

Education Worker

Bulletin of the Education Workers Network - 2011 - issue 6

STUDENTS SHOW THE WAY

The occupations by students nationwide have provided a tremendous boost to the anti-cuts campaign. The government appeared to be costing hopeful they could implement their cuts programme with the minimum of opposition. The union leaders' response to the cuts has so far been pathetic, merely calling for a national demonstration on March 26th this year. Little wonder the government was arrogant in its dismissal of the idea that there would be "French style" resistance to the cuts.

The student protests in November and December changed all that. The government was soon forced onto the defensive, employing the age old tactic of trying to blame a "politically motivated" minority as a way of distracting attention from the success of the action. This is a sure sign that it is getting rattled, and shows yet again that it is only through direct action that we can hope to win. Passive demonstrations (however big), petitions, letters to MPs and endless speeches achieve little. It is only through strikes, occupations and other forms of direct action that we will defeat the cuts.

But all the work cannot be left to the students alone - if higher education is not to be butchered then workers are going to have to join the action. If union leaders were serious about defeating the cuts they would use their massive resources to support the student actions, making it a starting point for a campaign for wider strike action. But we have to live in the real world, if there is going to be

strike action it will have to be built from the bottom. This means rank and file education workers joining with students to press for strike action.

The student occupations should just be the start. If students and workers can join forces and take action, it will not only turn up the heat on a weak coalition government, it also will give the whole anti-cuts campaign tremendous momentum and begin to make the idea of a general strike a real possibility. Behind all the bluster and cultivated confidence the government's position is fragile; there is real anger at the banks which will be directed at the government once the cuts begin to bite. The cuts can be defeated, but as education workers we must get ourselves organised.



Pensions Attacked
Pensions are under attack in higher education as they are across the public sector. University managements have been quick to implement the changes to pen-

sions proposed by the government. Among the planned changes university managers plan to cut the contributions the employer makes to pensions schemes, and increase the amount paid in by the workforce; increase the retirement age to 66; and create a two tier pension scheme, by offering a vastly inferior pension scheme to new starters. They are also proposing to stop basing pension increases on the Retail Price Index (RPI) in favour of the much lower measure of inflation the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which will seriously erode the long term value of pensions.

Management defends these savage cuts on the grounds that as workers are living longer, the current pension schemes can no longer be funded. But as with so much of the cuts propaganda, this is just more management lies aimed at conning the workforce into believing that there is "no alternative". The reality is that since 2003 expenditure on staff costs (including pensions) has not risen dramatically, as management claims, but has actually fallen. On top of which the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) investment funds, in the year up to March 2010, rose by a massive £8.28bn to a total of £30.197bn!!! The proposed changes to pensions have little to do with the inability to fund pensions and a lot to do with saving money.

In response to these attacks the UCU has launched a campaign aimed at forcing management to hold a ballot of all USS fund members asking them if they agree with the proposed cuts to their pensions. One wonders

by workers – for workers

Academy Schools Q&A

ACADEMIES: WHAT ARE THEY AND WHY SHOULD WE OPPOSE THEM?

What are Academies?

The academy schools program began in 2000 under New Labour. They are state sector schools run independent of local authority control and with a private sponsor. At present there are over 200 academies in England but the Academies Act 2010 seeks to expand the number of academies, often by 'fast tracking' schools. Originally conceived by New Labour to meet apparent funding problems in education, and seen as a way of either rescuing 'failing' schools, or building new ones in deprived boroughs, Michael Gove's vision seems to be to get 'outstanding' schools to opt for academy status so they can opt out of local accountability structures. And if the 'outstanding' schools do opt for this status, the rest will surely follow, in a bid to 'do what the best are doing'. It remains to be seen what exactly will happen in these 'outstanding'

...Pensions Attacked

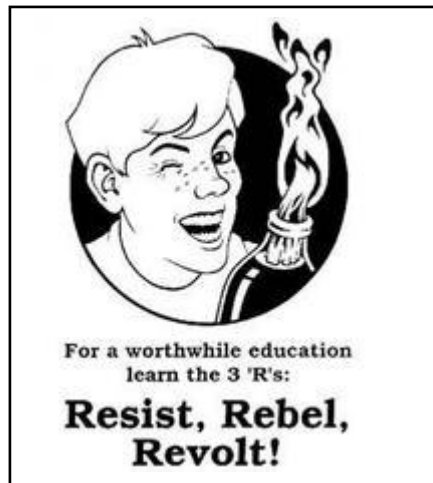
sometimes what planet union leaders are on. Management does not give a toss what workers think about cuts, so why are they going bother consulting them in a ballot?

The union leaders' response to management attacks on the fundamental right of security in old age has so far been pathetic. We face a tough fight ahead, and if we are going to win then sustained mass action by workers is going to have to be organised. And going by the response of the unions to the attacks on university pensions it will be us rank and file workers and not union leaders who will have to do the organising.

schools, though it is expected that they will be free to 'do their own thing', including set their own terms & conditions.

What do sponsors get?

Private sponsors put up an initial capital sum of up to £2m, and the state foots the bill for around another 90%. For this, the sponsor gets a say in the running of the school. They have a majority on the board of governors, dictate the ethos of the school, and have



control over what the school building is used for. Often they have control of aspects of curriculum. Academies are not obligated to recognise unions or follow national agreements over pay & conditions. In my own school, this is manifest in the sorts of outside agencies we have coming in.

What sort of sponsors are out there?

Sponsors do not have to have a proven track record in education. Academies have been opened by Christian 'philanthropist' used-car salesmen like Peter Vardy's Emmanuel Schools in the north-east, other Christian groups like United Learning Trust and Oasis Trust, and multi-national banks like United Bank of Switzerland. There have also been talks of foot-

ball teams opening academy schools.

What do they mean for workers?

Because they can set their own pay & conditions, academies open up the possibility of further eroding conditions for all education workers. They can increase staff workload through ignoring national assessment practices and having extended school days. Many expect staff to stay much longer than 'normal' schools, and if people don't do it they aren't 'committed' to the 'team'.

What are 'Free' Schools?

These are also independent schools in the state sector, planned to be set up by local parents, teachers and voluntary groups. They would also be free to set their own pay & conditions for workers, and it is suspected they will also require a private sponsor in practice. In effect, they would achieve much the same as the roll-out of academies – putting the boot into national agreements, and quite possibly being the death knell for the unions in schools.

Do academies improve education?

Any assertion that they do is baseless, and indeed all indicators suggest they are bad for education. While eroding workers' conditions, they provide what many consider to be a deeply unsatisfactory education to those who need it most. An NUT report in 2007 found that many academies have high staff turnover and sickness figures, and also high pupil exclusion rates (in a bid to move on 'problem' pupils).

Academies have been said to 'massage' their 5 A*-C grade figures (the benchmark by which

schools are often judged) by entering pupils for 'equivalent' courses such as BTECs, courses whose educational value is questioned by Ofqual, the independent educational standards monitor. The risk is that this will create a two-tier education system, a school within a school, where many pupils, often those poorest, 'being "led away" from academic subjects towards "practically irrelevant" qualifications such as BTECs and OCR Nationals that were "mis-sold as 'vocational"''. Of course, such 'practical' courses provide generic skills that make perfect workplace fodder. Although schools are required to make students pursue 'proper' GCSEs in Maths and English, many will use 5 A*-C measures that do not include Maths & English in their 'marketing', further misleading parents.

Another damaging aspect is that the sponsor can have a corrupt influence on the content of the curriculum. In 2006, Channel 4's *Dispatches* found that Emmanuel Foundation schools were teaching creationism alongside evolution in science lessons and that there was overt 'bible-bashing' in the school.

What is the social impact of academies?

Being controlled by a sponsor means the possibility of manipulating pupils with an ideological programme. The Emmanuel Schools Foundation was found to be openly teaching that the Earth is 6000 years old in its science lessons. Others run by businesses and banks have an overt focus on 'business-speak', with many being business specialists or eschewing traditional subjects for business-related study.

Academies are free to select 10% of pupils by aptitude and have been accused of skewing the educational demographics of areas in which they operate. Parents are lured by the fancy buildings

and an emphasis on 'clean and tidy' uniforms. For many parents, who genuinely want the best for their kids, this outwardly clean presentation seems impressive, and academies are extremely good at PR, especially with the support of their sponsors.

The scheme is also ripe for cronyism. For example Brighton & Hove's Falmer School is to be reopened in September as the Brighton Aldridge Community Academy after local 'entrepreneur' Rod Aldridge. Aldridge's background has been in making millions out of government IT contracts as the head of Capita Business Services. Naturally, getting rich from successful bids for funding - after secretly lending the Labour Party £1m - is not the same as running a complex institution like a school. He is currently in the process of taking control of another local school, Portslade Community College. This is a clear case of a business elite using the political process to take over public assets and, as ever, public investment is used to further the ends of private investors.

Revolutionary change

The planned cuts and 'austerity' measures would hit education hard. The attempts to increase private involvement in education and further erode pay & conditions, as well as educational standards, through programmes such as the academies scheme, highlight the need for complete abolition of the existing system. The call for radical overhaul in the education system is a call for revolutionary change in society as a whole.

Until workers and communities are in charge of all industries we will never have an education that truly liberates us and aids our quest for better and more meaningful lives. Education workers must resist attacks on their working conditions, and communities

must fight the erosion and further manipulation of education provision that should be liberating us, rather than churning out workplace fodder for the bosses.

We want education run *by and for* working class people, to meet *our* needs, not the narrow ideological whims of capitalists, politicians or religious cranks. The EWN seeks to build a revolutionary union for education workers, with the ultimate goal being workers control of education, in our interests, not bosses, churches, or the state.

Stop HE Cuts (continued)

Pay and conditions will also worsen, even at the elite universities. Market forces will bring an end to national pay bargaining as competing universities undercut each other, resulting in a "race to the bottom" in terms of pay and conditions. National strikes will be a thing of the past as universities demand locally negotiated pay and conditions.

The government's proposed privatisation of universities poses a threat to students and staff alike. However, if workers and students unite in a national campaign, with other public sector workers, these cuts can be defeated. But victory will not come through petitions and demonstrations, no matter how large. The only way to win is through using our collective strength and taking action. That means strikes, occupations and blockades, not passive marches on parliament.

Here at *Education Worker* we have been working with radical student groups over the past year. One highly national successful joint worker/student conference has already been organised. If you want to get involved in the next, please contact us.

RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Workers at Dundee University are balloting for strike after management decided to go ahead with plans to cut 195 posts. The worst cuts are among university-wide support services and the school of medicine, while other schools are to be merged.

A campaign to keep the nursery at Goldsmiths university open achieved a small victory in August, when management gave in and agreed to keep the nursery open for another year. The Save Goldsmiths Nursery campaign vowed to continue the fight for a nursery on campus. In March, a campaign against the closure of Phoenix nursery at Brighton university managed to stave off closure. Nurseries and creches are threatened at dozens of universities and colleges – and beyond education in other large public sector workplaces.

At UCL a campaign by education workers and students demanding that all UCL workers, including outsourced cleaners and catering staff, be paid a London Living Wage has met success. In late September UCL managers announced they'd agree to paying a living wage of £7.85 per hour, though it is not clear if the change will be phased in as contracts expire. UCL claimed it could not afford to increase pay – though it can afford to pay provost Malcolm Grant the sec-

ond highest salary of any university head in the country. Grant earns £404,000 a year, and even his travel expenses in 2009 of £12,280 exceed the average annual salary of a UCL cleaner by a third.

Following the decision of bosses at London South Bank University not to honour the 2009-10 pay deal and to break from national bargaining over pay, UCU members are moving towards industrial action.

A week before the Spending Review in October 2010, Lord Browne, the former BP boss, recommended uncapped tuition fees for universities. The news led to a number of student protests across the country. At London South Bank, where 40 staff are also facing redundancy, 50 students protested outside the Vice Chancellor's office, leading to an angry standoff with security. At Leeds University, over 60 students took part in an anti-fees protest. Protesters from the Really Open University also stormed the room from where Channel 4 was to broadcast live on the Browne review. At Birmingham University 200 students protested, building a barrier out of boxes to show how fees would act as an obstacle to students studying. One placard had the slogan "tuition fees: to infinity and beyond!" When the government announced on 3rd November that tuition fees would go up to £9,000, this led to

further protests. At Goldsmiths in London students occupied a building after a rally. A survey showed that 70% of students say fees of £7,000-a-year would have deterred them from going to university.

Updates at: <http://anticuts.com>;
<http://www.stopthecuts.net>;
www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk;
anticutsaction.wordpress.com.

Stop HE Cuts

The government's intention to cut the teaching grant to English universities by 40% with a 100% reduction for arts, humanities and social sciences should be seen for what it is: the privatisation of whole swathes of higher education. Taken together with the tuition fees hike, what we are seeing is the state pulling out of HE on a massive scale, with the gap being filled with individual payments from students (or should we say customers?).

This process has profound implications for all university staff. Firstly, there will be massive job losses as some universities go bankrupt and others have to constantly make cuts in order to survive. Cuts will inevitably lead to increased workloads as fewer and fewer staff are forced to take on more and more work.

(continues on page3)

Education Workers Network

EWN is made up of Solidarity Federation members who work in the education sector. Joining EWN also means joining your nearest SF group (solfed@solfed.org.uk or PO Box 29, S.W. DO, Manchester, M15 5HW for details). Even if you don't wish to join us, we welcome requests to join our discussion list (ewn@lists.riseup.net) and / or for bundles of *Education Worker*. Also available: EWN intro pamphlet; basic EWN intro leaflet; back issues of *Education Worker*. EWN, c/o News From Nowhere, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool, L1 4HY. ewn@ewn.org.uk; www.ewn.org.uk



EWN Intro Pamphlet

Building a Revolutionary Union for Education Workers

Please send SAE to EWN (see address opposite)

