bare minimum in textbooks, paper, pens, computers and transport.'

What the college failed to notice was the almost unbearable costs placed on my family, my mother and I.

I lived 45 minutes away from my sixth form college - just short of two miles down a very busy A-road - a journey that, I would think, warrants public transport.

However, according to the college, unless you live over two miles away, there is no reimbursement of travel costs. Consequently, I found myself having to pay for public transport when a friend who lives two streets away had free travel.

Costs

Therefore, a usual shopping list for the week included: a £20 weekly bus pass, £15-20 in lunch and breakfast and at least £5 in notepads, pens and printing costs.

This is without mentioning the huge one-off costs often required. £30 a textbook per module in A-level biology, plus numerous literature novels not stocked in the college and £300 for a mandatory biology field trip and over £100 for

a trip to an archaeological site in Cumbria.

As you can see, for me, further education was a very costly experience. The only saving grace was that I was eligible to receive £30 a week Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for immaculate attendance.

With this money, I was able to cut the costs to my mum, and I began to regularly cycle down very unsafe roads in order to break even.

Barely sufficient

For low-income families, EMA is the only way to fund their children's education. However, with increased resource costs, massive education spending cuts and increasing public transport costs, the situation I faced is only going to become harder.

EMA was barely sufficient before, and now when it is needed more than ever, it needs to be higher than ever. Instead it has been destroyed.

Sixth form isn't even the end of the road. Students wanting to reach their potential are then required to invest tens of thousands of pounds and three years in a university degree.

Furthermore, I know from personal experience that to actually gain employment in a sector you have trained in, you are required to get a masters degree as well! For me, three years and a degree have got me to a supermarket checkout!