

# Act now for ESOL!

**Rebecca Galbraith**

**E** SOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) is the main publicly funded English language provision in the UK and is an essential service for migrants. But now, the survival of ESOL is under threat. Proposed government cuts to ESOL will mean that from August 2011: only people from 'settled communities' receiving 'active' benefits (Jobseekers or Employment Support Allowances) will get free classes; students on other benefits (so called 'inactive' benefits) who currently get free classes will now have to pay fees, and students who currently pay will pay more - perhaps as much as £1,200 per course; it will become much more difficult to learn English for those who cannot pay, making it even more difficult to gain citizenship or permanent residence in the UK; asylum seekers will no longer have free classes; at the same time there are cuts to advocacy and interpreting.

## ESOL provision is not a luxury

If people can't speak English how can they find work, help their children at school, take part in their local communities or assert their rights? A recent survey by the Association of Colleges (AOC) of 75 colleges across England found that of all students currently enrolled on ESOL courses, 53 per cent - of which around three quarters are women - are receiving inactive benefits and will become ineligible for free classes next year. In some parts of the country this figure is even higher. From August of this year, it is estimated that around 99,000 students will have to pay fees of between £400 and £1,200; colleges fear that many will simply be unable to pay. To make matters worse, the £4.5m fund currently available to help ESOL students who pay fees will no longer exist. In London alone around 40,000 students may have their ESOL place taken away from them, meaning courses will close and teachers will lose their jobs.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), who are now 'responsible' for ESOL, have yet to carry out an assessment of how their

cuts will affect individuals and communities. When they do, they will find that cuts in ESOL will be devastating for everyone, but that women, people on low wages, and asylum seekers will be particularly badly hit. In his recent, much touted speech in which he announced the failure of 'state multiculturalism', David Cameron demanded that immigrants 'speak the language of their new home'. But at the same time his government is cutting entitlement to the very English classes that would enable them to do that. Despite a persistent belief amongst politicians and tabloid journalists that migrants are reluctant to learn English, most people are only too aware that English is essential for access to further education and training, employment and the chance to participate in society in whatever way that might be. Learning English is neither an obligation nor a privilege, but a right.

The current government, like their predecessors in New Labour, frame the need for migrants to learn English in terms of 'community cohesion' and 'integration'. As teachers and students we need to question what these terms mean. Which communities seem to lack cohesion, exactly? Probably not the exclusive communities of the very rich who surround themselves with gates and walls to keep out their poorer neighbours. When the Government says it wants 'integration' does it actually want obedient citizens who do not assert their rights? Real integration looks very different. To take the world of work as an example, one of the main reasons for the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers is the language barrier that prevents access to and participation in trade unions. 'Integration' into a trade union is a key way for migrant workers to fight for better pay and conditions. It is also a two-way process - the onus is on the unions themselves to organise migrant workers as well as on the workers to learn English if they can. But this is probably not what David Cameron wants when he talks about integration!

Of course, the need to find a job, or get a better job, is a major motivation for people to join an ESOL class - but work and employability are not the

only reasons people are motivated to learn. Adult learning helps all of us to gain a better quality of life on many levels - socially, emotionally, mentally and politically. As educators we need to remind ourselves that this is as true in ESOL as it is in all other areas of education. If we argue for ESOL purely on economic grounds, or accept the Government's definitions of 'cohesion' and 'integration', the only provision we will be left with will be narrowly tailored to these ends. We may be under attack, but we do not need to be defensive. ESOL is for everyone who needs it, for whatever reason at all.

### Students resist the ESOL cuts

I teach ESOL at the Migrants' Resource Centre and at Newham College and I am also part of the Action for ESOL campaign which has recently been formed to organise against the threats to funding. One of the exciting things about this campaign, and the Save ESOL campaign in 2007, is the participation of large numbers of ESOL students who have been writing letters to their MPs, organising in their colleges and communities and demonstrating alongside their teachers. To research this article I went to Tower Hamlets College in East London to interview a group of ESOL students who have started their own campaign against the cuts. The interviewees were Rakib, Naz, Raz, Shahnaj, Malika and several other students who did not wish to give their names. Although some of the grammar has been altered for publication, the content has not.

### Qu. Why is ESOL important to you?

This was the first question I asked the group. One man, Naz, began like this: 'Without ESOL we can't help our children. We can't go out shopping. We will have a dark life. We have eyes - we can see the world, but with education we will see more. If ESOL students like us have no education, we can't understand things. ESOL is giving us life, giving us experience to work. It stops isolation of communities. When I came into this country I felt shy, I couldn't buy a chocolate bar. My younger sister or brother had to come with me. So I was isolated. All the women, they are isolated. They are working in the home, doing housework. If they come for ESOL they know more about how the world is. They can fill in forms. They can do many things', said Naz.

I asked the other students if they agreed. 'Yes', they all said, 'YES'. What do the women think? Is this true? One woman said, 'Yes, if anyone came to our door, and we didn't know English, we wouldn't

open it, because we were scared'. Another said, 'If ESOL is cut we won't learn more English. Women will have to stay at home - there will be more isolation and depression'. Malika explained, 'Four or five years ago I was taking my children to school and the head asked me if I wanted to learn English. I was so, so happy. I had no education in my country. Others, they should be able to learn, like me'.

Why else is ESOL important? 'If ESOL is cut then we can't have education or get jobs', said one woman, and another, 'I'm a student and housewife. Without ESOL how can I learn English? If we can't speak English, how can we help our children?' A Somali woman observed, 'I come from Somalia. This country is my country now so I need to understand everything - the hospital, the council. No ESOL, no life. Without ESOL I can't go to college, I can't get a job. In my opinion ESOL is important. English is an international language; you need it all over the world. In Somalia you can't get a good job without it'. Ironically, she feels, she is being deprived of the chance of learning the most powerful language in the world, in an English speaking country.

### Qu. Why are the cuts happening?

At the second question, the students all started to speak at once, 'because of the credit crunch, because the Government has no money. If we don't have enough nurses we will get sick, if there are not enough teachers we can't learn, if there are not enough police there will be more crime'. What could they cut? 'Cut the bonuses of the people in the banks. The problem started from the banks. Cut spending on war. If they cut education now, there will only be more problems in the future'.

Raz expressed a beautiful analogy about how futile the ESOL cuts are, 'After war the country is damaged, like a river. But if you try to stop a flooding river with a small jug it does not work. They are cutting small things, like teachers, like ESOL. This is not going to do anything, this does not fix it'.

We talked briefly about the Government's attitude to immigration and I asked the students what they think about the introduction of a pre-entry English requirement for those coming on a spousal visa. There was a mixed and heated response. One student said she thought that the country is full up, and that making people learn English before they come to England could be a good thing. Others strongly disagreed and said it was about being against migrants and wanting people to go back. 'Why did they give us the opportunity to come?' asked one student, 'Because they were ruling us for

200 years. We have the right to come here. It is our country too', responded another student.

### Qu. What are you going to do about it? Tell me about your campaign.

'We are doing a petition, a leaflet, a poster and a demonstration - all of the students together. Last week we organised a big meeting, about 50 students. There are 1,000 ESOL students at Tower Hamlets College, we need to let them all know and have a meeting of 200/300 students'.

There was a discussion about whether the campaign can win. One student said, 'We can email, Facebook, send letters, but then it is David Cameron's decision, we have to accept it'. Will

David Cameron listen? 'No he won't, he is a rich man', said one - but others thought, 'No, we can win - in Egypt they joined together and they did it'.

### Qu. Any final comments?

'All the people outside Europe we don't know English. We are people who live in this country. We are the community. Do you understand?'

If you do understand then get involved in the campaign; 'Action for ESOL' has been set up to fight the cuts, and for free ESOL provision, for all who need it. For ideas of what you can do go to <http://actionforesol.org/take-action>.

**Thanks to the students at THC and their teachers Becky Winstanley and Melanie Cooke.**

### Latest news!

#### Are we about to get a u-turn on ESOL fees?

An article this week on ESOL funding in the *Financial Times* suggests John Hayes is less than impressed with his civil servant briefings on ESOL impact analysis (memories of Bill Rammell anyone?). Mr Hayes is quoted as saying that he has requested analysis of the changes to fee and funding eligibility for those on inactive benefits (and their dependents). Let's keep the pressure up!

#### Action for ESOL: day of action

The Action for ESOL campaign is calling a national day of action against the cuts to ESOL funding on **24th March 2011**.

This will be a day when ESOL teachers, students and all who support us organise in our communities and in our colleges and other workplaces in the week of the budget and the demonstration called by the TUC on March 26th.

Actions can be large or small - the main thing is that you organise something and let everybody know. Let's get as much attention as we can!

### Ideas for action:

- a demonstration in the local neighbourhood / outside your college or workplace
- public meetings, in or outside college premises (if your college is friendly to this, try local community groups and centres)
- leafletting
- pickets
- symbolic actions such as: students taping their mouths in protest and holding hands round the college building (thanks to students in Greenwich Community College for this one)
- an ESOL themed picnic
- an ESOL Teach-in / lesson in a public place
- community language awareness and skill-sharing talks and workshops
- banner making and poster making for 26th
- and lots more . . .

Please let us know your plans for action so we can publicise them on our website: [www.actionforesol.org](http://www.actionforesol.org). See also NATECLA: [www.natecla.org.uk](http://www.natecla.org.uk) and our Facebook page and [Twitter@actionforesol](https://twitter.com/actionforesol)

### Lets's take action for ESOL on 24th!

# OFSTED - weapon of mass demoralisation

*We reprint here a CHENEL UCU branch leaflet written by Jenny Sutton*

**H**ow many staff have worked 12-hour days over the last three weeks, or given up weekends to work on lesson plans, schemes of work or ILPs? Probably most of us, because it's Ofsted time again! But pause for thought - **if it can't be done within a 35 hour week, it's not reasonable to expect it, and we shouldn't be doing it!** And what's going on when certain managers are telling staff that 'normal contractual terms and conditions are suspended during Ofsted'? Your working hours can only be changed with your consent, and this type of bullying is unacceptable, counter-productive and illegal.

## What a charade!

We all know that preparing for an Ofsted visit is about papering over the cracks that are inevitable in an under-resourced and over-stretched institution. As each college scrabbles to suppress its negative features and promote its positive ones, there is an inevitable tendency for the bar to rise and the illusion to become the expectation.

All colleges feel compelled to collude in this charade, because when government funding is

based on results rather than need, we have to compete to save provision - and jobs. Can you imagine a situation where colleges, instead of competing, shared best practice to raise standards for all? And weren't punished for failure, but were offered support, expertise and additional funding for areas identified as weak? That would really make a difference to people's lives!

## The tyranny of the market

Unfortunately, despite the disastrous implosion of the banking sector (for which we are all paying), governments since Thatcher have been in thrall to the market, and believe that education needs to be subject to 'market discipline'. The IMF, in its drive to privatise education, has described teachers as 'an institutional block to change'. For market values to prevail, teachers need to be subdued, our collective spirit to be broken down. We need to be trained to individualise success and failure, rather than to challenge the basis on which we are judged and the ideology on which our current education system is based.

The mechanism? Ofsted, weapon of mass demoralisation,

whose role is to undermine teachers' self-esteem. **They expect us to produce a cordon bleu meal on a camping stove,** and rather than challenge the expectation, we internalise the inadequacy and blame ourselves. It is much harder to demand better pay and conditions when you are on the defensive.

## Who judges Ofsted?

No matter how often you have been through an Ofsted inspection, you can't get it right. The private companies that carry out the inspection have different expectations and prejudices; their judgements are never moderated, and they are never asked to look at the same institution independently of each other as a basic check on their reliability. Most inspectors have no idea what it is like to teach 23 hours a week in an FE college - or if they did once, they couldn't hack it.

Of course they have a material incentive to fail an institution - the inspectors can return as consultants to ensure success in re-inspection. All sectors have their parasites, and education is no exception.

How dare they judge an experienced teacher with a great success rate as inadequate

because during their fleeting visit they saw no ICT being used? How can an inspector from leafy Middle England down-grade us because we don't provide enough work experience or job opportunities for students - in Tottenham, with the highest unemployment in London!

### Erosion of terms and conditions

The malign influence of Ofsted is not limited to the occasional

visits. Its shadow darkens our sector because management use it as a mantra to drive us to do more for less.

Internal observation regimes mirror the Ofsted process, generating unease and insecurity - 'satisfactory' work is deemed not good enough, and all teachers struggle to work harder. Artificially inflated standards become the 'norm', unachievable without hours of unpaid work; grades are used punitively to discipline some teachers and get rid of others.

At times of pressure, we have to work even harder to defend our terms and conditions - after all, in the context of massive cuts, working a 12 hour day will not save jobs, only a determined and collective fight for decent pay and conditions and properly funded education can do that. This cannot be separated from the fight to reclaim education for its true social purpose. Use your vote in the forthcoming ballot to defend our pay and pensions!

# Teacher neutrality

Philippe Harari adds a further point to his *PSE 61* article, 'Education is never neutral'

In my article published in *PSE 61* I wrote about political neutrality in the classroom and addressed the issues of teachers expressing their own political views to students and how they should react to students wishing to miss classes in order to take part in political activity. One important aspect of this whole question that I failed to address was the issue of bringing political speakers into schools and colleges.

Inviting speakers to talk to students has enormous educational benefits but such speakers will inevitably present a one-sided point of view. Speakers will vary in the extent to which they try to 'convert' students to their point of view or to present a more balanced argument, but it is not possible for them to be completely neutral and objective. Of course, the event will not be entirely one-sided as long as students have the opportunity to question or disagree with the speaker, and part of our job as teachers is to encourage students to do this effectively.

The question this raises, though, is whether each invited speaker must be balanced out by another speaker taking an opposing view, either in the same session or on a different occasion. My view is that this is neither practical nor necessary. If we were to adopt this principle, it would make it significantly harder to run sessions with invited speakers and it would be a pity to lose these valuable educational opportunities.

Students do not simply absorb what a speaker is saying; they are capable of discriminating between what they agree with and disagree with, and questioning speakers appropriately. Furthermore, students are exposed to 'outside' influences in many other ways. As well as visiting speakers, students are shown documentaries and films and exposed to polemical arguments through debates, looking at websites, reading books and articles etc. If the large majority of these inputs took a single political view in a one-sided way, then teachers could legitimately be accused of presenting an unbalanced view to students. However, over the course of a year, students will be exposed to a wide range of different opinions and values and encouraged to question them and to discriminate between them.

On a final note, college management is not always neutral in its assessment of neutrality! It is often the case that they will question the political objectivity of a teacher following invitations made to certain speakers, but not to others. For example, in one case a teacher was questioned about inviting a speaker from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign on the grounds that they would present a one-sided view, but was not questioned when they invited a local Conservative MP.

# News update: January - February 2011

## Week beginning 3/1/11

[Previous week] The Government reveals that Lib Dem deputy leader Simon Hughes has been given the role of 'access champion', such that, over the coming six months, he must 'design a communications strategy' aimed at persuading people that the decision to abolish education maintenance allowances (EMAs), scrap the £250m Aimhigher programme and raise HE fees to £9,000 a year will not deter people from less well-off backgrounds from seeking to enter HE.

The Government is to put £3m over three years into the National Skills Academy for Rail Engineering (NSARE), announced by Vince Cable in December, aimed at tackling skill shortages in that industry. NSARE is likely to be linked to Derby College and South Cheshire College.

A report in *Times Higher Education (THE)* claims that UCU is 'in turmoil', which supposedly arises from a struggle between the UCULEft organisation on the one side, and, on the other general secretary Sally Hunt, a minority of National Executive Committee (NEC) members, and at least some officials (who are themselves members of Unite). The dispute is presented as centring on moves, allegedly initiated by UCULEft, to swing the NEC

behind support for further demonstrations over HE fees, cuts etc, which are not supported by the NUS, with which UCU has hitherto cooperated, thereby supposedly undermining the position of officials involved in this cooperation.

Points in a *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* article on the situation facing FE teacher training include: the Browne review of HE funding included a proposal that in future trainee FE lecturers themselves should pay the full costs of their training; around 90 per cent of FE lecturers undergo their training on a part time basis; this currently costs them £1,500 for a two year course; in 2012-13, when Browne's proposals are due to take effect, this figure could rise to £8,000 (according to the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training) or at least to £6,000 (according to the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers - UCET); the increase will result from the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) withdrawing from universities and FE colleges grants which currently hold down the fees lecturers must pay and provide bursaries for full time students.

A *THE* article about the plan by Denise Walker, headteacher of Methwold High School, near Thetford, to provide at the school

by part-time study whole degree programmes accredited via London University's external degree programme, reveals that a key aspect is the involvement of a company set up by former Royal Holloway University of London MBA director Duncan Harris. A new building on the school's premises will be leased to Harris's company, and this in turn will then deliver a London-accredited bachelor's degree in business admin., using 'tutors' from local companies.

The consultant Nick Linford, author of the *Hands-on Guide to Post-16 Funding*, predicts that the decision made public in the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) 16-19 funding statement, according to which annual per-student 'entitlement' funding (money that pays for tutorials and extra-curricular activities such as ASDAN courses in 'additional' Key Skills and the like) is to be cut by 2015 from 114 hours to 30. This could add up to a further £643m cut in 16-19 provision, as well as leading to job losses amongst lecturers whose timetables include this work.

The results of ballots on the employers' plans to destroy the final salaries pension arrangements for academic staff in pre-1992 universities, held at Oxford and Cambridge as a result of staff pressure, are as follows: at Cambridge, out of 6,388 to whom

ballot papers were issued, 802 (81 per cent of votes cast) voted to support the UCU's alternative proposals, and 186 (19 per cent) to support the USS (ie employers') plans; at Oxford, of 6,151 to whom papers were issued, 753 (81 per cent) supported UCU, 101 (11 per cent) supported USS, and 63 (7 per cent) rejected both.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) releases figures showing that by 20/12/10 applications for HE places to start in September 2011 (ie the last year before fee increases apply) totalled 344,064, implying a likely final total of 705,000 (up from last year's record 688,000).

### Week beginning 10/1/11

Points in a *TES* feature on HE provision in FE colleges include: In a speech at the end of 2010, universities minister David Willetts revealed that the Government has been in discussion with the publishing company Pearson about the latter's plans for the exam board they own, Edexcel, to award its own degrees, to be 'delivered' through FE colleges; this provision is to be piloted from September 2011; Pearson has recently recruited Roxanne Stockwell, previously employed by BPP (the first private company licensed to award degrees here), as managing director of Pearson's 'HE awards business'; Association of Colleges (AOC) chief executive officer (CEO) Martin Doel says: 'We would be interested to explore further the proposals set out by Pearson'; AOC chairperson Chris Morecroft, formerly principal of Worcester College of Technology, 'thinks the target audience [for such provision] will be students from poorer backgrounds and older people who are already working'; Pearson UK

president Rod Bristow says he looks to the deal between Manchester Metropolitan University and McDonald's Hamburger University (located in East Finchley) as offering 'the kind of tailor-made education that is proving increasingly attractive to employers'.

Delivery plans released by the HE research councils to coincide with their announcement of budget allocations include a range of measures aimed at further concentrating such funding in a limited number of 'excellent' institutions.

For the AOC, education policy director Joy Mercer says that new minimum levels of performance (MLPs) issued jointly by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) result from 'very little consultation' with 'the sector' and are 'about the Government raising the bar'. Ofsted could be used to identify colleges failing to achieve these MLPs, which could then have all their funding for the relevant qualifications removed. An SFA spokesperson says that the MLPs represent 'the absolute minimum success rate performance, and providers are expected to exceed them'.

Board papers published by HEFCE reveal that: at a meeting of its audit committee on 25/11/10 concern was expressed about HEFCE's ability to remain independent of the Government, given pressure from the latter to cut HEFCE's own running costs (requiring an 11 per cent £2m cut this year) and 'the level of control imposed by BIS [Department of Business, Innovation and Skills] over HEFCE'; a meeting of the HEFCE board itself, on 9/12/10, decided, on the basis of an audit committee report, to plan for a 'worst case scenario' in which by the end of the academic year

2012-13 (ie one year after introduction of the new fees regime) 23 institutions could be 'at higher risk'.

Skills minister John Hayes has instructed the SFA to investigate a whistleblower's allegations about the conduct by The Manchester College (TMC) of offender education at Reading Young Offenders Institution. The allegations were made to Reading East (Tory) MP Rob Wilson. TMC was awarded the Reading contract by the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) in August 2009. Under the previous provider, Milton Keynes College, 1,312 inmates had attended classes, but under TMC this had by March 2010 allegedly fallen to 610. In addition, South Staffordshire (Tory) MP Gavin Williamson has raised with Hayes allegations against TMC made to him by John Bunyard, sacked by TMC from his employment as a lecturer at HMP and YOI Brinsford (near Wolverhampton) because he refused to take three-hour numeracy classes.

Lord (formerly Kenneth) Baker tells the *TES* that (in their words) that there has been 'widespread interest from higher and further education, local councils and groups of teachers' in his plan for 'university technical colleges'.

At a meeting in the Commons with people protesting against the axing of EMAs, Simon Hughes says he is likely to abstain in the vote on this issue, to be held on 19/1/11.

After being told by principal Lynn Merilion that the alternative was to receive no pay at all in March, staff at Stockport College reluctantly vote through their unions to accept an arrangement by which 900 of them (ie all except the lowest paid 100) will take a 2 per cent pay cut until August.

(Merilion claims that this is necessary in order to compensate for the £4.3m lost by management after the collapse of their £100m building project which was part of the Learning and Skills Council's Building Colleges for the Future fiasco, adding that: 'I think the staff are wonderful'.

Northumberland College is to merge with Newcastle College, the union-bashing principal of which, Jackie Fisher has already taken over Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College in Lancashire and the remnants of the collapsed Carter and Carter private training organisation.

The outsourcing company SERCO awards West Nottinghamshire College a contract by which the latter will provide Skills for Life Training for 1,000 Serco staff 'across the country'. (In the 1990s, Barnsley College briefly became on paper the largest college in the country after entering into a similar franchising scam with several companies, including Ford. This was during the period in which corrupt former principal David Eade and his acolytes stole nearly £1m from Barnsley. At least one of these acolytes was later employed by SERCO.)

Figures released by the HE Statistics Agency (HESA) show that in 2009-10: 2,493,420 people were enrolled as students at HE institutions in the UK; among these there were 280,760 from countries outside the EU; in addition, 408,685 people were studying overseas with UK universities, 200,800 of them as students registered at UK universities themselves, and 207,885 through UK university awards franchised to other providers; of these 408,685, 340,235 were studying outside the EU; in many cases such

provision involves a tie-up between a UK university and a for-profit provider in the host country.

### Week beginning 17/1/11

The Government is pressing ahead with plans to include 'impact' (ie, in effect, direct commercial potential) as a major criterion of how 'quality-related' research funding should be distributed to universities by HEFCE in 2014 via the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

FE principals, including especially the Tertiary College Group, of which former Cirencester College principal Nigel Robbins is executive director, claim that the insistence by HM Revenue and Customs that VAT be paid on new buildings where these are used for supposedly income-generating purposes means that classes for people over 18 are increasingly being timetabled in sub-standard older buildings.

In a report on three impending UCU ballots (over HE pay and conditions, and over pensions) and possible links between action that might result and student mobilisations, the *THE* claims that the Education Activist Network (EAN, involved in the latter) 'draws some of its funding from UCU branches'.

Initial findings of a joint UCU and AOC survey suggest around 100,000 of the 195,000 people on ESOL courses run by FE colleges and related community groups would be excluded from these under the Government's new regulations about who will be eligible for fully funded ESOL provision.

In one of a number of articles published recently by the *Guardian* and *TES* praising the regime

introduced at Harlow College by principal Colin Hindmarch, the *TES* quotes FE minister John Hayes as saying (in the previous week): 'We will look very closely at the work being done at Harlow College, which is an exemplar in so many ways.' (In 2007, against union and community opposition, Hindmarch forced a large number of Harlow staff, including targeted union officers, out of their jobs, and imposed arguably the worst conditions in any FE college in the country.)

A poll of 100 employers recruiting 'high-flying' graduates, conducted by High Fliers Research, predicts there will be around 45 applicants for every such vacancy in the summer of 2011, and reports that a majority of employers think it unlikely they would take on a graduate without 'work experience' (ie one who has not done an unpaid internship).

Jill Lanning, CEO of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, which comprises around 120 exam boards, expresses concern about both the reliability and the confidentiality of the Personal Learning Record ie the new arrangement (managed by the Learning Records Service, itself administered by the SFA) which is eventually to hold an online record of every FE student's participation, qualifications etc.

In the Commons' debate about their plan to axe EMAs: the Government rejects an offer by shadow education secretary Andy Burnham to accept a 19 per cent cut in EMA funding; a question by Scunthorpe MP Nic Dakin (formerly principal of John Leggott College there) reveals that scrapping the EMA will involve compensating Capita, the outsourcing firm contracted to run this till 2013. (The unexpired portion of Capita's contract is valued at £34m plus VAT.)



Also on EMAs, a joint UCU/AOC survey of 700 FE students finds that 38 per cent would not have begun their studies without one, and 70 per cent would have to drop out if EMAs are withdrawn.

David Cameron announces that the Government's education bill, due next week, will have a clause allowing sixth form colleges to re-open as academies.

The YPLA announces an extra £57m in capital funding for sixth-form colleges to replace and/or refurbish buildings.

At a debate in Westminster Hall called by the Commons Children, Schools and Families select committee's chairperson Graham Stuart, children's minister Tim Loughton reveals that the remit of the report on vocational education being written by academic Alison Wolf has been widened to cover the question of vocational FE lecturers teaching in schools.

At a meeting with HE unions, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) refuses to increase its 0.4 per cent 2010-11 pay offer. (GMB, Unison and Unite have accepted this, the Educational Institute of Scotland [EIS] has rejected it, and UCU is to ballot HE members starting on 2/2/11.)

Management at Liverpool Hope University, which faces the loss of 95 per cent of its public funding for undergraduate degrees, issues notice of plans to cut 60 academic and 50 non-academic posts.

### Week beginning 24/1/11

Save EMA, a campaign initiated by James Mills, described by the *TES* as 'a former EMA recipient . . . [who] now works as a re-

searcher for a Labour MP, is taking advice from 'trade union lawyers' about a possible legal challenge to the Government's axing of EMAs - on breach of contract grounds. NUS moves in this direction indicate that, because AS and A2 are classed as different courses, any test case would be likely to focus on students doing two-year vocational courses.

The Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning issues for consultation a draft budget which would require the two universities there - Queen's Belfast and the University of Ulster - to make 22 per cent 'efficiency savings' by 2014-15, thereby contributing a total of £68m to the £144m overall cut to be made by the Department by then.

A *TES* article reveals that in December, Hull Crown Court gave suspended nine-month jail sentences and community service orders to Julie Baker and Stuart Evans, the directors of East Yorkshire Care Sector Trust. Between 2003 and 2006, the LSC paid this organisation £337,000 for providing training to homeless people and ex-offenders, of which Baker and Evans stole £54,000.

*Collaborate to Compete: Seizing the Opportunity of Online Learning for UK Higher Education*, final report of the Government's Online Learning Task Force, recommends that the Government inject £100m over the next five years, to be spent on setting up between three and five consortia of universities and IT companies. (The Task Force was chaired by British Library head Dame Lynne Brindley, and included Wolverhampton University vice-chancellor Caroline Gipps, along with 'experts' from Microsoft, Apple and Pearson.)

A larger number than last year of Russell and 1992 Group universities, (including Bristol from the former and Sussex and Exeter from the latter) are this year demanding that applicants have at least one A\* on top of straight A grades at A-level. (In summer 2010, 17.9 per cent of A-level candidates from private schools achieved an A\*, as compared with 5.8 per cent of candidates from comprehensive schools.)

Commenting on the Government's HE fees policy and the problem of collecting money from people elsewhere in the EU who study here, HE Policy Institute (HEPI) director Bahram Bekhradnia points out that, because of lower salaries in several EU countries, 'many more students will fail to reach the £21,000 salary threshold, and even when they do, . . . many more will reach the 30-year forgiveness date without having repaid it all', (Student Loans Company figures show that EU students' fee debt rose from £42m in 2008 to £167m now.)

UCU members at Richmond upon Thames College hold their third one-day strike this academic year in protest against management plans to axe jobs and the teaching time available to students.

In a letter to Tory MP Mike Freer, David Willetts says he has no power to intervene in the repercussions of the collapse, in November 2010, of the north London-based London College of Traditional Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. Some qualifications at this private college were validated by Portsmouth University, and in 2009-10 24 students there received fee loans from the Student Loans Company. 'Many' (*THE*) students there paid £6,500 in fees days before the collapse, and the total

owed by the institution to students collectively is over £900,000. But financial rules mean any money left over will go to directors before students.

HEFCE CEO Sir Alan Langlands tells a conference on 'leading Transformational Change', held in London, that the Government may make still larger cuts in HE

funding if a rush by universities to set fees at £9,000 per year triggers a higher level of student loan subsidies than it has bargained for (ie it will prefer to cut teaching grants than to ask taxpayers for more money).

The Government's Education Bill includes a clause which would allow them to charge interest

rates of up to 3 per cent above inflation and 'no higher than those prevailing on the market' on student loans taken out after 2012-13.

### Week beginning 31/1/11

Former HEFCE CEO David Eastwood and David Greenaway,

## Fighting the Cuts!

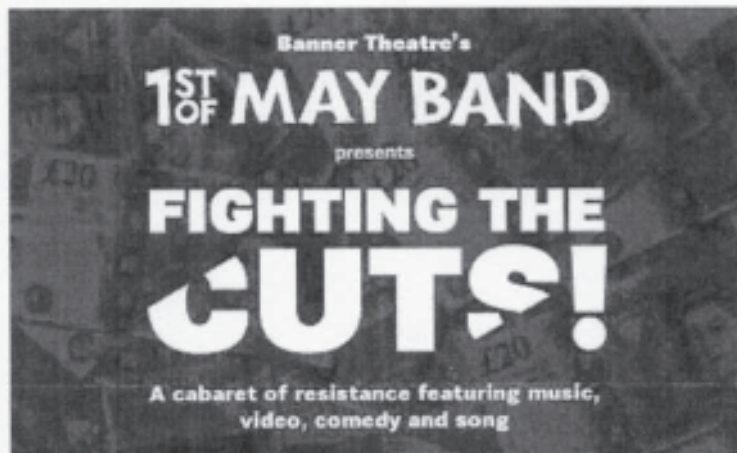
The Con-Dem government have launched a major attack on Britain's welfare state, threatening the jobs and living standards of millions of working people.

### Whose crisis?

They claim that the national deficit demands massive cuts in our public services. The truth is neo-liberal governments throughout the world created the crisis, allowing the global banking system to career out of control in its unfettered pursuit of profit.

### Who will pay?

Not the fat cats. As usual, they expect ordinary working people to pay with the most savage cuts that this country has seen since the 1930s.



### Our answer? Resistance!

Banner Theatre's 1st of May Band is touring **Fighting the Cuts!**, a multimedia cabaret of songs, music, comedy and video. The Band delivers a punchy soundscape of reggae, rap, flamenco, folk and blues to lay bare the real story behind the crisis, and support the campaign to defend our welfare state.

The 1st of May Band is touring to venues and communities across the country. See our website at [www.1stofmayband.com](http://www.1stofmayband.com) for more details.

To book the Band, phone 0845 458 1909, or email [info@bannertheatre.co.uk](mailto:info@bannertheatre.co.uk)

vice-chancellors respectively of Birmingham and Nottingham Universities, announce an agreement by which these two Russell Group institutions, which together have about 67,000 students and 14,000 staff, will collaborate on areas which include provision in China and South America, research, some joint degrees and some academic appointments. Greenaway claims the arrangement is 'not about changing the size or shape of the workforce'.

Students taking part in an anti-cuts demonstration/rally in Manchester chase NUS president Aaron Porter through the streets, accusing him of being 'a fucking Tory too'. Porter claims, falsely, it appears, that some of the chants addressed to him were anti-Semitic.

The Education Activists Network (EAN) and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) announce that in the NUS elections, due in April, they will stand, respectively, EAN member Mark Bergfeld for president, and NCAFC co-founder Michael Chessum for vice-president (HE).

A *Guardian* article suggests that the Government's attempts to 'save' £500m by cutting entitlement funding for 16-19-year-olds will put at risk initiatives like the sixth form baccalaureate initiated by 15 sixth form colleges and backed by the Sixth Form Colleges Forum and the Institute for Learning (IFL). Wyke College (in Hull) principal Dick Smith thinks some such colleges could go out of existence if they cannot afford to offer entitlement tutorials, support with HE applications and the like.

A HEPI study, *Higher Education Supply and Demand to 2020*, predicts that by then up to 100,000 people a year could be

prevented from entering HE by the Government's plan to use the UCAS tariff to recruitment. The study cites UCAS figures showing that from 2008 to 2010 people with no tariff points accounted for nearly half the rise in HE applications, and that last year over 200,000 applicants, of whom 126,000 secured places, were without such points.

Association of [private] Learning Providers (ALP) employment and skills director Paul Warner, with other 'leading figures in the work-based learning sector' (TES) claims that the requirement in the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE), announced by John Hayes in January, for a minimum of 280 guided learning hours, of which 'at least 10 hours or 30 per cent, whichever is the greater' must be 'off-the-job', could deter employers from providing apprenticeships.

Three UCU National Executive Committee (NEC) members - treasurer Alan Carr plus John McCormack and Angela Roger - send an email to branch officers asking them to support a 'reclaim the union' campaign aimed at countered the influence of UCUleft.

Newcastle College Group CEO Dame Jackie Fisher announces a plan to cut more than 170 jobs, including 124 lecturer, instructor and assessor posts, out of a total of 1,724, supposedly as a response to the Government's overall cuts in the FE budget. In 2009-10, the Group's turnover was £80m. Fisher says Newcastle's success is 'testament to our outstanding leadership . . .'

The Open University (OU) announces that after May 2011 it will not accept new students onto its Master's courses in social

sciences, including psychology. This is thought to result from the Browne review's failure to recommend changes in state support for postgraduate students, and the likelihood that fees for them could rise to £9,000 a year in 2012-13.

Referring to the refusal by management at East Durham College to consult with unions about the plan to cut 73 jobs, despite the statutory requirement to do so, UCU regional official says: 'It is time for East Durham College to drop its stupid macho management style, to join the 21st century and talk to us'.

The Mathematics in Industry and Education charity claims there is a sharp increase in universities requiring applicants for undergraduate maths courses to sit the Sixth Term Examination Paper (STEP) in this subject, previously confined mainly to Cambridge and Warwick.

Points in HE applications figures released by UCAS include: 583,501 people have so far applied for a place in autumn 2011, up 5.1 per cent on last year and an all-time record; the number of 21 year olds applying is up 15.3 per cent on last year, and the number of 24 year olds up 11.4 per cent.

### Week beginning 7/1/11

Proposals from a Cambridge University working group on student finances there include: Cambridge should charge the £9,000 maximum in fees; £3,000 of this should be waived for students from households earning less than £25,000 a year; as well as this, students on a full state maintenance grant should be given a £1,625 annual bursary; students from households earning up to £42,000 should be

eligible for 'partial support . . . calculated according to income'. The Cambridge assembly (ie 'dons' parliament') is to decide in the week beginning 14/2/11 whether it supports these proposals.

The Institute for Learning (IFL - the body which FE lecturers have since 2007 been compelled to 'join' under threat of losing their jobs) writes to its 'members' (ie all FE lecturers) demanding that they pay a £68 membership fee. (Up to now the notional 'membership' fee of £30 has been paid by the Government. If all members were to pay the £68, the IFL's annual income would rise to £10m, from the £4.6m given to it hitherto by the Government.) UCU FE head of FE Barry Lovejoy speaks of a possible boycott as 'the most extreme option' for dealing with this situation.

A group of pro-vice-chancellors for research at four universities - Plymouth, Middlesex, Oxford Brookes and Portsmouth - writes to Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) CEO Paul Boyle maintaining that the ESRC's decision, announced in the previous week, to restrict research funding to 21 'doctoral training centres' shows 'a complete disregard' for the research capacity of the 25 post-1992 institutions where ESRC-funded research has till now been conducted.

Commenting on the current state of the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT, ie the arrangement introduced as a part of the Qualifications and Credit Framework [QCF], and intended to allow entry level and Level 1 'bite-sized' vocational/general education programmes to young people), ALP CEO Graham Hoyle alleges that: 'Providers are withdrawing from the programme . . . it's not

fitting the bill. Everything we feared would happen has come to pass'. He accuses the YPLA, responsible for channelling money to such provision, of failing to heed ALP's warnings about its weaknesses.

Universities which have already lost funding as a result of the Government's decision to locate school teacher training in schools include Canterbury Christ Church University (298 lost places) and Liverpool John Moores (192). At another, Edge Hill, the largest of all cuts in secondary teacher training places (326 students) equates, according to its vice-chancellor, to a loss of up to £1.4m.

Former union-bashing principal of Oaklands College Mark Dawe, now CEO of the OCR exam board, claims that OCR National qualifications in IT and science, favoured by managers in schools because of their capacity to boost league table ratings, will survive the Government's decision to exclude them from its 'English baccalaureate' (EBac) group of approved GCSEs / IGCSEs.

Middlesex University vice-chancellor Michael Driscoll tells staff that by circulating a specific email they 'could be contravening the university's computer use policy'. The email relates to a decision by management, having sacked a finance officer there for fraud, not to report this to the police or HEFCE.

Barnet College and Southgate College (in the London Borough of Enfield) are in merger talks, due to be concluded by 3/3/11, and Bromley and Orpington Colleges are in merger talks due to conclude on 4/3/11.

Sue Caldwell, a teacher at Friern Barnet school in north London, has been suspended on the

grounds, denied by her, that she encouraged students there to leave classes to take part in demonstrations against education cuts, HE fee rises etc.

BIS confirms that part-time HE students who take out loans to pay for tuition fees from 2012-13 will be charged an interest rate of 3 per cent above inflation for up to three and a half years, and have to start repaying loans if they are earning over £21,000 per year, even if they are still studying.

### Week beginning 14/1/11

In response to pressure from lobbying groups, including NIACE, for the Government to carry out an equality impact assessment of its cuts in ESOL provision, a BIS spokesperson says: 'A full equality impact assessment on the Government's skills strategy was published in November 2010. It found that there are unlikely to be disproportionate impacts on protected groups. A separate assessment of how the changes will affect ESOL learners will be undertaken by BIS shortly'.

Birkbeck College HE professor Claire Callender argues that the final version of the letter to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) sent last week by Vince Cable and David Willetts, which basically urges selecting universities to use fee waivers rather than bursary schemes to allow in some poorer students, shows the Government has 'no serious mechanism' for controlling fee levels.

Points in a *Guardian* feature about the Government's Work Programme include: this scheme will replace Flexible New deal and other similar arrangements in the summer of 2011; 35 'prime

contractors' have been given permission to run it; only one of these, Newcastle College via its private training arm, now called Intraining, is an FE college; eight other college-led bids were rejected; some other colleges (eg Carlisle) are involved as subcontractors to private agencies; no agency under £20m has been allowed in; the ALP is critical of the scheme; training providers involved in the scheme receive only 10 per cent of the funding per trainee at the start, the rest being dependent on whether he or she is given a job and keeps it for a defined period.

Student activists are to picket the Universities UK (UUK - ie the vice-chancellors) conference, to be held in London on 24/2/11 in protest against UUK's support for fee increases.

Lewisham Council (in south London), where last year, according to Office for National Statistics figures, nearly 36 per cent of 16-24 year olds were unemployed, the highest percentage in the UK, becomes the first local authority openly to discuss ending its contract with the Connexions service (with effect from 1/4/11).

In a briefing note to students, Aaron Porter and Usman Ali, respectively NUS president and vice president, characterise as 'woefully inadequate' the Government's National Scholarship Programme, final details of which were circulated with the letter to OFFA. (The scheme was initially announced in December in an attempt to get MPs to vote for fee rises. All institutions charging over £6,000 must sign up to it. Money for scholarships will be allocated to universities on the basis of their size, not on how many students from less well-off backgrounds they have.)

UCU is to ballot members in FE and post-1992 universities over Government moves to cut the value of pensions provided through the teachers' Pension Scheme.

Points made by former BBC education correspondent Mike Baker in a *Guardian* 'Opinion' article on recent UCAS figures include: the rise in applications is much smaller than at the same point in the two previous years; the overall rise as recorded in January (5.1 per cent) represents a sharp drop from the rise recorded in November (11.7 per cent) ie before parliament voted for the fee increase; the number of applicants from England is up only 3.7 per cent, whereas those from outside the EU are up 17 per cent, and those from the EU other than England are up 7.7 per cent (and from Scotland 6.5 per cent); the number of applicants from England who are 18 or under has fallen slightly; Taken with statistics about graduate unemployment and a rising level of applications for 'apprenticeships', Baker thinks these figures reveal a trend for young people to look for options other than university.

Figures in *The UCAS Guide to Getting into University and College* show that in 2010, UCAS's Copycatch software identified 29,288 personal statements (3.85 per cent) as at least 10 per cent copied, either from other people's statements or from online models, up from 20,086 (2.8 per cent) in 2009.

IFL CEO Toni Fazaeli dismisses as 'this small survey' a UCU poll in which fewer than 20 per cent of 900-plus lecturers questioned said the IFL is doing a good job.

In a speech at the Lord Dearing Memorial Conference, held at Nottingham University, David

Willetts urges vice-chancellors to set fees at £7,500 for the first year after the increase, rather than move directly to £9,000.

Launching the Labour Party's review of its education policy, shadow education secretary Andy Burnham puts forward the idea of reintroducing literacy and numeracy hour-type provision, but this time for 16 year olds rather than primary school children. This would include one-to-one tuition in maths and English. He undertakes also to 'look again' at the Tomlinson Report's proposal for an overarching 14-19 diploma, rejected by Tony Blair in 2005.

### Week beginning 21/1/11

It emerges that the December meeting of University College London's board considered a proposal that to deal with the problem of government cuts in teaching grants (said by provost Malcolm Grant to be up to about £100m a year by 2014-15), UCL should breach HEFCE's cap on student numbers, writing off the resultant fines.

An AOC survey finds that that the average annual VAT bill for colleges in membership is £600,000. January's 2.5 per cent rise in VAT could raise the overall total by £30m. Because of their incorporated status, neither FE nor sixth form colleges can automatically claim back the full cost of VAT on capital items in the way schools (including 'academies') can.

A survey by the outsourcing firm Tribal, which specialises in supplying consultants to 'advise' colleges rubbished by Ofsted, finds that of 232 FE institutions questioned: 58 per cent are planning pay freezes; 60 per cent are considering sharing 'back-

office services' (ie outsourcing admin); and 66 per cent are reviewing their curriculum plans to maximise funding.

Due to uncertainty about what fees universities will charge for students starting degrees in September 2012, UCAS has cancelled publication this year of its *Big Guide* listing detailed course information etc, and is instead publishing *The UCAS Guide to Getting into University and College* (ie without course information) and will then put 2012 fees on its website on a day in July. (Some of the uncertainty arises from the fact that the Government delayed sending its guidance letter on access agreements to universities until 10/2/11, despite claiming in December that it had to rush fee rises through parliament so prospectuses could include the amount each institution would charge.)

According to the YPLA, errors have occurred in pupil success rates data for 2008-09 submitted by just over 900 schools (48 per cent of relevant secondaries) which is to be used to determine their post-16 funding levels from August 2011. (This is the first time schools have been required, like FE colleges, to report their individual success rates.)

Aaron Porter tells the *THE* that he expects to be succeeded as NUS president by a candidate pursuing similar policies to him, because 'The hard Left and its fetishism with street protests and occupations is already dwindling' and students will elect someone who will ensure that 'we' are 'not being driven into outdated, irrelevant and tired tactics that will consign students to the sidelines'.

Since 2007, 30,000 people have become UK citizens or obtained

indefinite leave to remain here after taking entry-level ESOL and citizenship qualifications (ie instead of taking the Life in the UK citizenship test). National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) ESOL Programme director Chris Taylor emphasises that government cuts to ESOL will hit people seeking to follow this route.

UCL provost Malcolm Grant attacks the Government's HE fees policy on the grounds that setting the cap at £9,000 (ie as opposed to not setting a cap at all) 'protects the rich' - 'because the more money we are required to put into supporting students from less well-off backgrounds, the higher the overall fee'.

The Skills Funding Agency (answerable to BIS) is trying to save money by ending direct contracts with those providers with whom its current contract is worth under £500,000, seeking in the process to push smaller providers into forming consortia or becoming sub-contractors to larger ones. In contrast, the Department for Education wants the SFA to have direct contracts with all organisations providing apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds regardless of size, this provision being funded by SFA and the DFE jointly.

Sheffield College principal Heather MacDonald informs staff of management's intention to cut 121 full time equivalent jobs in order to 'save' £4m in 2012.

Lambeth College principal Richard Chambers is to retire in October, ahead of the merger with Lewisham - and probably also with Southwark - College scheduled for 2012.

## Where we stand:

*Post-16 Educator seeks to defend and extend good practice in post compulsory education and training. Good practice includes teachers working with students to increase their power to look critically at the world around them and act effectively within it. This entails challenging racism, sexism, heterosexism, inequality based on disability and other discriminatory beliefs and practices.*

*For the mass of people, access to valid post compulsory education and training is more necessary now than ever. It should be theirs by right! All provision should be organised and taught by staff who are trained for and committed to it. Publicly funded provision of valid post compulsory education and training for all who require it should be a fundamental demand of the trade union movement.*

*Post-16 Educator seeks to persuade the labour movement as a whole of the importance of this demand. In mobilising to do so it bases itself first and foremost upon practitioners - those who are in direct, daily contact with students. It seeks the support of every practitioner, in any area of post-16 education and training, and in particular that of women, of part timers and of people outside London and the Southeast.*

*Post-16 Educator works to organise readers/contributors into a national network that is democratic, that is politically and financially independent of all other organisations, that develops their practice and their thinking, and that equips them to take action over issues rather than always having to react to changes imposed from above.*

# Oxbridge *redivivus*

**Patrick Ainley**

Gillian Evans, *The University of Oxford: A New History* (Tauris, 2010) 356pp, £35.00 (hardback), ISBN 978 1 84885 114 6  
 -, *The University of Cambridge: A New History* (Tauris, 2010) 382pp, £35.00 (hardback), ISBN 978 1 84885 115 3  
 (References are to the Oxford volume unless otherwise stated.)

## Introduction: social immobility

**W**hat is the point of different forms of indirect democracy if MPs do not represent the electorate anyway, *viz.* Clegg - fees? And if government and opposition are both headed by male Oxbridge humanities graduates - Cameron, Clegg, Miliband, Balls and Osborn? No wonder celebrity politics focuses on trivialities since the popular view is 'they are all the same'.

A spate of media programmes point to this situation worsening with the idea that a return to grammar schools will restart social mobility and is therefore progressive. It's true that the official introduction of comprehensive schools in the UK from 1965 on was coincident with the ending of the period of limited upward mobility that occurred during the nearly 30 years of post-war full employment. But that it was not the cause of it can be seen from a comparison with the USA's comprehensive high schools feeding similarly limited mobility that ended at the same time.

Since then in both countries there has been only illusory social mobility as non-manual service

employment has expanded at the expense of manual labour, benefiting mainly women who now pursue careers before having children in the 30s. These new opportunities have been presented as professionalising the proletariat but in reality many of these para-professional occupations are being rapidly proletarianised - teaching and lecturing a case in point.

Bringing back grammar schools would only cement this new social situation since the only mobility remaining for increasing numbers is downward. And the eugenic thinking behind thus 'saving the bright working-class child' from this fate is as evident now as it was in 1944, though without (as yet) any coherent ideology of 'IQ' to support it. However, what is defined as 'bright' is equally narrow performance in repeated tests of largely literary ability functioning from the earliest age as proxies for more or less expensively crammed cultural capital.

The majority are thus failed at every fence and, more importantly, made to feel that they are failures. This principle of academic selectivity has re-imposed itself ruthlessly, marginalising residual republican notions of entitlement, along with any other 'effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of colleges', as Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* saw it.

Now the market in universities competing on price for various specialist options becomes the model for schools and colleges. As the former follow further and higher education into a centralised system of 'fair funding', it can be anticipated that vouchers for a basic entitlement

may be introduced so that parents who can afford it top up their voucher at independent schools as private providers are subsidised to bid into the state system. The academic predominance of 'The Great Public Schools', with their long-standing links to Oxbridge colleges exemplified by Winchester and New College, Eton and Christ Church, is thus also reaffirmed.

### 'Nosseled in the grossest kynd of sophistry'

Gillian Evans's twin histories enable us to understand how this has happened. She has long been a thorn in the side of successive Cambridge vice-chancellors' aspirations to turn that institution - at which she holds a doctorate as well as one from Oxford - into a business park. She is dedicated therefore to 'preserving the medieval democracy which has served it for more than eight centuries' (p76).

The priestly vocation in which this originated was later joined by lawyers and doctors, though not without dispute, for instance over the dispensation of what would now be called dangerous drugs between apothecaries, physicians and the state - a battle that continues on all three fronts to this day. The question is whose knowledge and how is it to be defined. As in the public disputations that remained the Oxbridge method of examination until the mid-nineteenth century, 'both sides of the question' had to be presented in a manner that is tediously familiar in today's journalistic ideal of 'objectivity'.

Similarly, today's students are expected to defer to authority but have their own point of view in a debate that is open but which you have to be an expert to enter. These paradoxes confuse the uninitiated and are only 'assimilated', as Bourdieu said, as a matter of 'style' by those who are already 'converts'.

In the Medieval period such dangerous knowledge was guarded as Mysteries by Guilds whose disciplines demanded a Master work to demonstrate initiation into the craft with students taking a *peregrinatio academica* around Latin-speaking Christendom, just as journeymen stonemasons and other apprentices toured Europe's cathedrals.

However, Evans begins her history of 'Modern Oxford' by saying that it was 'shaped by the generation born as Victorians who broke off their studies to go and fight in the First World War, survived the carnage and lived on through another World War to become the generation of aged dons . . .' typified by the Inklings (Lewis, Tolkien *et al*), 'Straddlers

between Victorian and modern Oxford they may have been, but not includers of a wider social world, or of women' (pp11-12). They coped with the grim conditions by withdrawing into a fantasy life, 'writing stories and designing languages for elves' (p14).

From the enthusiasm of *John Betjeman's Oxford* for this Middle Earth of pseudo-medieval flummery and eccentricity - or 'a particularly Oxford form of "celebrity"' (p43), Evans turns to 'our second Oxford "guide book to the century' (p48), Masterman's 1952 *To Teach the Senators Wisdom*. This contains such jolly gems as 'There has been no greater mistake made in Oxford than the abolition of compulsory chapel, except of course the admission of women and the abolition of compulsory Greek' (quoted on p27).

Nevertheless, Evans sees Oxford's mission embodied in the figure of Roy Jenkins - 'an Oxford Chancellor without a privileged background, who had no trouble with "access", went on to run the country, and came back to enjoy the late summer of his life in Oxford' (p77). Jenkins's port-filled self-parody in those later years was a reinvention of character in the opposite direction to that taken by the Bullingdon Boys who now run the country but who have also disguised their earlier avatars. Yet both - and the long list of Oxford-educated Prime Ministers, such as Bliar, 'a typical Oxford lawyer, completely superficial' in the estimation of Peter, now Lord, Hennessey - show the University's subservience to state and church which Evans' subsequent chapters trace from its origins in the twelfth century.

In her Cambridge volume the Tudor monarchy drew upon that university at the time of the Reformation, following 'The custom of looking to the universities for likely academics who could be used in the service of the Government [that] was now well established' (p149). Thomas Cranmer, for instance, rewarded with Archbishopric for justifying Henry VIII's divorce, was described by a contemporary biographer as 'nosseled in the grossest kynd of sophistry' at Cambridge (p148).

Playing off church against state, the academic Guardians asserted their special selection of the powerful through an extension of the unctuous laying on of hands by a priestly caste. The two English universities (as compared with five in medieval Scotland) also enforced a monopoly of defining what was recognised as valid knowledge first noted by the historian Edward Gibbon (p199). They ruthlessly snuffed out rivals like Lincoln and Northampton, or Durham University founded under the Protectorate; also other competing centres of legitimation, such as the Inns of Court and later Learned Societies, Royal or Lunar, Dissenting Academies and Mechanics Institutes.



### *Trahison des clerics*

25 years ago Oxford students and academics petitioned and voted against Margaret Thatcher's honorary Doctorate. Now the academic ideal that even the Gove-approved John Dryden regarded in his day as 'crabbed and subtle' (p210), has re-asserted its dominance. It is no wonder therefore that many Oxbridge students and staff are now so totally 'up themselves', as other students put it, as to place their self-interest above any residual dedication to public sector higher education.

That this *trahison des clerics* is true to form Evans shows in her judicious account that illustrates in critical episodes and individuals (More, Wolsey, Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell, Laud) the struggle of 'an organised body of professional teachers to provide for its own perpetuation', as Durkheim says of the Paris University Guild in his *History of Pedagogy in France*.

At least Cambridge, nurtured by the puritan ethic of East Anglian trade and property relations, was represented in Parliament by Oliver Cromwell. Thereafter, in the antinomies of the national culture embodied by the Boatrace Universities, Royalist Oxford since the Restoration has endorsed the social ideal of the ruling class, while puritan Cambridge and a few Oxford colleges - such as eighteenth century Exeter, Merton and Wadham, as 'Whigs' amongst a 'Tory' majority - afforded a second eleven to be fielded as required, like New College's influence on the 1945 Labour government.

Nevertheless, even at eighteenth-century Oxford, a 'more plebeian and puritanical', if not 'middle class' (p193) undergraduate intake necessitated provision that went beyond religion and aristocratic pursuits such as hunting. This turned halls into colleges and raised the age of admission from 15-16 to 18-19. 'Oiks' acted as servants to gentlemen students in superior caps. At Cambridge gradations between students were marked by separate dining arrangements. In contrast to Doctor Johnson, whose 'Oxford career was brief because of shortage of family funds' (p197), many a student was there 'to say in later life that he has been to university' (p199) or 'comes here as a commercial speculation' to increase his earning power (p306).

In the same period, Cambridge became 'duller and more second-rate' (p240) but, in what that volume describes as its 'nineteenth century transformation', Cambridge redefined the academic pursuit, following the Victorian Henry Sidgwick, as 'one whose study is the chief interest of his life' and who 'alone can keep the machinery of teaching ever on a level with the advance of knowledge' (p87

in the Cambridge volume). The University was thus well positioned to cater for the alliance of industrial capital and middle-class professions it helped to form against surviving landed aristocracy pursuing more character-building preparation for leadership at Oxford.

Cambridge was also more open to the development of science, putting ideas to 'the test of Sense' and moving 'out of the gentleman's study and the Royal Society' (p285) to find a home in *de facto* university research centres organised 'through faculties and Departments and not by the Colleges' - partly because it was too expensive for them. Science was therefore 'fundamentally different from the tutorial system of the arts and humanities' (p47), though making use of existing botanical gardens and museum collections. It followed the Humboldtian model of the professor leading his fellow scholar-researchers that was imported by the new universities of London and the industrial towns as they gradually wrested themselves free from Oxbridge tutelage. By contrast, in Newman's revival of the tutorial system, 'A student's task was to read. His [college] tutor's role was to direct his reading' (p247).

The gap between Snow's two cultures of art and science was thus preserved and extended within each institution as well as being reflected elsewhere, particularly through A-levels introduced in 1951 to prepare a minority for specialist study. Abandoning any attempt to overcome this divide, government has now withdrawn state funding for the arts and humanities, leaving them as frivolous pursuits for those rich enough to afford them

### Conclusion

In the 1960s the Cambridge economics professor Joan Robinson said, 'The leading characteristic of the ideology which dominates our society today is its extreme confusion. To understand it means only to reveal its contradictions.' Since then the academic fashion for postmodernism, first floated in 'post-structural' form at Cambridge - ever more open to foreign ideas even if silly ones - has made a virtue of this deconstruction without acknowledging the need for the reconstruction which Robinson implied. The resulting fragmented 'discourse' is the obverse of traditionally narrow and arbitrarily subdivided empirical subject specialisation. Neither academic form of knowledge allows for generalisation capable of questioning the purposes to which it is put or the society which uses it.

# Rebuilding IWCE:

## 1. William Morris

Colin Waugh

*As part of the process of trying to rebuild the tradition of independent working-class education (IWCE), we print here the last two paragraphs of William Morris's lecture, 'How we live and how we might live', given on 30 November 1884 to the Hammersmith branch of the Social Democratic Federation, and later published in Morris's paper, Commonweal. The passage contains some key ideas about IWCE. This is followed by some sample questions that could be used to stimulate a discussion of this passage in a political education setting today.*

**R**ather, however, take courage, and believe that we of this age, in spite of all its torment and disorder, have been born to a wonderful heritage fashioned of the work of those that have gone before us; and that the day of the organization of man is dawning. It is not we who can build up the new social order; the past ages have done the most of that work for us; but we can clear our eyes to the signs of the times, and we shall then see that the attainment of a good condition of life is being made possible for us, and that it is now our business to stretch out our hands to take it.

And how? Chiefly, I think, by educating people to a sense of their real capacities as men, so that they may be able to use to their own good the political power which is rapidly being thrust upon them; to get them to see that the old system of organizing labour for *individual profit* is becoming unmanageable, and that the whole people have now got to choose between the confusion resulting from the break up of that system and the determination to take in hand the labour now organized for profit, and use its organization for the livelihood of the community; to get people to see that individual profit-makers are not a necessity for labour but an obstruction to it, and that not only or chiefly because they are the perpetual pensioners of labour, as they

are, but rather because of the waste which their existence as a class necessitates. All this we have to teach people, when we have taught ourselves; and I admit that the work is long and burdensome; as I began by saying, people have been made so timorous of change by the terror of starvation that even the unluckiest of them are stolid and hard to move. Hard as the work is, however, its reward is not doubtful. The mere fact that a body of men, however small, are banded together as Socialist missionaries shows that the change is going on. As the working classes, the real organic parts of society, take in these ideas, hope will arise in them, and they will claim changes in society, many of which doubtless will not tend directly towards their emancipation, because they will be claimed without due knowledge of the one thing necessary to claim, *equality of condition*; but which indirectly will help to break up our rotten sham society, while that claim for equality of condition will be made constantly and with growing loudness till it *must* be listened to, and then at last it will only be a step over the border, and the civilized world will be socialized; and, looking back on what has been, we shall be astonished to think of how long we submitted to live as we live now.

1. What is the 'wonderful heritage' that Morris mentions?
2. How can there be both a 'wonderful heritage' and 'torment and disorder' at the same time?
3. What do you think Morris has in mind when he says that 'the attainment of a good condition of life is being made possible for us'?
4. Morris says that 'the past ages have done most of that work [ie of 'building up the new social order'] for us', and 'it is now our business to stretch out our hands and take it'. Do you think he would have been right to say this 1884? Would someone who says this now be right?

5. In Morris's opinion, what would 'stretch[ing] out our hands and tak[ing]' 'the new social order' mainly involve?
6. Does Morris contradict himself by saying, on the one hand, that 'it is now our business to stretch out our hands and take it' and, on the other, 'the work is long and burdensome'?
7. If somebody told you he/she couldn't understand what Morris meant by 'educating people to a sense of their real capacities as men', how would you explain his meaning?
8. What does Morris see as the key objectives of socialist education?

- 9. What do you think Morris means by 'the political power which is rapidly being thrust upon them'?
- 10. Morris speaks at one point of 'the whole people', at another of 'a body of men, however small', and after that of 'the working classes, the real organic parts of society'. What relation does he think there should be between these three groups?
- 11. Morris speaks of 'changes in society' which the working classes will claim, and which will 'indirectly help to break up our rotten sham society'. What are these changes?
- 12. What does Morris mean by 'equality of condition'?
- 13. Is he right when he says that 'equality of condition' is 'the one thing necessary to claim'?
- 14. Why are 'the individual profit-makers' 'the perpetual pensioners of labour'?
- 15. Morris appears to suggest that two processes - 'the working classes claiming changes in society' and 'socialist missionaries' claiming 'equality of condition' - will together be enough to result in 'the civilized world' being 'socialized'. Is this basically right? If not, what else do you think might need to be done?

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# The history of workers' education

Richard Ross

## Introduction

The history of workers' education is rarely spoken or written about. It is in danger of being lost from view. We need to reclaim this history so we know where we have come from and that other possibilities are available. Shedding a light on the past might help us to illuminate the future.

## Workers' education before the Second World War

Two organisations, two rivals, provided the bulk of workers' education before the Second World War. The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) had been founded in 1903. Its rival, the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), was established following a strike by students at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1909 (1). The WEA and Ruskin had similar aims, to bring the benefits of education to workers, but the question arose as to who should determine and control that education. Was it to be the middle class, bringing enlightenment to the working class, or was it to be workers themselves and their institutions, such as trade unions? Was the purpose of education to fit workers into a capitalist society or to question and help to change that society?

This question came into sharp focus at Ruskin College. The College had been founded in 1899 by two Americans, Walter Vrooman and Charles Beard. Vrooman and Beard returned to America and by 1909 Ruskin was influenced very much by Oxford University and received donations from, amongst others, a couple of Dukes and some nine Lords (2). Oxford University had started to run tutorial classes for workers as part of the Extension movement. In 1908 they set up a permanent

committee, made up of University representatives and working people, to run these classes (3).

Many of the Ruskin students, who were mainly trade unionists, were aghast at these developments. They now felt that the purpose of the College was to transmit ruling class ideas, particularly in the field of economics. They organised their own classes, formed the Plebs League to put pressure on the College authorities and in 1909 went on strike, following the dismissal of the Principal, Dennis Hird, who had sided with the students.. The Plebs League established the Central Labour College, in opposition to Ruskin, as 'a declaration of Working Class Independence in Education' (4). Many of the strikers were from the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS, a forerunner of the RMT) which, after much internal debate, resolved at its AGM in October 1909 to transfer its support from Ruskin College to the Central Labour College (5). An editorial in the ASRS journal, *Railway Review*, had supported the students, saying that, 'They could see (Ruskin) drifting into the enervating influence of (Oxford) University, being divorced from the intentions of the founders, and instead of training working-class leaders and tutors capable of holding their own with the opposite classes, becoming a patronized pulpit for the production of semi-political prigs' (6).

The ASRS and, following its mergers with two other unions in 1913, its successor, the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), were strong supporters of the Central Labour College. The College struggled to fund itself and in 1915 ownership and control passed to its two greatest funders, the South Wales Miners Federation and the NUR. It finally closed in 1929, but by then the baton of independent working class education had been handed to the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC).

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The Plebs League had organised classes around the UK, classes run in halls and meetings rooms by former Ruskin and then Central Labour College students. In 1921 these classes came together to form the NCLC and from then until 1964 the NCLC was one of the two main providers of workers' education in the UK.

### The NCLC versus the WEA

The NCLC had many supporters in the trade union movement. This was a threat to the WEA which, in 1919, set up the Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee (WETUC). On the ground workers attended classes provided by both organisations, and some tutors taught for both. However, ideologically the two organisations were poles apart. The NCLC stood for independent working class education, by which they meant education independent of the state and those that controlled it. They refused to take state money, unlike the WEA. The NCLC stood for education aimed at meeting the needs of 'workers as a class, and undertaken by the workers themselves independently of, and even in opposition to the ordinary existing educational channels' (7). The WEA was part of the extension movement, extending the benefits of education and culture to a class that had been denied them. For the NCLC the WEA was a tool of the state, designed to integrate the working class into a common national culture. They ridiculed the WEA's claim to be 'impartial'. From the WEA's point of view NCLC education was 'propaganda'. In sum, whilst the NCLC stood for revolutionary change in society, the WEA stood for reformism, a divide that continues to run through education, trade unionism and politics today. In fact the State recognised this divide. It saw the adult education movement and especially the WEA as 'a bulwark against revolutionism, a moderating influence and a form of social control' (8). Lord Eustace Percy, the president of the Board of Trade in 1925 understood the importance to the ruling class of supporting the WEA. '£100,000 spent annually on this kind of work, properly controlled, would be about the best police expenditure we could indulge in . . .' (9).

### The TUC's role in education

THE NCLC's aim of working class education by and for the working class had led to it calling for the TUC to be responsible for trade union education. Attempts had been made in the 1920s and 30s for the TUC to take over workers' education, but these

had ended in failure. One such attempt was in 1925. The Countess of Warwick offered her home, Eaton Lodge, to the TUC. The aim was for both Ruskin and the Central Labour College to move to Eaton Lodge. This scheme was defeated at the 1926 TUC Congress, on the grounds that, following the General Strike, there was little money around for a College that would cater to just a few. A Jack Jones 'talked about men who had gone up to Ruskin dressed as workmen who have come back with haloes, dressed in plus fours, and immediately wanting to be general secretary of their union' (10).

However, in 1944, and at the instigation of the NUR, the TUC examined again the possibility of a residential college. This became the plan for a full-time college as a war memorial to trade unionists and resulted in what became Congress House, the TUC Memorial Building, containing its non-residential training college. The TUC was also sponsoring students on a three-year evening course at the London School of Economics (11).

### Maritime House houses the TUC Training College

The TUC plans were for a training college running courses on technical industrial relations skills, such as negotiating, trade union administration, accounting and national insurance, together with background studies on trade union history and structures (12).

While the Memorial Building, now known as Congress House, was being built, the TUC courses were run at Maritime House in Clapham, South London. This had been opened as the headquarters of the National Union of Seamen (NUS) 70 years ago, on July 23rd 1940 (13). TUC courses began there in April 1947 and continued until 1957. The courses were full-time and at first they lasted for three or four weeks but over time the TUC moved towards shorter courses of one to two weeks.

Most of the teaching was undertaken by TUC staff with some outside lecturers. The students were full-time officials and lay representatives, together with officers of what were then called 'Colonial Trade unions', some sponsored by the Colonial Office (14).

### The TUC Education Scheme

Financial difficulties that unions faced after the Second World War led to further calls for the rationalisation of trade union education under the

auspices of the TUC. The educational work of unions themselves, as well as the TUC, was growing and the duplication of providers was costly. Following an NUR motion at the TUC in 1957 a plan was devised to set up a TUC Educational Council to take over the running of trade union education from the existing organisations (15). In 1964 the TUC Education scheme came into being, taking over the NCLC and the WETUC (16).

## Conclusion

Although workers' education was rationalised in 1964 the questions that were raised in 1909 with the Ruskin strike are still relevant. What is the purpose of workers' education? Who should control it? Who should provide it? How can Independent Working-Class Education be achieved? The Plebs League wanted 'neither crumbs nor condescension (17), but control of their own destiny. We must not forget this history.

1. For information about the origins of the WEA and the NCLC see Brian Simon (1965), *Education and the Labour Movement*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London)
2. Simon op. cit. p319
3. Thomas Kelly (1992), *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain* (Liverpool University Press)
4. Quoted in Simon op. cit. p324. For more on the Ruskin strike and the Plebs League, see Colin Waugh (2009) *'Plebs': The Lost Legacy of Independent Working-Class Education*, (Post-16 Educator)
5. Frank Moxley, 'Railwaymen and Working-Class Education', Appendix A in Philip S. Bagwell (1963), *The Railwaymen*, (Allen and Unwin, Woking and London)
6. Quoted in Moxley, op. cit. p675
7. J. F. and Winifred Horrabin (1924), *Working Class Education* (The Labour Publishing Company)
8. Roger Fieldhouse, 'Conformity and Contradiction in English Responsible Body Adult Education, 1925-1950' in S. Westward and J. E. Thomas (1991) *The Politics of Adult Education* (NIACE) p139
9. Ibid.
10. Moxley, op. cit. p687
11. Moxley, op. cit. p692
12. A. J. Corfield (1969), *Epoch in Workers' Education* (WEA) p89
13. NUS (1940), Maritime House, Brochure for Official Opening
14. TUC Annual Reports for 1950 to 1957
15. Moxley, op. cit. p695
16. John Holford (1994) *Union Education in Britain* (Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham)
17. *The Burning Question of Education* (undated) (The 'Plebs' League, Oxford).

# 29 January anti-cuts demo

***We print here Bill Roffey's letter, sent before the demo to other UCU members at his college***

**N**ot since the 1980s have ordinary people faced such a threat to social cohesion and employment conditions in this country. The ConDem government's plans will make huge changes to the way we work and live for decades to come, yet they are founded on the weakest mandate in modern political history. The last time such a challenge was faced whole communities were decimated and the resulting human cost was incalculable. The changes forced on the labour movement as a whole by the Government of the day were designed to weaken the influence of the trade unions and destroy the spirit of a whole class; David Cameron and his privileged multi-millionaire cohort are here to finish the job. Nothing is safe or sacred: education at all levels and the welfare state are prime targets. Everything that was gained through struggle and sacrifice is now under threat.

The time has come for us as trade union members to show that we belong to a movement committed to defending those in society who cannot defend themselves and giving a voice to those that otherwise would not be heard. If you are not prepared to stand up and speak for this cause, be prepared for a society that is going backwards, not forwards. One where all the social gains made over the last 50 plus years are dismantled one-by-one by a government representing the interests of big business and a burgeoning plutocracy.

If any of this means anything to you, then join the protests this weekend and future ones to come. The cause is the worthiest in living memory and one that for the sake of a decent society we cannot afford to lose.

I will be at the central London march on Saturday 29th January. If anyone else from CNWL is going please let me know so that we can demonstrate the commitment of this branch to the cause.