

Defend education, defend jobs – Coordinate the resistance

Colleges up and down the country are bracing themselves for bad news. Principals are announcing cuts under the guise of “efficiency savings”.

Scores of lecturers at Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets have been threatened with redundancy. City College Bristol is the latest to find members’ jobs on the line. All this is part of a wider attack on our members’ conditions of service and our students’ education under cover of the recession.

To add insult to injury the AoC have offered us a 1% pay deal whilst their members have awarded themselves double ours over the years taking many principals’ pay to £160,000, 4 or 5 times that of a main grade lecturer on top of the scale.

Disgracefully some FE colleges are still having to take action as part of the IOU campaign to bring their pay up to national rates. Leeds College of Building and Suffolk College were on strike on 10th June.

Principals tell our members that there is a crisis of “overproduction” in the colleges; too many students for whom the colleges cannot get funding. You couldn’t make it up.

Leaving school

600,000 16 to 18 year olds will be leaving school this summer, many of whom will have no job to go to, but many won’t be able to get into their local FE college because it is cutting courses and sacking lecturers.

How long do we have to put up with bankrupt educational policies based upon a discredited market-based funding system before the government listens to those who work in the sector and abandons its market dogma?

We should demand of the AoC and its members that they refuse to implement these cuts and that they use the millions that colleges have in reserves to ensure that not one course is closed and not one lecturer sacked.

Every time one Principal agrees to do the government’s dirty work another follows suit to maintain their competitive advantage. What could

the government do if every college in the country simply refused to pass on these cuts? They are so weak, divided and universally despised they could not put up a serious fight.

Resistance works

UCU members have responded magnificently to these attempts to close courses and sack lecturers. In Tower Hamlets, as soon as they had heard that the management wanted to sack 40 lecturers and attack their contracts, they walked out spontaneously and unofficially.

The next day they occupied their atrium for half an hour and then 400 staff and students with local councillors and community groups lobbied the Principal’s office.

In Northumberland College, after members voted overwhelmingly for strike action to protect jobs, the management were forced to back off. Last month we saw Doncaster College and Liverpool University successfully fight off cuts and closures by threatening industrial action and campaigning within their local communities.

Responding quickly is one of the keys to success. Barnsley College has called a demonstration for Saturday 20th June after their management threatened job cuts. City College Birmingham was due to strike on 16th June and UCU members at The Manchester College are campaigning to win a strike ballot to defend jobs.

We need to ensure that all these colleges get our support. Send a message of solidarity today.

All of this is an excellent start, but it is just the beginning.

We will not be able to defeat the tsunami of cuts coming our way if we just fight on a college by college basis. We need a national response to these attacks. Where possible every branch across regions and nationally should try and coordinate their action.

For instance, London Metropolitan University will be striking on the 2nd July if their management don’t back down. London Region UCU has called a day of action where branches that are balloting for action come out on the same day and others organise stalls using the joint union petition over funding and lunchtime protests.

Coordinate

Wherever possible we should attempt to coordinate action across the country. Coordinated action is much more effective than isolated action.

The attacks on FE jobs are rapidly escalating. The UCU’s leadership on the Further Education Committee must now seek to focus and coordinate the resistance that is building in colleges up and down the country – and develop a national campaign within further and adult education to defend the colleges which find themselves in the front line.

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