

Time to fight back

*Vote Yes for pay action, No to cuts, Defend Further Education
–Lobby Parliament 26th January*

Vote Yes in the pay ballot

FE lecturers can show that we are not prepared to pay for the bosses' crisis by voting to reject the AoC's insulting offer of 1.5% and voting Yes for action in the pay ballot which starts on 10th December. With inflation set to rise and planned VAT and tax rises we must say No to a pay cut.

Of course it is not just our pay under attack. Both FE and HE are facing attacks on a scale not seen for decades. The latest jobless figures are appalling. Around 1 million young people (20%) are in the 'NEET' category – not in employment, education or training. Yet The Observer recently published leaked Labour plans to cut FE funding by another £350 million - on top of 'efficiency savings' of £400 million announced after the Budget earlier this year. This is madness in a period of mass unemployment, especially of young people.

Stand up for FE

Now is the time for us to stand up and defend FE. We know it can be done because we have seen the victories, most notably at Tower Hamlets College recently but also at Liverpool Community College and Doncaster earlier this year. And there have been other important victories in the labour movement – the Lindsey oil refinery workers, Visteon, Linamar and so on.

These show that if we organise resistance, we can win. Other groups of workers are also resisting – Universities face swingeing cuts, such as Leeds, but also BA staff, bus workers, fire fighters, postal workers, Leeds bin workers, Superdrug and others. We need to find ways to network with these other workers and build joint support and solidarity groups in every locality.

Stop the market in education

Whoever wins the general election next year is pledged to make savage cuts. Government and Press are



Striking bus workers on a picket line in East London – part of the rising wave of resistance against cuts. Photo by Guy Smallman

attempting to soften us up with talk of 'hard choices' to be made, that there is 'no alternative'. This is a lie. In FE control of funding streams is about to pass to LAs who will decide which institutions will deliver the skills agenda.

Despite market criteria being so discredited Labour remains hooked on them and on a 'compare the college.com' mentality. But education is a public service, not a business.

Funds for rich friends

To add insult to injury, at the same time as planning huge cuts aimed at the most vulnerable in society, the government can conjure up another £35 billion to sell stakes in the failed banks back to the private sector and more billions to continue funding the disastrous war in Afghanistan. Nor have they lifted a finger to stop the £2.8 billion of our money still being paid out as bankers' bonuses.

Instead of cutting opportunities for those who most need training and education why doesn't the government recoup the costs of bailing out failed banks by banning bonuses, cutting dividends, and chasing the vast sums of unpaid corporate tax which are avoided, evaded or uncollected?

Why should we, the staff, students and communities we serve, pay for their crisis? We must say No to pay

cuts and freezes, No to job losses and course closures, No to attacks on pension rights.

Mobilising our resistance

Some members may be tempted to say we should focus on jobs and conditions and accept the pay offer. This would be a serious mistake for several reasons:

- Many colleges have already budgeted for pay increases greater than 1.5%
- Inflation is set to rise to around 4% within a year
- The FE Sector has £1.4 billion in reserves
- Teachers in schools and Sixth Form Colleges have already got 2.3% - if we accept less we will open the gap between FE pay and teachers even wider.
- If we accept the 1.5% the AoC and our managements will feel more, not less, encouraged to push through job cuts and course closures.

UCU members need to throw ourselves both into winning a Yes vote in the pay ballot but also into supporting every local struggle. We need to unite with HE in a national campaign to defend Further and Higher Education.

We can start by every branch supporting the Day of Action for both FE and HE and the lobby of Parliament on 26th January as well as the Right to Work Conference on 30th January.

RIGHTTOWORK

A CONFERENCE OF RESISTANCE & SOLIDARITY

- Fight for every job
- Defend services & pensions
- Organise to stop the cuts

**Sat 30 Jan, 11.30am-5pm
Central Hall, Manchester**

To book: www.righttowork.org.uk