

VOTE YES IN THE BALLOT IT'S A FIGHT TO DEFEND H.E.

We face an attack on education, and an attack on Higher Education in particular.

In institution after institution, managements are using the recession or the results of the RAE or the financial settlement from HEFCE as an excuse to push through restructuring plans.

They are closing Schools and Departments they do not like.

They are transforming institutions into balance-sheet operations, and, in the process undermining the very idea of a university.

We are fighting now to defend Higher Education.

HE members are being balloted on action after the employers' offer of 0.3 percent on pay, and their refusal to negotiate a national agreement on preventing job losses in the sector. The employers' position has been rejected by all of the unions in the HE sector.

There is some confusion about the dispute. There shouldn't be.

- The ballot is over PAY and JOB LOSSES.
- The employers' offer means a CUT in real wages.
- Many employers are using the recession and the RAE results to justify restructuring plans that would threaten the employment stability of all staff in the sector.
- UCEA's key target is to weaken the UCU to give employers a free hand in the future.

Pay, rhetoric and statistics

Managements claim that the 0.3 percent offer is reasonable because, on one measure of changes in the cost of living (RPI), inflation is now negative at -0.4 percent.

But they do not mention that the reason RPI is now negative is only because of the reduction in tracker mortgage rates, the fall in property prices, and the small reductions in buildings insurance.

In respect of other prices, inflation is far from negative.



Visteon workers showed a fightback can win

According to the CPI measure (which excludes property-related costs), inflation is now running at 2.9 percent (March 2009).

In other words, 0.3 percent would guarantee a return to the sedately declining real incomes of staff in HE that we had been experiencing for the two decades before the 2006 dispute.

An offer we can't refuse?

That does not mean, of course, that pay is the most important of the unions' two major concerns.

The preservation of education, jobs and a service to the wider community at a time of recession are the key concerns.

The unions have not invented the threat to jobs in HE. When the trade union negotiators met the representatives of UCEA, it was the latter who declared that at a time of recession the unions would have to choose between jobs and pay.

That was their bargaining position, and in just so many words. They came to the table clearly intending to use the recession, and what they hoped would be fear of job losses, to hold down wage settlements so as to reverse the small advances made by staff as a result of the 2006 dispute.

Indeed, that was their privately acknowledged intention in the strategy seminars organised for the universities'

personnel departments by UCEA over the last year. That was why they entered the national negotiations with an announcement that over 100 of their affiliated institutions were planning significant job losses

An injury to one...

That is why the unions in the national negotiations are now seeking, as a matter of urgency, a national agreement on the avoidance of job losses and the preservation of the service.

A time of recession is when the education sector should expand as a preparation for the future. It should not be facing job losses, and intensified pressure on resources.

There may be no immediate pressure for job losses in every institution but, if staff/student ratios worsen dramatically in other HE institutions, and if the fee cap is relaxed, the pressure on all universities and colleges will be to seek "efficiency gains".

The Liverpool and London Met cases are an indication of the possible future. In one case, an assault on successful departments simply because they do not conform to the Vice Chancellor's ambitions. In the other, an attack on up to 500 staff jobs as the solution to the financial consequences of managerial ineptitude.

—continued over page

from front page

But they also indicate an alternative future, one in which staff unite to defend both the educational provision and the jobs under threat.

In reality, redundancies do not increase efficiency.

Rather they undermine the quality of the educational service and they demotivate staff.

They result in the centralisation and alienation of administrative and technical support, the “rationalisation” of library and information provision, an increase in class sizes and the multiple delivery of lectures.

There is an increase in the workload for those who remain, and a consequent decline in the students’ access to tutors and support workers, and in the quality of students’ overall experience of education.

What happens in other institutions this year will be what inevitably will be forced on every institution in the future.

Campaign for education & jobs

That is why our responsibility is not just with our own institution but also with the sector as a whole, and why our horizon cannot be defined by the very short term.

The unions’ campaign is not simply about the sectional interests of our own members but about the defence of university education as a public good.

This dispute, and any consequent action, is not against the interests of our students but precisely in their interests as a defence of the quality of the provision made for them.

This fight for education need to be linked with the struggle of teachers and further education lecturers against general underfunding and financial crisis in post-16 education, and generalised out into a campaign against youth unemployment.

Students graduating with over £15,000 debts, on average, are facing a shrinking jobs market.

Thirty five percent of finalists this year expect to be unemployed (High Flier survey).

Meanwhile, 30,000 qualified young people who want to go to university cannot do so because of the government’s cap on numbers, and FE and Sixth Form colleges face a black hole in their finances.

Resistance

Effective resistance requires all of those in education to unite in defence of the sector, and to reject the suggestion that either the staff should pay for the recession with their jobs or with their salaries, or that the students should pay through the quality of provision.

We must refuse to accept that we should pay for the bankers’ crisis.

That is what this comes down to in the end.

As the government cuts public expenditure to pay for the billions used to bail out the bankers, it is the young who are being expected to bear the cost in high unemployment.

The response to this offensive against Higher Education needs to be political and industrial.

Who pays for the crisis?

Every union needs to campaign amongst its members, with students and the general public to explain that there is an alternative to a society run in the interests of financial speculators.

We need to explain that those who have no responsibility for this crisis should refuse to bear the consequences.

But the challenge to us is most direct at the points where we have the greatest influence: in our workplaces and in our industry.

For UCU members in HE that first test comes now.

Are we going to accept real wage cuts in 2009-10 to pay for the crisis, and allow the employers in many institutions to decimate the educational provision with

widespread redundancies?

If we are not going to acquiesce in the face of that intimidation, we must vote for industrial action in this ballot.

Our side can win. Visteon workers have just won an important victory against the huge multinational Ford which was forced to pay redundancy money after the workers occupied and held mass pickets.

At Doncaster College UCU members have won a victory with 300 job losses taken off the table.

At London Metropolitan University hundreds of UCU members will strike, thousands of trade unionists will march in Birmingham on 16 May over jobs, and the UCU NEC called for a national demonstration on jobs at Labour’s conference in September.

We really have a very simple choice: surrender education, our jobs and our pay or follow the example of Visteon and Doncaster College and fight.

DEMONSTRATE FOR JOBS

● **Saturday 9 May: 2pm, Myrtle Parade, Liverpool**

Called by Merseyside campaign to defend education

● **Saturday 16 May: 11am Birmingham.**

Called by Unite

● **Saturday 23 May: North London. 11am, Highbury Fields.**

Called by UCU, UNISON and PCS

Join UCU Left today

Fill in the form below and send it c/o 17 Barfield Road, Leytonstone, E11 3AF . Or join online at www.uculeft.org

Name

Address

..... Postcode.....

Email

Phone

Institution & UCU branch