



FIGHT BACK!

A READER ON THE WINTER OF PROTEST

Edited by Dan Hancox



WITH

**Guy Aitchison
Siraj Dattoo
Cailean Gallagher
Laurie Penny
Aaron Peters
Paul Sagar**



Feedback on Fight Back!

For Fight Back! references, news, follow-ups, and to offer your own links, feedback, and suggestions for further reading on the protests, please visit the Fight Back! page, at <http://opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/ourkingdom/fight-back>.

<http://www.bit.ly/fightbackUK>

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Editor: Dan Hancox

Editorial Kettle: Guy Aitchison, Siraj Dattoo, Cailean Gallagher, Laurie Penny, Aaron Peters and Paul Sagar

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Note From The Editor

Fight Back! exists because it needs to exist.

If you read the right blogs, follow the right people on Twitter, and subscribe to the right RSS feeds, then perhaps you've already read most of these articles, during the last few extraordinary weeks of 2010. But what about the vast numbers of people who don't fall into that group? We have to keep making noise outside the echo chamber – the potential pitfall of web 2.0 solidarity networks is that they become a virtual version of the kettle, the sound of our chants rebounding off the Police lines, forever contained. All of *Fight Back's* editorial team have been subjected to kettling by the police during these protests – we know what it's like in there, and what we're fighting for, and against, and we want to tell people about it.

This is an opportunity to make sense of the winter eruption, and to take stock: just a small selection of the terrific writing on the protests. Apologies to all whose good material we missed; please visit the *Fight Back!* page to leave feedback, and offer your own suggestions for further reading. Our aim here is to provide a framework, and to encourage clear thinking, as a guide to the further action we need to take.

But above all, we want to tell the world what happened. I knew something was missing when I called my mother a couple of days after the #dayx3 demonstration, during which I'd been kettled in Parliament Square for five hours, and on Westminster Bridge for two hours. She's a veteran of decades of protests, reads the real-world, papery, inky version of *The Guardian* every day, and taught me everything I know. But unlike some of us, she has better things to do

with her time than clicking refresh on the #demo2011 Twitter feed. The point is, she's as horrified as the most web-savvy student by the public sector cuts, has read everything about the protests that comes her way – but two days later, still had no idea there had been a kettle on Westminster Bridge. If her son hadn't personally informed her, she might still not know there had been a kettle on Westminster Bridge. And who can blame her, when the official line from the Home Secretary, repeated three times in the House of Commons, was that it never existed.

So tell a friend – that's how this works. It's how it all works.

#solidarity

Dan Hancox

London, February 2011

Foreword: A Fight For The Future

Anthony Barnett

On 10 November 2010 a student-initiated protest erupted into British politics. It was followed by an extraordinary month of actions, campaigns, more demonstrations, civic swarming as well as marches, university and school occupations, friendly flashmobs that shut stores and generated media coverage of corporate and individual tax avoidance, and the storming of Parliament Square on 9 December, as the House of Commons voted to triple student fees. Thanks to online networks, over 30,000 turned out in a matter of days when the government decided to race through the legislation. Sixteen-year-olds from comprehensives and sixth form colleges in London's East End joined Cambridge dons and inspired trade unionists as well as students from all over the UK. The police responded by trying to trap and then violently kettle as many protestors as they could. The corporate media sensationalised acts of vandalism but were unable to caricature the confrontation, thanks to the *social* media that dramatised what really happened. Public support was mixed and took on a life of its own as polls showed that opposition to the government increased.

Immediately the web filled with videos, photographs, testimony, blogs, arguments, twitter exchanges, facebook clusters, posters and graphic work. The experience of what happened is recorded in many outlets, told by those to whom it happened and who, more importantly, made it happen – the activists are also publishers and co-creators with their own voices. In this reader you will find just a modest

selection but you can follow the links for much more. What strikes me is the range, good humour and truthfulness of the young protestors compared to the confinement and evasions of official politics.

Will these few weeks come to be seen as the start of a movement that reshapes the wider politics and culture in our country and shifts the balance of force between authority and people?

If so the birth was sudden, forceful, and for some of us bloody. It was also surreal. Prince Charles, heir to the throne, had recently declared "I can only, somehow, imagine that I find myself being born into this position for a purpose." The purpose, he concludes, is to lead us to environmental "Harmony", the title of his latest book published in time for Christmas. It opens with the declaration "This is a call to revolution". On 9 December he ordered his chauffeur to drive his Rolls Royce amidst his fellow revolutionaries. Perhaps he felt that he and his wife would be greeted as comrades. Instead, they met with the great republican slogan of high Victorian confidence, albeit originally uttered by Lewis Carroll's Red Queen, "Off with their heads!"

A new movement? Round up the usual gatekeepers! Quite an alliance of forces are darkly jealous of its potential energy and fresh celebrity – stretching from News International through the Tory, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties and goodness knows how many NGOs and bloggers. The gatekeepers even include those on the far-left who helped it burst into existence but want to oversee it for themselves. But this baby, as the readers of this collection can see, is not so inarticulate or shapeless. Instead, there is a conscious sense of originality thanks to the power of the modern forces that have propelled its birth. These give credibility to its double wager of defiance: that what the state, the government, and the corporate media offer to the country

and especially its young as our fate is unacceptable, and that the claim which accompanies it, that there is no viable alternative, is a lie.

Is it possible to have a new movement baptised by an act of *lèse-majesté*? Like many a new life it is needy and inexperienced. It enjoys an inspiring, protoplasmic will, and a capacity to make noise out of proportion to its size. And it is vulnerable. It lacks coherence. It could be snuffed out, or broken by internal differences. But it exists in a country that since the scandal over parliamentary expenses in 2009 has clearly needed a new, strong voice of opposition to the way we are governed, outside official channels.

Now we have one. In a welcoming spirit of solidarity and kinship, therefore, openDemocracy's UK section, OurKingdom, is publishing *Fight Back!* – and is learning and being changed in the process. These days everyone wants immediacy and the first question being asked is whether the movement will grow. But there are different kinds of growth and I think the most important question is whether something new has started that will last.

I hope you will read this book with an open mind as the answer is going to be multi-layered. It depends on the forms of organisation adopted by the protestors, how links are made with others, on the music and culture that is being created, and most important on the nature of our epoch and how open it is to change. The voices of the winter protest can be judged in terms of naivety or maturity – but what really matters is the opportunity. Of course there is evidence of idiocy, over-optimism and simplification as well as the usual drawbacks of student politics. But the wider anti-cuts protests that began in late 2010 are not just about fees, and reached well beyond students – thousands across the country who are not in higher education are helping to create it. Exceptional economic, social and technological transformations are underway. Will *this* budding movement

have the energy, audacity, persistence, imagination and intelligence to make the best of these changes?

Losing the future

In the 1980s the socialist cultural critic and novelist Raymond Williams observed that the left in all its varieties had lost hope in the future. As Britain's attempt at social democracy decomposed and the Soviet bloc stagnated, the left became sclerotic with nostalgia. At the same time, Conservatives ceased to be backward-looking and embraced growth and market optimism. New Labour's canny response under Blair, Brown and Mandelson was to embrace capitalist globalisation as the replacement of internationalism. Instead of reinforcing the sense of closure that Williams diagnosed, this created a countervailing confidence in 'progress' thanks to the expansion of the bubble economy and the funds it generated for public investment under New Labour. But its embrace of market fundamentalism proved its undoing. The bubble of the North Atlantic economies burst in 2008 and in the UK this was closely followed by a political crisis, as the MPs expenses scandal, itself part of the wider stench of entitlement and greed, shattered popular belief in the historic integrity of parliamentarians as a whole.

The electorate judged that no one party was up to the job of repairing the damage. It voted to hang parliament in the May 2010 general election. But the Tories proposed a wholehearted partnership to the Liberal Democrats as a way out. The resulting Coalition government offered voters an apparently honest response to the twin financial and political emergencies, through a combination of principled compromises on policies and a belt-tightening exercise to secure the economy. It also committed itself to free the people from New Labour's overbearing state and its interfering assault on liberty. In this way, presented as a relatively youthful but not undignified politics of restoration, the Coalition was widely welcomed. It turned instead into a

two-faced, unprincipled exercise: while reassuringly Whiggish in appearance, it drove forward market fundamentalism within the public sector faster and more ruthlessly than even Blair and certainly Thatcher would have dared to contemplate, with disregard for traditions and institutions. At its core is a deficit-reduction strategy that places support for the bond market, and preserving the City of London as a base for financial globalisation, above everything.

This policy is being most dramatically implemented in higher education. How it came about is essential background to the protests as it shows how the issues of fees and how to pay for universities combined from the start with a much wider philosophy of marketisation that is now attempting to redefine the very purpose of education itself.

The Browne Review

In the beginning was the master manipulator: the yachting companion of George Osborne, New Labour's Peter Mandelson. Brought back by Gordon Brown to save his premiership, Mandelson became Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform in 2008. He then body-snatched the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills to become overlord of the Department of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. Thus our universities and hundreds of thousands of students found themselves under the control of a department that had neither 'education' nor 'universities' in its self-description. And this is where they now belong.

Within five months Mandelson published *Higher Ambitions: the future of universities in a knowledge economy*. It praises the expansion of higher education under Labour and the tremendous investment in British science and advanced research. It sets out a case for more than half of all young people having further education, to widen access and raise

standards. There is a touch of pluralism about it too, “Universities have a vital role in our collective life, both shaping our communities and how we engage with the rest of Europe and the wider world”. But overwhelmingly it presents a business case for education as a means to an end, for the individual and society:

“Higher education equips people with the skills that globalisation and a knowledge economy demand, and thereby gives access to many of this country’s best jobs. Everyone, irrespective of background, has a right to a fair chance to gain those advantages.”

To achieve this he opens the way for increasing fees. Again, in his own words, “It is necessary to look afresh at the contributions of those who benefit from higher education... the Government will commission an independent review into this question.” This became the Browne Review.

In a far-sighted assessment of Mandelson’s *Higher Ambitions* when it was published in November 2009, Alan Finlayson warned that even in business terms what was needed was the opposite of what it proposes. Britain should move to a broad, US style, liberal arts education, says Finlayson, giving an understanding of scientific methods as well as core principles of history and philosophy, “to impart skills that a wide range of employers welcome, and to create citizens conscious of their place in history and confident about acting in public life”.

Alas, Mandelson appoints John Browne, the disgraced ex-head of BP, to carry forward his work. The original brief was technical. But if your starting point is that money is all that counts, you naturally proceed to pass judgment on everything in these terms. At BP, Browne had demonstrated a quite exceptional talent to impose his narrow-minded vision. As Tom Bower aptly put it, he changed the company’s culture from oil engineering to financial engineering (opening the

way to the recent disaster in the Gulf). Browne approached universities with the same simple zeal. He saw them as cost-centres of educational engineering and proposed turning them into places of – what else? – financial engineering. Which in this case means making them campuses that focus on the enhancement of earning power.

His review is published on 12 October 2010, and the government accepts his proposals except that it caps fees at £9,000 rather than allowing them to be unlimited. Far from opposing New Labour's inheritance, which it scorned in public, the Coalition embraces it with vengeance. In the course of a few days, with the country hardly aware of what is happening, it is agreed that the totality of the government's direct public provision for teaching the humanities (and 80 per cent of all university teaching revenues) disappears next year. Funding will henceforth be routed through students in the form of loans. But what is being presented as a technical answer to a question of payment is in fact a life-sentence passed on the future generations of students.

I know of no one who thinks that universities don't need to be significantly improved or that there are not genuine questions concerning the future of higher education, such as raising quality, how to create a system where everyone can credibly aspire to the jobs they want, the implications of meritocracy, combining vocational and academic skills, education being for living as well as employment, and how the web might open up access.

Browne ignores all this. Higher education is defined as an investment made by students to enhance their employment prospects in a corporate world (while corporations start to take over and run universities for a profit).

The student's choice is dressed up as freedom backed by government-secured loans. But they are obliged to pay to

enter what many understandably feel to be a choiceless world.

I am not exaggerating. Browne states that there is simply no “objective metric of quality” available with respect to higher education to decide how to “distribute funding”. Therefore its money should follow student choice (p25). In order for students to choose there will be “certified professionals” appointed to every school, using a “single online portal” for applications and information (p28). This portal will:

“...allow students to compare courses on the proportion of students in employment after one year of completing the course; and average salary after one year. Employment outcomes will also make a difference to the charges set by institutions... its charges will become an indicator of its ability to deliver – students will only pay higher charges if there is a proven path to higher earnings... Courses that deliver improved employability will prosper; those that make false promises will disappear.” (p28)

The whole of education is perceived as a means to an end. The possibility that education might be an end in itself, that it can be dangerous and liberating, that it might open up choices and enhance one’s self-development, that it can be life-changing and that society as well as individuals might wish this to be so, is just about allowed for in the Mandelson report because it includes vivid testimony from specific universities. In Browne, the absence of such possibility is suffocating and complete.

The Coalition’s collision course

By embracing Browne the government backs his drastically one-dimensional approach. Our response should not be to deny that instrumental calculations (including the liability of taking on debt) are part of life, they are; or that students should not be able to demand a proper education; they

should. What needs to be said loud and clearly is that the idea that loans to students should be the *only way* in which we as a society fund humanities education; that to survive and prosper universities must think exclusively in market terms about what jobs they deliver; that our society with all our history and experience is incapable of agreeing on a mixture of other ways to recognise “quality” in higher education, is altogether abhorrent.

That a horrific approach to higher education is decided and becomes law in a few weeks with no proper debate or consideration of alternatives suggests a society whose political system is close to breakdown.

It is not surprising that ambitious and creative young men and women respond by saying, ‘hold on a moment’.

The Coalition’s justification is that swift measures are essential to cut expenditure and eliminate the deficit over the course of a single parliament. But Cameron’s underlying desire to privatise the public realm, or as he puts it, oversee a change from “state power to people power” (of which his ‘Big Society’ is a part), is not a deficit reduction strategy at all. It dates back, he told the Conservative Party conference on 6 October 2010 – indeed it is a point he insists on – to well before the financial crash. He was speaking as the Browne Report was being prepared for publication. He proclaimed that his government had begun a “revolution” (its seems quite a popular word these days amongst the old ruling class) and he boasted, “We are the radicals now breaking apart the old system”.

It was true, but only for 34 days.

Then his party headquarters at Millbank by the Thames was stormed.

The pivotal moment of Millbank was not the smashing of the glass into the entrance, the trashing of the lobby by the young mob and the triumphant race to the roof by a

relatively small number of exuberant protestors. It was the larger crowd outside. It was the thousands who cheered them on. They knew that this would break through the indifference of the media, that they were making their case in the only way the spectacle respected, that their anger would be on TV and in the press. They were cheering something much greater than a protest over fees.

When they say, *'cut back!'*

We say, *'fight back!'*

This was the chant that defined the cause. It is a response to the entire approach of the Tory-Liberal Democrat Coalition, and not just fees.

The National Union of Students organised the 10 November demonstration. Later, an informal network called for another manifestation and after taking to the streets of London, university occupations began. Enter UKUncut and False Economy: in parallel with the student protests, they provided a platform to organise wider protests against the cuts.

UKUncut initiated enjoyable, peaceful but unruly flashmobs. On two Saturdays I joined them in Oxford Street as we temporarily closed high-street chains like Top Shop, Vodafone and British Home Stores, explaining to shoppers how these chains were implicated in tax avoidance, with similar actions taking place in high streets across the UK.

The web generates a wide number of weak connections. In contrast, direct actions and especially occupations can create intense friendships as people collaborate in open struggle. An experience of agency, of self-determination, of being an influence, with all the passionate negotiations and searching for consensus that is bound up with making change, started to transform demonstrators into activists.

The National Campaign Against Cuts and the London Student Assembly, working with the occupations, organised the 9 December march on parliament: over 30,000 sweep unstopably on Parliament Square as the most far-reaching single reform of English higher education is being raced through the House of Commons, in the form of secondary legislation, incapable of amendment, in a single three-hour debate. For the first time in a century, since the suffragettes, a police cordon gets thrown directly around the Palace of Westminster to protect MPs as they prepare to vote. Helmeted police with riot shields stretch from opposite Big Ben to right past the House of Lords as a free festival of protest takes place in the square itself. By 3.30 in the afternoon the police vans and horses start to move in, in full riot gear. Having failed to stop parliament from being surrounded, they were not going to let it end peacefully, as you can read in several eyewitness accounts that follow.

From protest to politics

Student militancy draws on a variety of sources and experience over the past two decades. Among them are Reclaim the Streets, Climate Camp, militant environmentalists, and the demonstrations that marked the meeting of the G20 in London. These developed techniques of networking, consensual organisation and activist solidarity. Awareness of the nature of the surveillance society and its policing techniques was dramatised by the Convention on Modern Liberty in 2009 (supported by 50 organisations, among them The Guardian, openDemocracy and the activist network NO2ID; Henry Porter and myself were co-directors). The far-left maintained a steady organising presence. A lively left blogosphere, full of ideas and with a focus on action and solidarity, began under New Labour and was stirred up by the general election in May, encouraged by group blogs like Liberal Conspiracy and The Third Estate.

Then there are the Liberal Democrats. They had recruited among students as part of the growing opposition to the two main parties. They preached that politicians had lost the trust of young people but that *they* were the solution as they alone could actually win seats and stay honest and be trusted. With the student vote increasingly important in university towns where the Lib Dems did well, they had gone out of their way to pledge in writing that they would not support any increase in fees. They did not just ‘break’ this promise. It was a betrayal – creating intense anger because they had recruited on the even more important promise that they were different and would do no such thing.

From dramatic high-risk forms of resistance to tactical voting for Clegg and his party, all these actions, conferences and reactions, were *protests*. By contrast, the experience recorded in these pages suggests that the “fight back” of winter 2010 contains the seeds of a *politics*.

Here is why:

1. The protest movement born in the winter of 2010 is directed at the totality of the government’s economic policy and therefore engages with the state’s management of democracy and power. At the same time the government’s attempt to save market fundamentalism means preserving an unparalleled degree of inequality in terms of top salaries and bonuses. This super-inequality has lost all public credibility since the crash. Market fundamentalism is losing political legitimacy, a profound shift that opens up a space for far-reaching challenges to thrive.
2. One of the drivers of the crisis has been capitalism’s capacity for productive transformation as well as financial bubbles, in this case the upturning of productivity thanks to the microchip and the internet. Student occupiers had more computing power in their laps than NASA when it sent Armstrong to the moon. Social networking is already transforming the way social decisions are being taken, which is itself a definition of politics.

3. A politics without a culture is merely technocratic. But we are at the forefront of an immense cultural transformation – not necessarily positive, but that’s the point, a complex confrontation is underway. This applies especially to what it means to be educated and therefore cultured. It goes much further than working class access and costs. The principles of the Enlightenment, from human rights to the influence of religious belief, are in play.
4. The Westminster system has entered an endgame. Higher education has been swept into the department of business; the Browne proposals have become law; all this and much more has been driven through without a proper debate in the Commons, let alone pre-legislative scrutiny and the chance to propose alternatives. There is little meaningful democracy, the ‘sovereignty of parliament’ is a joke, reliable checks and balances have ceased to exist in the UK: the executive rules and the constitution is broken. Hence the need to riot.

A political process that is losing consent; an economic order whose inequalities have undermined its legitimacy; the arrival of new ways of organising power and influence thanks to technology and social media; taken together such a combination makes it possible for an influential democratic movement to emerge – one which does have a belief in the future.

The new Levellers

Nationally, however, the right is still in the ascendancy and internationally it is ascendant. It too is using new technology for its ends and is debating how democracy and the economy should be organised in its interests, in an era when the traditional political party is in advanced decomposition. That the internet will indeed change things deeply is for certain, how it will do so is not pre-determined.

So this is quite a dangerous moment for the movement if it is to grow, and evolve, and become more than a protest.

The first demonstration of 2011: a symbol of parliament itself, a 20 foot high effigy of Big Ben, is burnt on 2 January. It takes place far from crowded streets in a clearing within the historic Royal Forest of Dean. Local people are determined to protect their forest from being sold off into commercial hands. This poses an issue that haunts British politics – the UK’s national question. Should the Coalition insist on its plan to sell off our woodlands, can the cities link arms with the countryside to overcome one of the most crippling divisions in English democracy?

The Coalition’s decision to abolish the EMA, the Educational Maintenance Allowance for 16-19 year olds from poorer and very poor households, created furious opposition in schools and sixth-form colleges with a high proportion of working class children. Many joined the demonstrations which, from the start, were not confined to ‘privileged’ students of whom there are anyway over a million. Cross-class solidarity was built into the DNA of the movement against the cuts from the start, while trade unions leaders, as these pages record, welcome it.

On 8 January the TUC helped host a meeting of *NetrootsUK* at Congress House. Perhaps only 10 per cent of the 500 online activists who attend are trade union organisers, but in terms of the British labour movement it is an exceptional exercise in openness and shows a remarkable lack of tribalism. The TUC has called for a massive demonstration on 26 March. This is likely to be supported by local councils who hate being forced to implement cuts, as well as many from across the NHS now undergoing its own radical marketisation. It is very early days, but the students may be initiating a social movement that addresses the larger interest of society.

Members of political parties are sniffy, while Labour ones claim that it is they who should speak for any new opposition. Certainly, they badly need more energy. But one

of the inspiring aspects of the protest movement is its sensitivity to process. It is not whether Labour or the Greens of the Scottish or Welsh nationalists support this or that policy on education or the cuts that will count, but how they do so. Can Labour open up to the widening force of the anti-cuts movement so that it is changed by it? It may then have a chance not just of being re-elected but also of governing better when in office.

The Coalition's "revolution" will make Britain a safe haven for international finance and corporations in the hope that they will ensure domestic economic growth from above. But what kind of economic development and self-government will the opposition to this fate propose in its place? The Coalition is busy modernising parliament: equalising constituency sizes, reducing the number of MPs, replacing the House of Lords, while reinforcing the exceptional power of the executive over the Union. What counter-programme of democratic reform and what kind of state is needed to enhance our democracy now that a return to the status quo seems impossible?

Amongst the students the debate is more radical despite the danger of looking inwards. Two broad approaches are engaged in what can very roughly be described as an argument between two traditions, that of Lenin and that of the Levellers. Leninism distrusts participation and engagement, fearing it will become contamination (unless it is disciplined by 'entrism,' or other forms of undercover activity). It seeks polarisation while it waits for the larger crisis and total insurrection. My own preference is for the Leveller tradition, which is altogether more open. Many of the current movement's egalitarian hopes are familiar and none the worse for that. They go back to our Civil War when the first modern call for political equality went out, "The poorest He that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest He". It is a tradition that threads through the works

of William Blake, Tom Paine and Shelley and the spirit of the suffragettes and it has awoken from hibernation. It is inventive, humane as well as radical, engages with the economic and political forces around it and calls for liberty and rights.

New technology has the potential to empower this 'Leveller tradition' of radical self-determination. One of the themes running through these pages is a feeling that the profound socio-economic changes and the collapsing costs of communication have made it possible to achieve a modern livelihood through mutual ownership, economic optimisation rather than maximisation and co-creation (and creative commons copyright under which this collection is published). Ironically, those who want to limit the marketisation of everything are starting to enjoy the technological capacity to do this, thanks to the immensely productive expansion of capitalism.

Perhaps another way of registering how genuinely radical the historic moment is, is by asking who are the conservatives and who are the extremists?

Are the conservatives really the Etonians who want us to buckle down to globalisation as they sell off the forests, tender NHS provision to US for-profit health providers, marketise education and give parliament a good slapping? Are these the traditionalists?

Are the extremists really those who want to preserve the status of the forests, ensure that those who run the NHS believe in it as a public service, see education as about developing our human capacities, practical as well as intellectual, and call for pluralism and mutual respect? Are these the revolutionaries?

We were supposed to sit back and admire the Prime Minister and his deputy, as they displayed their radicalism on our behalf. The police were doubtless prepared for small

numbers of objectors. Now, both in fact and metaphorically, an effort is underway to corral the unexpectedly numerous expressions of resistance and throttle them. Our 'leaders' would prefer to close down the attitudes, ideas and militancy of the winter protests evident in *Fight Back!* They want to ensure that the energy, intelligence and inventiveness are contained, that its thinkers, artists, bloggers and activists squabble, divide, are rendered harmless and do not develop a politics which lasts or ideas that are of any influence. The book's editorial flashmob have all literally been kettled by the police. I feel that they are not going to be successfully confined. But a much larger exercise is underway to kettle the spirit and creativity of the potential movement against the cuts and market fundamentalism, so as to isolate it from society. We must do everything we can to make sure that it remains open and free to grow.

OVERVIEWS

You say you want a revolution...

Laurie Penny and Rowenna Davies, openDemocracy

How to believe in change? This exchange was published in July 2010 but it prefigures the energy and issues released by the protests that erupted in November and December, and expresses the frustrations that were building up well before the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government announced its plans for higher education.

Laurie Penny:

Not every generation gets the politics it deserves. When baby boomer journalists and politicians talk about engaging with youth politics, what they generally mean is engaging with a caucus of energetic, compliant under-25s who are willing to give their time for free to causes led by grown-ups.

Now more than ever, the young people of Britain need to believe ourselves more than acolytes to the staid, boring liberalism of previous generations. We need to begin to formulate an agenda of our own.

There can be no question that the conditions are right for a youth movement. The young people of Britain are suffering brutal, insulting socio-economic oppression. There are over a million young people of working age not in education, employment or training, which is a polite way of saying "up shit creek without a giro".

Politicians jostle for the most punishing position on welfare reform as millions of us languish on state benefits incomparably less generous than those our parents were able to claim in their summer holidays. Where the baby boomers enjoyed unparalleled social mobility, many of us are finding that the opposite is the case, as we are shut out of the

housing market and required to scabble, sweat and indebt ourselves for a dwindling number of degrees barely worth the paper they're written on, with the grim promise of spending the rest of our lives paying for an economic crisis not of our making in a world that's increasingly on fire.

Just weeks ago, as news came in that the top 10 per cent of earners were getting richer, 21-year-old jobseeker Vicki Harrison took her own life after receiving her 200th rejection slip. Whether a youth movement is appropriate is no longer the question. The question is, why are we not already filling the streets in protest? Where is our anger? Where is our sense of outrage?

There are protest movements, of course. It would be surprising if anyone reading this blog had not been involved, at some point over the past six months, in a demonstration, an online petition or a donation drive. We do not lack energy, or the desire for change, and if there's one thing that's true of my generation it is our willingness to work extremely hard even when the possibility of reward is abstract and abstruse.

What we are missing is a sense of political totality. From environmental activism to the recent protests over the closure of Middlesex University's philosophy department, our protest movements are atomised and fragmented, and too often we focus on fighting for or against individual reforms.

We need to have the courage to see all of our personal battlegrounds – for jobs, housing, education, welfare, digital rights, the environment – as part of a sustained and coherent movement, not just for reform, but for revolution.

For people my age, growing up after the end of the cold war, we have no coherent sense of the possibility of alternatives to neoliberal politics. The philosopher Slavoj

Zizek observed that for young people today, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

For us, revolution is a retro concept whose proper use is to sell albums, t-shirts and tickets to hipster discos, rather than a serious political argument.

Many of us openly or privately believe that change can only happen gradually, incrementally, that we can only respond to neoliberal reforms as and when they occur. Youth politics in Britain today is tragically atomised and lacks ideological direction. We urgently need to entertain the notion that another politics is possible, a type of politics that organises collectively to demand the systemic change we crave.

Revolutionary politics involve risk. Revolutionary politics do not involve waiting patiently for adults to make the changes. They do not come from interning at a think tank or opening letters for an MP, and I say this as someone who has done both. Revolutionary politics are different from work experience, and they are unlikely to look good on our CVs.

The young British left has already waited too long and too politely for politicians, political parties and business owners from previous generations to give space to our agenda. We have canvassed for them, distributed their leaflets, worked on their websites, updated their twitter feeds, hashtagged their leadership campaigns, done their photocopying and made their tea, pining all the while for political transcendence. No more; I say no more.

A radical youth movement requires direct action, it will require risk taking, and it will require central, independent organisation. It will not require us to join the communist party or wear a silly hat, but it will require us to risk upsetting, in no particular order, our parents, our future employers, the party machine, and quite possibly the police.

The lost generation has wasted too much time waiting to be found. Through no fault of our own, our generation carries a huge burden of social and financial debt, but we have already wasted too much time counting up what we owe. It's time to start asking instead what the baby boomer generation owes us, and how we can take it back.

No more asking nicely. It's time to get organised, and it's time to get angry.

Laurie

Rowenna Davies:

Laurie,

You paint a vivid picture of a young, struggling underclass being exploited by adults, and it's obvious your cry for revolution comes straight from the heart. But do we really want to make age another battleground in our communities? As members of the left, don't we believe that the real divides in our society aren't between young and old, but between the rich and poor, the powerful and the vulnerable? Do we really have space for another division?

As a true believer in progressive politics (and at 25, perhaps still a young person), I believe we should be allying ourselves with all those who feel oppression, not just those of a similar demographic. The alternative is to risk segregating ourselves into another youth playpen, disconnected from the left's mainstream movement. Let's fight for the bigger picture, not a youthful self-portrait.

It's a common mistake of adults to assume that because we're young, we all think and feel the same. Sure, young people tend to feel injustice particularly sharply as a demographic because we all start at the bottom of the jobs pile. But that doesn't mean that all young people are powerless to the whims of adults. Conservative headquarters are filled with fresh-faced young graduates that are working

on policies that screw over people old enough to be their parents and grandparents. How does a “youth movement” deal with that?

Nor do I agree with your vision of revolution, as beautiful as it sounds. Bringing this system to collapse would result in massive economic instability that would undermine the employment chances of all people – young and old. It would fly in the face of the last democratic vote and threaten the social stability of our communities.

So what’s my alternative? Your passionate eloquence leaves my response vulnerable to looking like a tired defence of the status quo. But I share your fierce urgency for change – I just don’t want to see young people tearing down the system. Instead I want to see us enter it, take charge and reshape it. I want to see us filling the youth wings of our political parties and demanding they give us more power, as Young Labour is already doing. One initiative I’m pushing for helps to get young people into local government, not as token youth reps or pen pushers or photocopiers – but as legitimate representatives of their communities.

In short, I want to see a generation that fights for each other rather than on the streets. A youth movement that stands by fellow interns, refuses to work without pay and raises the temperature on educational funding. Yes this will take direct action and organised protest. And yes our targets will often be ‘youth issues’ – but they should always be part of a bigger picture, as the students and lecturers who stood together at Middlesex will tell you.

I can understand your frustration. After thirteen years of a ‘progressive government’, we are still told that we can’t afford to pay for internships, let alone redress substantial inequalities. But we mustn’t underestimate the difference that policy can make, as this Conservative budget is about to prove.

I agree with so much of your clear-spirited diagnosis of the problems. It's your solutions I'm questioning. Are you completely disillusioned by the system? Is there really no hope for change from within? And if not, why do you keep voting in our elections, and urging others to do the same? Can political parties help turn things around, or might they just as well disband? I'd like to know how you think the system should change to make young people like yourself believe in it again.

Row

Laurie Penny:

Row,

You asked if there isn't hope that young people can change the system from within. The short answer is: none at all, if that's all we're planning on doing. For too many people our age, political activism is just something that looks good on our CVs, something that involves photocopying, distributing leaflets and answering the telephone for adult politicians whose agendas we may not necessarily agree with – often for free.

We worry, and rightly so, about being shunned by the establishment, when really we should be trying to impose our own values upon it. Fortunately, that doesn't necessarily have to involve pepper spray and water cannon. You say that you want to see "a youth movement that stands by fellow interns, refuses to work without pay and raises the temperature on educational funding... direct action and organised protest." in my book, that's the very definition of revolution. Revolution is about challenging hierarchies of labour, property and power; it's not just about slogans and terrible hair, and sometimes revolution can work in the gentlest of ways.

You say that a call for young people to rebel poses a risk of further division in our communities, but I firmly believe that generational politics and the politics of class and capital

should not be mutually exclusive. Young people in particular need to understand that our place in the hierarchy of labour and property is lowly, insecure and unjust, and only by developing a sense of solidarity and real rage will we begin to approach that understanding appropriately.

My greatest fear for our generation is that we will grow up to inherit a poorer, harsher, more difficult world than our parents without once having mustered the courage to question what brought us to this point.

Even before the financial crash, most of us who grew up through New Labour's exacting reforms to secondary and higher education have been conditioned from an early age to see ourselves as little more than commodity inputs. Now, with wages low, job security non-existent and seventy of us competing for every vacancy, there is a danger that we will feel too frightened of being left behind by the market to demand our rights to work, housing, a decent standard of living and a sense of security that means more than a neoliberal soundbite. We have been trained to compete, and to see one another as competitors, and this too is a reason to cherish revolutionary spirit.

What do I mean by revolution? Not blood in the streets, although direct action must be a part of any movement. Not just anger: raging at the baby boomers won't solve any of our problems by itself. Deep ideological questions of class, equality and the nature of late capitalism will continue to matter to people our age long after we have buried our parents and taken on the work of running the country. If we are to stand a chance of doing so with any semblance of maturity and responsibility, we need to remember what it's like to believe in change, change that's not a slogan on a poster or a platitude from a pundit but a concrete plan to improve our lives collectively.

That's why I'm quite serious in calling for revolutionary sentiment. We need to understand how badly we have been let down by the system, because one day we are going to be in charge of that system. People don't truly treasure things until they've fought for them, and it's only by fighting for political emancipation, equality and social justice that we'll be able to pass those things on to generations who will come after us. If we truly mean to create a decent society for ourselves to inherit, we need to risk upsetting people. We need to risk being badly behaved, and making ourselves less, rather than more, employable. To do politics properly, we need to risk getting in trouble.

Laurie

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<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/laurie-penny-rowenna-davies/you-say-you-want-revolution>

From the Reactive to the Creative

Cailean Gallagher, Oxford Left Review

The power of student activism and mass action is growing. The cuts are radicalising people, resulting in waves of protests at local and national level. We are witnessing, and participating in, the development of a new political culture, but there is a danger the passion may burn itself out if it is not focused and directed. Meanwhile, the principles of the student demonstrations – fair and free education, available to all; opposition to education and public-sector cuts; and the right to express a democratic will – are all principles of the left. This represents a chance and a challenge for the left, and we must use this opportunity to renew our ideology, and to combine it with a new culture of creative activism.

Beyond the Cuts

‘Tory scum! Tory Scum!’, ‘No ifs, no buts’ – the reactionism of the protests is justified, at least initially, and is an important part of mobilising and inspiring people to fight against the cuts. Yet this is simply the beginning. To avoid impotence we have to go further; we need to develop creative, radical alternatives for our movement, developed on our own terms.

The right have tried to frame the debate so that there appears to be no alternative. We – the left – need to stop merely responding to the arguments of the right within the narrow parameters of debate set by them. It is Advantage Right if, instead of saying ‘don’t make cuts’, we are forced to say ‘don’t make cuts there’.

All the tricks are being used to limit attention to the scale of their reforms. First, each policy announcement is expressed in terms of consensus and progress – this word ‘progress’ has lost its meaning, just as the word ‘society’ has been hijacked. Second, they are using the old technique of making things which are constituted by social relations – such as the economic crisis – appear external and thus ‘out of our control’. This allows them to defend the preposterous notion of needing to run Britain like a business and to transform the ‘services’ it ‘provides’, so as to be efficient, preference-based and subject to competition. The effect of this is to reduce, or nullify, the ‘critical space’ within which people might engage in debate; the only space where debate seems possible, sensible or worthwhile appears to be that framed by the right.

The narrow debate is evidenced in the feeble response of the parties of the ‘broad left’ which, seeking to occupy the consensual centre-ground, have adopted and adapted to the neoliberal ideology. It falls, then, to others to make people aware of the scale of the cuts – and to resist the hegemonic claim that they are necessary – and also to make people aware of the government’s total agenda. The whole culture of the future, as well as the welfare of the people, is at stake. This is a tipping point; this is the one opportunity to resist changes to culture, education, public services and society that, once made, will be near impossible to reverse.

But it is also essential to move beyond this resistance and reaction, and to use the opportunity for ideological renewal – attacking not just the Tories’ agenda, but the whole structure of society, with assertive ideological language; heeding the experience of other countries; not just drawing on past history, as the Left is so prone to do, but generating new ideas of culture, education, society.

The Left has to unite, not as a monolithic entity (and certainly not within the stubborn populism of a party

machine), but as a creative force challenging the incumbent orthodoxy. We need to establish what we are fighting against, and to build a broad, dynamic movement, which can both mobilize and generate ideas. There need to be imaginative alternatives. The bystander-culture of the intellectual and student classes needs to change; this renewal needs the involvement and contribution of those who would normally sit and watch.

The role of students

Students must be, and already are, an essential part of this renewal. There are practical reasons for this: we are well-placed to protest and organize. We have the energy and time to act again and again, and to keep struggling; we can be creative in our methods of dissent, we can communicate and organise faster than ever before, and we can commit in a way that no others can. We aren't just marching for our own sake; we won't have to pay the higher fees. But we will have to live in the society that is being created now.

We have the access to the literature, ideas, and minds we need to generate an ideology and culture for the society we want to live in. As students we occupy a privileged position within the existing elitist academic structures. Members of an elite can use their position to the advantage of society as a whole. When we write and organize, our methods and language will be drawn, inevitably, from our studies, but we will be deploying them for our own radical ends. We need to read, write, talk, experiment, so that we can understand both what we learn and what we are trying to achieve.

The student movement is unique in that it has the power to marry activism and ideology. As students we can use our privilege to develop new ideas for the Left; and then can practice what we preach.

In Oxford dozens of students occupied the iconic Radcliffe Camera with the stated aim of making information

and knowledge public and free to all – as expressed in the statement that the fortress of exclusive learning is “now a public library”. During the occupation, plans were made to photo copy university books for public access, before the police forced entry and evicted the occupiers. And the following week, a ‘Free School’ was held in Oxford, where tutors, students, members of the public and police were all involved in educational sessions. Oxford is a city defined by its walls, its collegiate enclaves. The campaign in Oxford fights the cuts in whatever way it can, but it also combines ideology with activism to pursue the ideal of making Oxford a city defined by free, open, universal education. No walls, no exclusion, no fees.

The potential

So the work of this student movement can go far beyond the reactive, and even beyond the conventionally ‘political’. We can in our actions begin the fight for the real benefits of free education: not just free to access but free from the limitations imposed by the academic system. Free education can expose and analyse knowledge and ideas that find no place in tutorials, lectures and classes. Vitaly, it can foster innovation in methods and ideals of collaborative education – open, flexible, critical, creative – that must have a central place in the left’s vision of education and society. Students and the public are not only being exposed to new thought, and making connections between different ideas; they are creating new ways to envision learning itself. These alternative forms of education will in turn generate more alternatives, and release more creativity.

There are other benefits. The unquantifiable benefit of an enthused young person, who had previously considered herself un-interested and un-interesting, being exposed to new and exciting ideas. The tangible benefit to the social fabric resulting from the general feeling of universal access to previously privileged knowledge. The restoration of a

pedagogical stance towards the value and purpose of education: knowledge for knowledge's sake, and knowledge for the sake of self-knowledge.

If the student movement moves from the reactive to the creative, it can promote the re-invigoration of an emaciated British intellectual culture, and the development of a new 'critical space' where orthodoxies are challenged. This is a necessary prerequisite of renewed ideological salvos on the part of the Left.

The anti-intellectualism of the post-Thatcher political landscape was the necessary corollary of the anti-ideological stance of neo-liberalism in general. It is often suggested that knowledge only exists for the sake of economic benefit (a la the Browne Review, or Mandelson's *Higher Ambitions*, November 2009), or for its own sake entirely alone. What is overlooked is that in being considered an end in itself, education serves greater ends as an indirect result, through generating new ideas for culture, economy, society. The role of students is to make this message heard by politicians, but also to demonstrate it through creative action.

We turn to knowledge and learning with activism in mind, and bring a new language and ideology to this critical space. This is done for the sake of an end we believe in that is not expressed in society – of free universal access to education. In the process, this will give us the tools to challenge the hegemony of the right. Through its key role in ideology and activism, and the growth that comes through their synthesis, the student movement has the potential to be a powerful element in the renewal of the Left. We have a duty to take up the challenge.

This article was written in collaboration with other editors of the *Oxford Left Review*, and is adapted from the the editorial of the November 2010 issue. The *Oxford Left Review* can be downloaded for free at <http://www.oxfordleftreview.wordpress.com>

The Open-Sourcing of Political Activism: How the internet and networks help build resistance

Guy Aitchison and Aaron Peters

It has been an exhilarating experience being part of the extraordinary outpouring of student energy and activism over the last few months. Although we may have lost the vote on tuition fees, we won the argument about the role of higher education and blew the political space wide open. In the process, two cherished myths within official debate, vital to the Coalition's sense of self-confidence and purpose as it goes about dismantling the post-war social democratic settlement, have been demolished. The first was the notion, reinforced by an obliging media, that Britain has a largely passive and quiescent population who, unlike their continental counter-parts, can be relied upon to meekly accept the fate handed down to them, with the young especially dismissed as lazy, feckless and self-interested.

The second governing myth, lying in tatters, is that the government's economic agenda is in any way "progressive" and concerned with "fairness". David Cameron had attempted to distance himself from his bellicose predecessor Margaret Thatcher, dressing up the Coalition's anti-state agenda in the fluffy rhetorical garb of the "Big Society" with its emphasis on devolving power, voluntarism and self-help. This lacked plausibility at the best of times, and can now be seen for the sham it is. Six months into the Coalition and groups of students and children have been repeatedly kettled, beaten and horse-charged outside Parliament with

the BBC's chief political correspondent, Nick Robinson, declaring that government has "lost control of the streets". Civil society has rejected the role allotted to it by Tory spin doctors, instead meeting and organising in opposition to the government's austerity programmes.

Taking part in the UCL occupation, and participating in other student meetings and occupations, it was striking the number of trade unionists who said they had been inspired and energised by the spirit and determination of the students. Encouragingly, this sentiment now finds echoes amongst the union leadership with Len McCluskey, the leader of Unite, calling for trade unions to join forces with the "magnificent students' movement" (see section 7). This call, from the leader of the country's biggest trade union, would have been unimaginable during earlier periods of union militancy in the 1970s and '80s and presents a historic opportunity for the left. If it is to defeat the rampant forces of market fundamentalism to achieve a society based on justice and equality then obsessing over the machinations of Westminster village, and the political stance of the Labour leader Ed Miliband, will not help. Parliamentary representation matters, but it is by orientating itself towards the public, rather than party leaders, that a movement gains influence.

For us, the key question now is how to turn rhetorical expressions of solidarity into concrete and lasting relationships of support and co-operation and how disparate campaigning groups – some local, some sectoral, each with their own battles, but united in opposition to the cuts – can link up to defeat the Tory-Lib Dem plans. One key consideration is how the movement can maintain its forwards momentum and militancy and not get sucked into a drawn out game of waiting for institutions hidebound by conservative leaderships.

This reader on the winter protests brings together just a small sample of the many reports and accounts of what happened in November and December. They are followed by examples from the wider arguments – over the government’s policy on higher education; policing and the barbaric use of kettling; the contribution of trade unions; the question of generational change. Already, another ‘reader’ of similar length could be put together from just the blog posts debating the organisation of the movement as a wide-ranging argument developed between those who emphasise the power of networks to release the creativity and self-organising power of activists and those who stress the effectiveness of central organisation and democratically accountable leadership.

As our contribution to the overviews, we want to set out how we think the originality and energy of what has happened can be best maintained in the context of the epochal transformation now underway.

To simplify, those who back the power of networks are content for the movement to remain precisely that, a social movement, held together by on and offline networks, and formulating a shared identity and set of political goals in an organic process of bottom-up deliberation. Whereas those who want central organisation and leadership wish to see the establishment of a Social Movement Organisation, formalized in stance, procedure and practice that is subject to theoretical homogeneity and the diktat of a centralised leadership and bureaucracy. Drawing upon popular conceptions about what is the most “natural” way to organise human affairs, they argue for the effectiveness of hierarchy, a form of organisation which is any case inescapable, as de facto leaderships emerge in a process described by Robert Michels at the beginning of the 20th century as the “iron law of oligarchy”.

Of course, the choice is not as polarised as this and it would be foolish for anyone to argue for a single exclusive model in campaigning against the cuts. If we are to see the emergence of a broad-based popular movement, uniting everyone from young social media enthusiasts to OAPs, then there will need to be a patchwork of different campaign groups across different sectors of society, some with elected leaderships and others without, each with their own methods of organisation and communication. Activists concerned with galvanizing popular resistance to the cuts will need to engage in what will inevitably be a slow and painstaking process of working with established institutions, not least the trade unions, and convincing them to take action.

At the same time this should not blind us to the fact that some of the most promising action in the anti-cuts movement so far has been a result of the challenge, by networks, to the monopoly traditional institutions have historically enjoyed over information and social co-ordination. The terrain of collective action is being transformed and this has opened up the exciting possibility of a powerful and rapidly growing mass movement beyond the capacity of regulation of any central leadership. The ideas on which such a movement could be based certainly aren't new. The long and complex history of the mutual aid tradition of anarchism has demonstrated the co-ordinating capacity of networks based on equality, participation, and self-organisation. Indeed, in practicing consensual democracy, the occupations and other sites of student resistance, are self-consciously working with an anarchist tradition based around autonomy and an ethos of co-operation and communality. What is distinctive about the current situation is that the amplification of the vital role networks can make in mobilising resistance by the "open sourcing" of political activism. For the first time in human history we have the possibility to organise on a dramatic

scale without monolithic organisations. With the technological revolution in networks and the internet, collective action just got a whole lot easier.

The ‘open sourcing’ of political activism

Historically understood, social movement organisations have exhibited organisational characteristics similar to what Erik S Raymond describes, in the context of software programming, as ‘Cathedrals’, the closed-source cathedral model being one in which “source code is available with each software release, but code developed between releases is restricted to an exclusive group of software developers”.

The cathedral model was determined by the technologies available: the assembly line, a centralised management structure, a rigid and hierarchical division of labour, and forms of mass communication premised on the “one-to-many” model, such as newspapers, radio and television. These had a tendency to favour established elites and were prone to obsolete ways of thinking and problem-solving over risk taking and innovation.

The Cathedral model has informed the attributes of organisations in the political, commercial and cultural spheres throughout the 20th and early 21st century. From Microsoft to Manchester United, and many of our recently failed financial institutions, it has shaped public values, our shared spaces, and the nature of social interaction. Indeed, it is this Fordist model of industrial, and later social, production that has determined the sphere of what is collectively possible.

The case against the cathedral as the exclusive organising model for social movements is observable in the nascent anti-cuts movement, where cathedrals are being repeatedly out-done and bypassed by energetic clusters of activism and direct action. These, in Raymond’s terms, represent the model of the “bazaar”, in which “the code is developed over

the internet in full view of the public”, rather than secretly at the behest and within the confines of the collective intelligence of a centralised bureaucracy. What we are seeing in these clusters is an ‘open sourcing’ of political activism. Just as the ‘bazaars’ of the Linux operating system and Wikipedia can be built upon by anyone with the capabilities, skills and requisite passion to do so, these movements are constituted in a similar fashion – themselves crowdsourcing the skill-sets and social networks of anybody who wishes to participate. The paradigm of the ‘closed source’ cathedral can be extended from the trade union leadership, to the NUS, and might be seen as an equivalent to the approach of Microsoft and the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The exciting possibilities this holds for developing new strategies of social emancipation has been commented on by political theorists, such as Erik Olin Wright, who points out that Wikipedia shows the productive capacity of non-market, egalitarian participation on a huge scale in *Envisioning Real Utopias*.

In the new ‘crowdsourced’ model, the distinction between producers and consumers of dissent is dissolved – there is no hierarchy or membership structure in place, instead all individuals are potential participants within a movement. It is within this context that anyone can contribute, hence we have the rise of networked activists, with such individuals simultaneously performing the old roles of both producers and consumers of dissent – indeed they are much like those who participate in citizen journalism or use content on Flickr, what Alvin Toffler called ‘Prosumers’ – at once producing dissent, mobilising and facilitating it, while also participating in actions facilitated by others.

Raymond contends that the Bazaar model is superior to the Cathedral model as a result of Linus’ law, that asserts “the more widely available the source code is for public testing, scrutiny and experimentation, the more rapidly all forms of bugs will be discovered”. In contrast, Raymond

claims that an inordinate amount of time and energy must be spent hunting for bugs in the cathedral model since the working code is available only to a few developers. Inevitably, social movement networks co-produced by large collectives of prosumers that utilize crowd-sourcing to solve problems will have certain advantages over social movement organisations administered by elites with passive memberships who are supplicant ‘consumers’ of dissent with little if any real input. Moreover, any tendency in this direction is just a delay or regression in the transformation of society that you want to see take place – people’s liberation into an active and creative democracy may as well start now – in the transition movement, “Be the change you want to see” is the most far-reaching of all the incentives for selecting the bazaar over the cathedral.

The necessity for the hierarchical ‘organisation’, the obsession of Marxists and industrialists alike at the turn of the 20th century, is at the beginning of our own, fast being rendered obsolete as a pre-requisite for facilitating large groups of people to act together in a common interest. This is true of Wikipedia, YouTube, Flickr and Linux and will also hold true for protest and political contestation.

The potential for open source resistance in a globalized world

The consequences of such a shift are awesome in scope and scale. This situation of informational abundance and a world where individuals can organise without organisations means that ultimately many established political organisations, such as parties and perhaps national legislatures, judiciaries and executives may become obsolete, just like the old model of the ‘Cathedral’ par excellence – the Encyclopedia Britannica.

With power seeping away from the cathedral of the nation state one might imagine a networked ‘cosmopolis’ with globalized dynamics of communication and movement of

persons, goods and capital. Alongside that, however, we might also see power seep downwards towards regions, cities and other networked localities where this logic of organising without organisations means that such actors are capable of pursuing certain goods, such as education policy or energy production, by themselves where this had not been previously possible.

The limits of recent protest movements in the UK

The traditional top-down model of mass mobilisation has been a central co-ordinating feature of recent protest movements in this country. The Stop the War coalition, for example, relied upon a monolithic organisation administered by a centralised machine which consumed the movement, rather than participating in its co-production. It relied on predominantly offline networks and an established cadre of actors who directed ideological self-understanding and more importantly, strategy. Alongside this top-down model of bureaucracy, in the Marxist-Leninist tradition, we find movements administered by established “gatekeeper” NGOs, who leverage their reputational and organisational capital at a particular political juncture to push their own particular brand and cause into the public domain. Make Poverty History and the Put People First campaign, aimed at the 2009 G20 summit, broadly fall under this category.

While these campaigns can justly claim important achievements, particularly in shifting public debate and agenda setting, they suffered from a lack of radicalism and flexibility which meant their transformative potential was never truly realised. Tragically, the Stop the War movement never vindicated the huge potential it showed in the historic protests on the eve of the Iraq invasion. The means it adopted were conventional and uninspiring, involving repeated marches from A to B to hear talks by the same old

usual suspects. Its top-down method of organisation militated against an open and pluralist movement that could reach out to the wider public, and left it vulnerable to the sectarianism and in-fighting which eventually pulled it apart.

Central coalitions of mainstream NGOs usually fare no better. They are frequently cumbersome and unwieldy, bound by the stifling and de-mobilising logic of the lowest common denominator. These groups are nearly always condemned to interminable wrangling over vague and timid "policy" statements, fret about damage to their "brands" by doing anything too radical, and inevitably jostle for pre-eminent position within the movement once they see any glimpse of success. It was unfortunate, though not entirely unpredictable, for example, that both Make Poverty History and Put People First faded because of organisational rivalry and in-fighting.

Within these top-down organisational models the abundant collective knowledge, skills and social networks of 'the membership' was neglected often to the detriment of the causes they championed. Within the 'bazaar' paradigm, these resources constitute the essence of what the movement itself becomes and broadly determine its potential for success. Social movement networks are very much the sum of their parts, and when constituted by large numbers of creative, dynamic and passionate participants embedded within a number of offline and online networks this can be a very great deal.

The genesis of networked protest

Some of the most innovative and effective manifestations of discontent in the nascent anti-cuts movement have been facilitated by networks, while traditional organisations have been slow to respond. It started with a series of successful blockouts of a number of high-street retailers for the mobile phone giant Vodafone in protest at an alleged £6 billion of

tax avoidance. Utilising a number of tools, all of which are of paramount importance to the new open source model, such as Twitter, Facebook, email and smartphones, a loosely connected group of activists mobilised for an initial block-out of the firm's flagship store in Bond Street, London. The success of this first action generated a viral loop, the coverage it received amongst the conventional mass media, Indymedia and Twitter creating an ecology whereby disparate and previously disconnected actors, who shared similar concerns, were inspired and empowered to imitate the original protest drawing on the same tools and techniques.

The past few months have seen sit-ins, pickets, educational lectures, super-glue stick-ons and flash mobs on high streets across the UK targeting Vodafone and retail outlets owned by Sir Philip Green's Arcadia group. On Saturday 18 December over fifty self-organised actions took place across the country, from Aberdeen to Truro. Even at this early date, the solidarity shown between those engaged in resistance to the cuts, especially the linking up of the student movement with UK Uncut, indicates the potential emergence of a unified identity and purpose.

The remarkable outburst of civil disobedience precipitated by UK Uncut, organised almost exclusively via Twitter and Facebook, belies Malcolm Gladwell's influential critique of digital activism for the *New Yorker*, which assumes that only the "strong-form" offline ties can create the necessary relationships of trust and support that lead people to engage in direct action together. Through the UK Uncut networks, groups of strangers come together to carry out actions, often at personal risk to themselves. By taking part in these actions together, they strike up the "strong bonds" of friendship and trust on which they can build a more concerted campaigning effort. In this way, online and offline activism are interlaced and reinforce each other: the dichotomy which Gladwell and

others wish to draw between low-risk online activity, such as signing a petition, tweeting a link, joining a Facebook group, and more high-risk offline activity, centred around direct action, simply doesn't hold.

The UK Uncut protests have had a remarkable success in shifting public opinion, including a positive response from the Daily Mail, and opening up a public debate on the issue of tax avoidance. Going forward there is no reason why this outburst of civil disobedience, generated by UK Uncut, should not increase significantly as more people engage with the message of the anti-cuts movement, but more importantly as more people engage with the new mediums through which that message is distributed.

The birth of the student movement

The birth of a militant student movement beyond the control of its hapless official leadership, over the course of a few weeks, demonstrates how swiftly self-organising networks can adapt and respond. The NUS President Aaron Porter played an important role in mobilising 50,000 students for the first big march on 10 November, but he abdicated moral and political leadership of the student movement with his over-the-top denunciations of those who took part in the occupation of Tory HQ at Millbank and his refusal to support a further wave of mass protests and direct action. From that moment, the initiative passed to the more radical wing of the student movement organising through the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, the Educational Activist Network, the London Student Assembly and the nationwide network of occupations that sprang up in campuses across the country. Students operating through these channels were able to communicate directly with the media and the wider public through online networks, while also building strong and enduring friendship groups in offline spaces.

By making the arguments against cuts to higher education and EMA and organising protests, flashmobs and direct action, the occupations constituted themselves as alternative sites of legitimacy and authority. The response of the helpless Porter echoed that of the Frenchman Ledru Rollin and countless other politicians who have seen their authority slipping away, "There go the people. I must follow them, for I am their leader." After days of silence, Porter went to visit the UCL occupation where he apologised for his "spineless dithering". He later went back on commitments he had made to occupying students, ensuring his ongoing irrelevance to the events that were unfolding. This was vividly symbolised on the day of the tuition fees vote, with the farcical spectacle of the NUS' glowstick vigil (candles were deemed against health and safety) of 200 people at Victoria Embankment, whilst 30,000 students marched to Parliament Square to make their voices heard.

There are interesting parallels with the Tea Party movement in the US which, in bypassing traditional Republican hierarchies, has shifted the entire discourse within the party to the right. The Tea Party aspires to be leaderless, radically decentralised and "open source". It is customary amongst progressives to dismiss the uprising of US right-wingers as the product of corporate "astro-turfing" rather than a real movement which engages people with organisation and ideas. But whilst it is true that powerful interests are at work, such a response conveniently exculpates the left for its own failures whilst ignoring the innovative potential of the Tea Party's organisation. Acting as a loose network, it makes full use of modern communications tools, such as free conference calling, and online social networks, such as Ning and Facebook. As Mark Meckler, a Tea Party coordinator and co-founder, said: "Essentially what we're doing is crowd-sourcing... I use the term open-source politics. This is an open-source

movement." Every day, anyone and everyone is modifying the code. "The movement as a whole is smart." Aided by the organising power of the web, new movements are learning that they can set their own agenda, with or without the blessing of traditional hierarchies. Grassroots activists looking to shift the Labour party into mounting a much stronger opposition to the cuts would do well to keep this in mind.

One of the arguments made by those emphasising the need for a central co-ordinating hierarchy is that the ease of organising provided by ubiquitous social media reinforces the need for a credible central voice to prevent confusion and disintegration. What this view ignores is the way in which an open source movement, organising through networks on and offline, constitutes its own sites of legitimacy and authority. The student demonstrations called by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts and the London Student Assembly, for example, saw huge turnouts precisely because these groups already had credibility within the movement built up through informal networks of fellow activists and the success of previous actions. By contrast, a fake demonstration on 20 December organised by an unknown individual with far right links, had almost zero attendance thanks to people warning each other not to attend by posting on their Facebook walls, posting to Twitter, texting each other, and so on. Far from proving the need for central leadership, the incident demonstrated how communities of mutual trust and support even within a young movement help to guard against badly thought through or malicious actions.

Horizontal organisation in the student movement

Mirroring the wider movement, of which they were a part, the occupations enacted solidarity-based horizontal

networks which were inherently more dynamic than the NUS. Operating along radically democratic and participatory lines, they were able to harness the latent energy, creativity and talents of participants. At the same time, they avoided the institutional paralysis characteristic of centralised forms of organisation and bureaucracies administered by leaders desperate to appear “responsible” and safeguard their future careers. Internal practices inherited from the alter-globalisation movement, which had in turn adapted them from the Zapatistas and other social justice movements from the global south, were disseminated by student activists who had learnt them from, among other places, the Climate Camp protests.

According to these practices, decisions are taken in a decentralized, non-hierarchical form of consensual democracy. Open meetings are chaired by a rotating facilitator, whose job it is to guide the discussion towards consensus ensuring that everyone has a chance to participate and all views are heard. Upwards facing wiggly hand gestures are used to signal agreement, and a downwards facing hand gesture disagreement. Proposals are worked through, with dissenting voices being heard and compromises being agreed to or rejected, until a consensus is reached. The emphasis is on finding common ground, rather than defeating opponents. The aim is not conformity, but a way forward that everyone could live with. Those who object could stand aside or, in exceptional cases fundamental to the existence of the occupation, “block” a proposal. Discussion at the UCL occupation group meetings tended to focus on practical ways forward, with any discussion of abstract theoretical issues seen as a complement – rather than a substitute for – action. In the context of the alter-globalisation movement, anthropologist and activist David Graeber described the process in terms of the ideology being “immanent in the anti-authoritarian principles that underlie the practice”, with

its democratic egalitarian ethos a rough approximation of the free society participants want to see.

Through its twice daily consensus meetings, UCL occupation was able to deal with a number of complex political and organisational questions in a consensual democratic fashion, including an ongoing court case with management, the formulation of demands, its relationship with the media, the university authorities, the police and the wider student body, as well as practical questions of day-to-day organisation. Using consensus, Cambridge University occupation was able to face down a hostile management whilst organising a lively general assembly that brought together over 300 people from nearby civil society in a discussion of how to oppose the cuts. The practice of consensus at the occupations helped to maximise group solidarity and foster a sense of shared collective identity and purpose, whilst guarding against the kind of factionalism and competitiveness which frequently characterise systems of majority rule or elected representation.

In turn, consensus and the use of loose “working groups” dealing with particular areas of practical concern, such as media, kitchen, security, legal, tech and outreach, reinforced the principles of autonomy and decentralisation. Individuals were encouraged to co-ordinate and take on tasks voluntarily with no strict division of labour. As is often the case, participation in a shared political project based on egalitarian decision-making was an empowering and transformative experience for the people involved. A culture of participation took root, which allowed for the fullest expression of individual talents and creative capacities that might have remained hidden within more formal structures found within ‘closed source’ forms of political dissent. Within a few days, first and second year students, many of them new to political activism, found themselves organising press conferences,

negotiating with management, preparing legal briefings or facilitating meetings of seventy or more people.

Critically, the occupied spaces acted as incubators for experimental forms of protest and direct action. A variety of different techniques, drawing on earlier social movements, were trialled and experimented. Culture jamming techniques, borrowed from the Yes men, were deployed to satirise the neoliberal ideology of UCL management. In a nod to the Situationist International, public spaces, such as Euston Station, were redefined as spaces for art and education. A group of Goldsmiths graduates formed the University of Strategic Optimism, a nomadic institution which pitches up and holds lectures in capitalist spaces such as Lloyds TSB and Tesco. Over the course of a few weeks, there were flashmobs organised against Topshop's tax avoidance, solidarity protests outside the Greek embassy, public lectures in Euston Station, banner drops, street theatre, the singing of "Con-Dem" Christmas carols.

These actions weren't organised by a central committee, but by individuals and groups who first deliberated amongst themselves over what the most powerful form of action would be, and then organised to carry it out. In cases where they were claiming to represent the collective, consensus was needed, but otherwise all forms of autonomous action were encouraged.

Of course, no decision-making process is perfect. On certain divisive issues, where an intransigent minority are blocking action, it may be necessary to take a vote rather than seeking consensus. Likewise, with the practice of consensus and uncodified organisational forms there is an ever-present possibility of the "tyranny of structurelessness" as informal hierarchies arise engendered by imbalances of time, knowledge and commitment. The automatic response, however, should not be the abandonment of participatory principles in favour of representative ones but an effort to

improve the quality of participation and deliberation and empower people by disseminating knowledge and skills more widely. This is the best hope of releasing democratic energy without closure.

Conclusion

We do not mean to advocate an exclusive model of political activism or downgrade the contribution established institutions, with their accumulated wisdom and organising power, will inevitably play in the fight against Tory-Lib Dem austerity measures. Instead, we have aimed to elucidate the phenomenon of open source political activism in the anti-cuts movement and argue why its dynamic and creative potential should not be ignored or dismissed as a mere temporary phase before the inevitable discipline of central organisation and leadership. Over the coming months, establishment forces – the Metropolitan police, the media, university authorities, the political establishment, and even those established actors of dissent – with a vested interest in the neutralisation and pacification of dissent, will place enormous pressure on those engaged in resistance to the cuts to conform to familiar institutional models of organisation. They will insist on identifying leaders within the movement to represent it and negotiate on its behalf. These, their experience tells them, can be relied upon to manage the trouble-makers, policing the movement from within and diluting aims and ambitions. With the rise of networked activism, there is an alternative – and though its aims may sometimes seem more amorphous and less easy to codify than with organised activism, this may also be its strength.

Whilst it is true that identified objectives subsequent to networked, open-source resistance might take time to formulate, they might also prove very difficult to dilute and co-opt. Most importantly they will prove much harder to castigate as undemocratic.

THE DEMONSTRATIONS

After the publication of the Browne Report in October 2010, there was a surge of dissent and debate, in response to the radical changes to the British education system that lay ahead. To take part in the protest movement in November and December was to experience an intense, ever-evolving process that began with a traditional march, and ended with a siege of parliament itself.

On 10 November, the first major demonstration against the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition proposals took place. Over 50,000 students and sympathetic parties took to the streets, and several hundred occupied the Conservative HQ at Millbank Tower in London, cheered on by thousands more. In the month that followed Millbank, a series of street demonstrations took place in the capital, supported by numerous other actions, protests and occupations across the country in opposition to the government's fees and cuts agenda.

Each of the major protests was characterised by different tactics and effects – and widely identified by the Twitter hashtags protesters used to follow developments: #dayx, #dayx2, and #dayx3.

The first, #dayx, was characterised by the iconoclastic storming and occupation of Millbank.

The second, #dayx2, became known as ‘the cat-and-mouse protest’, because it saw separate tributaries of the main demonstration spontaneously split off to escape Police kettling, running miles through the London snow from Victoria to Bank, from the Barbican to Trafalgar Square.

The third, #dayx3, took place on the day the House of Commons voted in favour of the rise in tuition fees: as the vote was passed, shortly after 5.30pm, thousands of protesters remained kettled directly outside in Parliament Square. The protesters variously danced, chanted, made new friends, clashed with Riot Police, and even tried to storm the Treasury building – later, over a thousand protesters were kettled on Westminster Bridge, in a situation so dangerous a doctor warned that a Hillsborough type disaster had been only narrowly averted.

Each demonstration was different, in its tactics, and in the effect it produced. As Jonathan Moses writes in this section, “a British institution – the protest march – was undergoing a transformative moment”.

Inside the Millbank Tower riots

Laurie Penny, New Statesman

It's a bright, cold November afternoon, and inside 30 Millbank, the headquarters of the Conservative Party, a line of riot police with shields and truncheons are facing down a groaning crowd of young people with sticks and smoke bombs.

Screams and the smash of trodden glass cram the foyer as the ceiling-high windows, entirely broken through, fill with some of the 52,000 angry students and schoolchildren who have marched through the heart of London today to voice their dissent to the government's savage attack on public education and public services. Ministers are cowering on the third floor, and through the smoke and shouting a young man in a college hoodie crouches on top of the rubble that was once the front desk of the building, his red hair tumbling into his flushed, frightened face.

He meets my eyes, just for a second. The boy, clearly not a seasoned anarchist, has allowed rage and the crowd to carry him through the boundaries of what was once considered good behaviour, and found no one there to stop him. The grown-ups didn't stop him. The police didn't stop him. Even the walls didn't stop him. His twisted expression is one I recognise in my own face, reflected in the screen as I type. It's the terrified exhilaration of a generation that's finally waking up to its own frantic power.

Glass is being thrown; I fling myself behind a barrier and scramble on to a ledge for safety. A nonplussed school pupil from south London has had the same idea. He grins, gives me a hand up and offers me a cigarette of which he is at least

two years too young to be in possession. I find that my teeth are chattering and not just from cold. "It's scary, isn't it?" I ask. The boy shrugs. "Yeah," he says, "I suppose it is scary. But frankly..." He lights up, cradling the contraband fag, "frankly, it's not half as scary as what's happening to our future."

There are three things to note about this riot, the first of its kind in Britain for decades, that aren't being covered by the press. The first is that not all of the young people who have come to London to protest are university students. Lots are school pupils, and many of the 15, 16 and 17-year-olds present have been threatened with expulsion or withdrawal of their EMA benefits if they chose to protest today. They are here anyway, alongside teachers, young working people and unemployed graduates.

What unites them? A chant strikes up: "We're young! We're poor! We won't pay any more!"

The second is that this is not, as the right-wing news would have you believe, just a bunch of selfish college kids not wanting to pay their fees (many of the students here will not even be directly affected by the fee changes). This is about far more than university fees, far more even than the coming massacre of public education.

This is about a political settlement that has broken its promises not once but repeatedly, and proven that it exists to represent the best interests of the business community, rather than to be accountable to the people. The students I speak to are not just angry about fees, although the Liberal Democrats' U-turn on that issue is manifestly an occasion of indignation: quite simply, they feel betrayed. They feel that their futures have been sold in order to pay for the financial failings of the rich, and they are correct in their suspicions. One tiny girl in animal-print leggings carries a sign that reads: "I've always wanted to be a bin man."

The third and most salient point is that the violence kicking off around Tory HQ – and make no mistake, there is violence, most of it directed at government property – is not down to a "small group of anarchists ruining it for the rest." Not only are Her Majesty's finest clearly giving as good as they're getting, the vandalism is being committed largely by consensus – those at the front are being carried through by a groundswell of movement from the crowd.



Not all of those smashing through the foyer are in any way kitted out like your standard anarchist black-mask gang. These are kids making it up as they go along. A shy-looking girl in a nice tweed coat and bobble hat ducks out of the way of some flying glass, squeaks in fright, but sets her lips determinedly and walks forward, not back, towards the line of riot cops. I see her pull up the neck of her pink polo-neck to hide her face, aping those who have improvised bandanas. She gives the glass under her feet a tentative stomp, and then a firmer one. Crunch, it goes. Crunch.

As more riot vans roll up and the military police move in, let's whisk back three hours and 300 metres up the road, to Parliament Square. The cold winter sun beats down on

52,000 young people pouring down Whitehall to the Commons. There are twice as many people here as anyone anticipated, and the barriers erected by the stewards can't contain them all: the demonstration shivers between the thump of techno sound systems and the stamp of samba drums, is a living, panting beast, taking a full hour to slough past Big Ben in all its honking glory. A brass band plays the Liberty Bell while excited students yammer and dance and snap pictures on their phones. "It's a party out here!" one excited posh girl tells her mobile, tottering on Vivienne Westwood boots while a bunch of Manchester anarchists run past with a banner saying "Fuck Capitalism".

One can often take the temperature of a demonstration by the tone of the chanting. The cry that goes up most often at this protest is a thunderous, wordless roar, starting from the back of the crowd and reverberating up and down Whitehall. There are no words. It's a shout of sorrow and celebration and solidarity and it slices through the chill winter air like a knife to the stomach of a trauma patient. Somehow, the pressure has been released and the rage of Europe's young people is flowing free after a year, two years, ten years of poisonous capitulation.

They spent their childhoods working hard and doing what they were told with the promise that one day, far in the future, if they wished very hard and followed their star, their dreams might come true. They spent their young lives being polite and articulate whilst the government lied and lied and lied to them again. They are not prepared to be polite and articulate any more. They just want to scream until something changes. Perhaps that's what it takes to be heard.

"Look, we all saw what happened at the big anti-war protest back in 2003," says Tom, a postgraduate student from London. "Bugger all, that's what happened. Everyone turned up, listened to some speeches and then went home. It's sad that it's come to this, but..." he gestures behind him

to the bonfires burning in front of the shattered windows of Tory HQ. "What else can we do?"

We're back at Millbank and bonfires are burning; a sign reading "Fund our Future!" goes up in flames. Nobody quite expected this. Whatever we'd whispered among ourselves, we didn't expect that so many of us would share the same strength of feeling, the same anger, enough to carry 2,000 young people over the border of legality. We didn't expect it to be so easy, nor to meet so little resistance. We didn't expect suddenly to feel ourselves so powerful, and now -- now we don't quite know what to do with it. I put my hands to my face and find it tight with tears. This is tragic, as well as exhilarating.

Yells of "Tory Scum!" and "No ifs, no buts, no education cuts!" mingle with anguished cries of "Don't throw shit!" over the panicked rhythm of drums as the thousand kids crowded into the atrium try to persuade those who have made it to the roof not to chuck anything that might actually hurt the police. But somebody, there's always one, has already thrown a fire extinguisher. A boy with a scraggly ginger beard rushes in front of the riot lines. He hollers, "Stop throwing stuff, you twats! You're making us look bad!" A girl stumbles out of the building with a streaming head wound; it's about to turn ugly. "I just wanted to get in and they were pushing from the back," she says. "A policeman just lifted up his baton and smacked me."

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The Significance of Millbank

Guy Aitchison, openDemocracy

Two days on from Wednesday's student demo and debate over the storming of Millbank, the police's response, the legitimacy of confrontational forms of direct action and protest, and what this means for the Coalition's programme of cuts, is still raging among many young people in Britain (see my Storify report if you are outside the UK and want to know what happened). It's perhaps too early to predict with any certainty what the significance of the protest will be, but a number of points are worth making to those on all sides of the debate.

In discussing the events at Millbank, it is important to distinguish between "violence" and direct action. Conflating the invasion and occupation of Millbank, with the idiotic throwing of a fire extinguisher off the roof, confuses a legitimate tool of direct action and protest, with a mindless act of aggression, and is especially unhelpful coming from those, like Will Straw, who are sympathetic to the protesters. It is possible for a protest to be both unlawful and non-violent – traditionally, the police have deliberately confused this point, allowing them to respond in the same manner to acts of civil disobedience as to acts of violence.

Now, clearly there were acts of vandalism that accompanied the Millbank protest, but the instinct of the crowd was decisively against violence. The throwing of the fire extinguisher was greeted by a chorus of booes and a chant of "stop throwing shit", as this video shows. The invasion and occupation of the building, on the other hand, certainly did have the support of the crowd. This wasn't just a minority of hotheads, a rogue gang of "anarchists" and

“Trots”, as Caroline Flint put it on Question Time yesterday. These were young, fresh-faced kids of the kind you’d find in any student bar. Disillusioned and enraged by a political elite that has chosen to make their generation pay for a crisis they didn’t cause, they saw an opportunity passing Millbank to get involved in a spontaneous direct action against the poorly guarded Tory HQ. And they took it. The hundreds who occupied the building had the support of the thousands who cheered them on outside, and many more no doubt on TV. Many I spoke to, who got involved in the occupation, were 16 and 17 and had taken the day off school, risking the wrath of their teachers, to protest. As John Harris put it:

“What happened on Wednesday afternoon was not some meaningless rent-a-mob flare-up, nor an easily-ignored howl of indignation from some of society’s more privileged citizens. It was an early sign of people growing anxious and restless, and what a government pledged to such drastic plans should increasingly expect.”

The other important point to recognise is that this wasn’t a purely self-interested protest about fees by a privileged few. The majority of those protesting won’t be affected by the hike in fees, and in any case students were keen to show solidarity with other victims of the coalition’s austerity agenda. The general anti-cuts slogans and the statement by those who made it to the roof of Millbank, cheered by the crowd, make this clear. As they put it:

“We oppose all cuts and we stand in solidarity with public sector workers, and all poor, disabled, elderly and working people! This is only the beginning of the resistance to the destruction of our education system and public services.”

As Richard Seymour points out, it is patronising and untrue, to imply, as Polly Toynbee does, that only the middle-class care about defending university education – many students come from working class families, live in poor

quality accommodation and struggle to get by on low paid jobs. The benefit of accessible higher education to the individual and society is recognised across all social classes.

Encouragingly, a number of solidarity campaigns have been set up to provide advice and support to those who took part in the Millbank occupation. David Cameron has called for the “full weight of the law” to be brought to bear on those involved, raising the possibility of draconian punishments of the kind handed down to those involved in the Gaza protests at the Israeli embassy who received up to two and a half year sentences, explicitly referred to by the judge as a deterrent. A Statement of Unity to “stand with the protesters, and anyone who is victimised as a result of the protest” has gathered over 3,000 signatures, including Naomi Klein, Billy Bragg and several dissident members of the NUS executive committee. A legal support group has also been setup with helpful advice for those who fear they may be scooped up by police – FIT Watch too have some useful tips. The shrill and distasteful witch hunt being ran by the Telegraph and the Sun, encouraging their readers to inform on the protesters depicted in their photos, has provoked an online campaign to thwart and frustrate them with members of the “Stop the hunt of the Millbank protesters” Facebook group encouraged to email creative responses and alternatives to the newspapers.

After months of rumbling discontent in anticipation of the pain that was about to be inflicted, the potential for determined and organised resistance to the cuts is clear. Emboldened by the scale and energy of Wednesday’s protest, trade unionists and other anti-cuts campaigners are already stepping up their activities. Campaigners behind the Vodafone block outs last month have announced they are planning “a day of mass civil disobedience against tax avoidance”; on 4 December targeting other high street names, pointing out that Wednesday’s events showed a “real

anger among a huge section of the population and this is not just the old faces and usual suspects”

No doubt, the line that the Millbank occupation was a “distraction” and a “failure” which has alienated public sympathy for the students’ cause will persist. It is, of course, the only acceptable line to take amongst those who wish to be taken seriously within the confines of official debate – and it is the line Aaron Porter has stuck to. The NUS president did a fantastic job of mobilising so many people, where his predecessors had been timid and ineffectual in opposing fees. But he should be careful not to sacrifice the unity of the student movement with blanket condemnation of those who took part in the Millbank occupation. He was right to have endorsed direct action against the cuts at the People and Planet conference last week, so it would be disappointing if, having been cowed by a right-wing attack campaign, the NUS chose to distance itself from the coming wave of occupations and sit-ins planned by students on campuses across the UK. What is at stake is huge. They should put aside their fears of not being able to control the movement, and instead seek to maintain momentum by encouraging the energy and anger out there, channelling it into creative ways.

It is a simplistic reading that sees Demolition 2010 as a failure, one which takes the media coverage at face value – activists concerned with galvanizing popular resistance to the cuts should recognise this. As Jess Worth puts it on the New Internationalist blog:

“What would have been a 30-second news clip of just another march through London has become the top story in all major UK news outlets and has picked up by the international press. Media commentators, whilst disapproving of the protest, are calling it a “wake-up call” for the government and a serious blow to the unity of the ruling coalition, while the bookies have slashed the odds of a dramatic political U-turn on student fees. A whole new

generation has tasted the power and energy that comes with effective rebellion and we can expect to see resistance snowball.”

And if you remain unconvinced, perhaps I can point you to a striking article by the Evening Standard’s City Editor – a weather-vain of establishment opinion if ever there was one. Echoing a prescient column by the Daily Telegraph’s political editor, Peter Osborne, he predicts that we can “Expect more rage if the rich and poor divide gets bigger”

“The temperature is rising all the time. Already, we’ve had strikes from the Tube drivers and firefighters, and now students are taking to the streets. More groups are likely to follow suit.”

“We have”, he says, “been warned”.

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<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/guy-aitchison/significance-of-millbank-british-protest-begins>

I was held at a student protest for five hours

Sophie Burge, TheSite.org

I was one of the students who protested on 24 November 2010, and from 3-8pm I was held, along with many of the other London protesters, in a 'kettle,' an area cordoned off by the police. Most of us had protested totally peacefully and, by the end, we were freezing cold, depressed, dispirited and wanted to go home.

A group of us left school at 11am. Our school was very supportive of us, although they couldn't say so outright. We wrote a letter to the school explaining our position and left during morning break so we wouldn't disrupt other people's lessons. We rallied in the local park and then got the train to central London.

Getting heard without a vote

I'm 17, so I'm not allowed to vote yet, but I had campaigned, hard, for the Liberal Democrats at the last election. I firmly believe Nick Clegg sold us out for power; I don't know how he expects anyone to vote for him again. These cuts are something all young people should care about; even if they won't affect you directly they'll affect your peers and the society you live in.

We reached Trafalgar Square at around midday. At that point it looked like a pretty small turnout and there weren't any clear leaders. I'd been at the protest the previous week and, this time, the crowd were younger too. I think the university students were mostly occupying their own university buildings and I reckon we'd missed the first wave

of people walking down towards Parliament, but everyone in the square started to head that way.

We were in Whitehall by about 12.45pm and the way ahead had already been blocked off by the police. It was obvious there were more of them than there had been the week before and quite a few of them were already wearing riot gear. There's been a lot of media coverage about the police van that was vandalised, but at first everyone just walked past it. We weren't aware we were being cordoned in at first, it was only when people at the front started to get pushed back and everyone tried to move in a different direction we noticed we'd been blocked in and couldn't go anywhere.

It was still quite peaceful. At about 2pm people who could prove they were under 16 or people in school uniform were mostly being allowed out. We didn't think we'd be held long and, honestly, the police didn't seem particularly organised: some of them were letting people out and others weren't. There wasn't a pattern. By 3pm no one was leaving, even a blind man who, to me, didn't seem to be involved in the protest at all.

There were people at the front trying to break through the police lines by ramming them with fences, and, yes, there was music and some people running around, but mostly everyone was being pretty rational. The police told us they were just trying to bore everyone into not protesting again.

We waited and waited. Kettling does work, when you have no choice about where you move you start to feel very desolate and very depressed. People were crying. It was horrible; it was freezing and there were no toilets. Portaloos were carried in, but we still couldn't get to them, we all just had to wee in a specific corner. The whole area smelled of urine.

Trying to stay warm

We were told to calm down and put out our fires, but we weren't lighting fires as a protest. We were burning our banners to stay warm. Because the placards all had print on them, the smoke was terrible, quite chemical. My friend had an asthma attack and her mum came down with her inhaler, but she wasn't allowed in. A lot of people's parents were waiting for them on the other side of the police lines and even more parents were phoning mobiles. Altogether I was held for five hours, between 3.00pm and 8.00pm, and there were others there for longer than me.

At first, while we were standing there in the freezing cold, I think a lot of people were thinking 'we hate this, never again'. But it's just made us angrier. We're radicalised now. We'll keep on protesting.

Sophie Burge, 17, is a student at the Camden High School for Girls. She told her story to Anna Fielding for TheSite.org – where it was originally published on 30 November 2010. <http://www.thesite.org/community/reallife/truestories/studentprotest>

On Riots and Kettles, Protests and Violence

Paul Sagar, Bad Conscience

The Riot

When police clash with demonstrators we're often told that "violent extremists" ruined it for "peaceful protestors". But is it really that simple?

I was in Parliament Square when protest turned into riot. When police struck and kicked people as they fell to the floor. When a man received a baton-blow to the back of the head for trying to help others away from danger, and came out streaming blood unable to walk. When demonstrators screamed, panicked and ran in terror as police horses charged a packed crowd with nowhere to go.

Unlike some, I did not bring weapons. I did not throw missiles at horses, nor light flares and fireworks. Those who did were clearly prepared for violence. Waving red and black flags, dressed in plain black, with faces covered and snooker balls in hand, these were anarchists in the technical sense. I was not one of them, and I do not defend their actions.

But prepared troublemakers were a tiny minority. By contrast, the now world-famous images of rioting in Parliament Square show police battling with literally thousands of protestors. So what happened?

Quite simply, ordinary people joined in. As I was not on the front row of the riots I stayed clear of the worst of the violence. But like the thousands around me I was swept-up in the enthusiasm of the situation. For, suddenly, it was us against them. Ordinary protestors dressed in plain clothes

and facing horse-charges and batons, versus masked police lashing out indiscriminately with boots, fists and truncheons.

The situation in Parliament Square deteriorated so rapidly precisely because it was exhilarating. Riots happen when ordinary people, who did not originally come for violence, find themselves in the fray and don't want to leave. When suddenly the shackles of society are cast off, and the animal thrill of conflict is not only experienced, but enjoyed. Certainly, fear and the instinct to run can get the upper hand – like when the horses charge – but adrenaline for the most part rules. Hence people stand, and they fight.

Those who would now dismiss me as a thug should remember that this all applies equally to the police. Anybody who's ever seen the riot squad in action knows they certainly relish the ruck. The police, after all, are only human; ruled by the same passions and animal instincts as the rest of us.

At 2pm on Thursday 9 November, the anti-cuts demonstration could be accurately divided into violent extremists waiting to fight, and peaceful protestors there only to march and sing. By 4pm, after the batons and the horse charges, the flares and the missiles, such a distinction was largely spurious. The riot had started, and there was violence on both sides. We were – as George Osborne might say – all in it together.

The Kettle

But riots burn out, as unarmoured protestors quickly become bloodied and tired. Yet that night the police “kettled” the entirety of Parliament Square, even when the tuition fees vote had passed and most simply wanted to leave peacefully. Indeed, despite briefing the media that “peaceful” protestors could disperse by designated routes, the authorities closed-down all exits. They duly detained thousands of citizens for hours in the freezing cold, without water, food or toilet facilities.

As rows of riot police implemented this mass arrest – this indiscriminate punishment of thousands – some words of the German political thinker and sociologist Max Weber took on a vivid reality:

“That a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory... The state is considered the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence.”

Standing in the shadow of Parliament – as fires burned and smoke billowed – an old anarchist saying likewise acquired a sense of reality: that the state creates the violence it uses to justify its own existence. I’d earlier watched as British citizens were beaten by an organised, armed and armoured militia. The same militia which now prevented even the peaceful from leaving the fray.

And yet that is only half the story. For when the kettle had gone into effect I saw a commotion erupt near the Treasury. Young people wearing ski-masks and raised hoods were attacking a reporting crew, throwing and kicking a cameraman to the ground.

Believing the attackers to be angry protestors, I confronted one youth. He was not wearing a ski mask, but his mouth and nose were covered. No older than 15, and a lot smaller than me, he shot me a look that nonetheless sent a shiver down my spine. But he weighed his options, and backed off. I got lucky.

As other protestors confronted the remaining youths, there was a sudden rush of fear. We all saw the hammer come out. Everybody took a step back. For a few terrible seconds, I thought I would witness a murder. But mercifully the situation defused. Someone with a leveller and braver head than mine calmly urged to “put the hammer away, mate” – and away it went. The gang ran off to another part of the kettle.

And that's when the second wave of fear – the reflective wave – hit me. I couldn't get out. I was trapped with the hammer-wielding gang. One of whom I'd confronted, and had clearly seen my face. The police? It wasn't their problem anymore: "there's nothing we can do – it's your fault for being in the kettle".

As Weber reminds us, the police enforce the will of the state by monopolising the legitimate use of violence. One of their functions is to impose political control. They protect politicians from the betrayed, the wealthy from the poor, rulers from the ruled. But that is not all they do. The police also protect ordinary citizens from those who would prey upon them.

Political protestors who wish to live under the safety of laws must acknowledge their janus-faced relationship to the police. The Parliament Square riots demonstrated that not everybody is peaceful, and that ordinary people may be far more eager for violence than we'd often like to admit. But they also showed that unleashed aggression can rapidly locate unpredictable targets. While the police today protect your political enemies from you, they may tomorrow protect you from yours – political or otherwise.

Trapped and afraid in the Westminster kettle, the infamous words of Thomas Hobbes perhaps seemed most apt of all: "Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is... worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

Paul Sagar is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge. This article is a combined, refined and extended version of two blog entries that appeared at his Bad Conscience website on 11 and 13 December 2010. <http://www.badscience.com>

Kettled In Parliament Square

Siraj Datto, The Student Journals

I arrived in Westminster at 12pm with the rest of the students from the University of Warwick and travelled on towards LSE Students' Union. The public debate against fees was taking place; I was interested in hearing the reactions from MPs inside the Commons and so entered via the surprisingly empty Public Gallery. Many other students with the same intentions soon followed; they wanted to hear the words of those Members of Parliament meant to be protecting the interests of the people.

After Business Secretary Vince Cable rather apprehensively ended his argument, John Denham, Labour's Shadow Business Secretary, started to defend students, who under the new system would be charged £9,000 a year for tuition fees. For students like myself who only have nine teaching hours a week, it is a figure that can only be described as ridiculous, not least because such high fees would deter students from low-income families from applying to university. In a week that revealed that only one black student was accepted between twenty-one Oxbridge colleges, the need for drastic change within the education system is clear; this is not it.

As Michael Gove, Education Secretary, was given the chance to ask a question, four students in the Public Gallery stood up and shouted "They say cut back, we say fight back" until they were grabbed by stewards and taken out. Labour MPs below looked rather bemused while the Con-Dems appeared frustrated with hours still remaining until the vote.

I emerged outside the House of Commons to see students, academics, lecturers, graduates and sympathisers brave the cold weather to protest against the cuts being made to education. “No ifs, no buts, no education cuts” echoed through the crowds as placards displayed ‘Higher fees in education only leads to class segregation’ and ‘Save EMA’. The causes were numerous yet protesters seemed to be united.

Betrayal was one of the largest sentiments felt by students at the protests; many had voted in their first elections and felt their vote was stolen from them. At the same time, there were a large number of school students who had missed school to make their own point: if you get rid of EMA, who’s going to pay the bus fare for me to get to school every day?

As Cable rightly said, there was a lot of waste in the EMA system (many received it even though they did not require it), yet the enhanced discretionary learner support fund, created as a replacement, is not good enough. The yearly budget for EMA was £560m. In comparison, this year’s tame budget of £26m for the new system is lacking in any real depth. Families who cannot support their children through further education will no doubt have to pull them out, a clear indication of these regressive measures.

Talking to protesters from the older generation, I learnt that students had built upon the methods of past generations. While occupations, sit-ins and teach-ins are reminiscent of the 70s, the organisation of students has been unprecedented. At the first national day of action in November, remembered for the violence at Conservative Party HQ in Millbank, over 50,000 turned up to protest. What’s more, occupations and teach-ins have occurred at no less than 15 universities and schools, mostly organised within the space of 24 hours.

The occupation at University College London received the widest media attention and drew the largest crowds, often inviting speakers to give talks to students.

One occupation took place in Oxford after a Conservative Council Leader, Kevin Mitchell, described a group of students as ‘badly-dressed’ and said, “God help us if this is our future”. Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Newcastle and Warwick are but a few universities where occupations and protests occurred.

However, demonstrations in London have remained the largest. On the second national day of action, police introduced kettling techniques so as to ‘avoid embarrassment’ and prevent violence. An empty police van was conveniently left in this area and was attacked before a group of school students surrounded the van to prevent any more vandalism to it.

Yet from my own experience, the heavy-handed techniques of the police must not be forgotten, for I believe that kettling caused much of the violence at the demonstrations.

There were a minority of protestors who had attended with the aim of causing violence and physical harm (regardless of who was the victim). Nonetheless, often not mentioned were the efforts to promote peace within the kettle. In one incident, a young student of around 15 attempted to make a Molotov cocktail using a flaming sock and a bottle of alcohol. As he began his run-up, the majority of people who saw this expected the worst. He threw the bottle and sock towards the police although it hit protesters, bounced off and an explosion was only just avoided. Immediately following this, students surrounded this boy, shouted at him, urged him to calm down and stop using violence. There were even shouts of ‘Give him to the police’. However, soon after being surrounded by his friends,

wielding hammers, the peaceful protestors had no choice but to back off.

There are hundreds of pictures of fires burning in Parliament Square on the internet; I know because I must have taken a dozen myself. While these were merely an act of defiance against police at the beginning, towards the end of the day they were used as a form of heat. Protesters, young and old alike, had been imploring the police for hours to leave and needed a source of warmth to keep them moving.

By 3pm, all sides of Parliament Square had been blocked off to anybody entering or leaving; we were stuck, denied basic rights such as food and sanitation (the only source of drink was via a Kettle Café, erected by students from SOAS). Thousands of students were kettled. When contained in an area, it is natural instinct to become worried, to fear the length of your suppression and to, eventually, become agitated.

Students wanted out and were instead pushed further into the Square (after peacefully requesting to leave). Then police started using their batons and forcing people to go further back still. Some students thought of using steel fences as a way to break through lines of riot police but did not succeed in getting far. Horses were then brought in, dispersing the crowd. Footage has also emerged on YouTube, showing policemen dragging journalist Jody McIntyre out of his wheelchair and to the side of the road before charging at protesters.

After the vote had passed there was a sombre mood; many wanted to go home yet the police were not having any of it. Rather than allowing these peaceful students to leave the area, they stopped them without explanation. Police then suddenly surged forward with no warning, pushing peaceful

protesters (some to the floor), and we were squashed. Protesters held up their arms showing the peace sign.

In the kettle I was trapped in, police moved us five metres and people started pushing back, simply because there was no space to stand or move. Protesters were angry because they could not breathe, not because they were inherently violent creatures who had arrived for a battle.

The police did not listen, and continued to push us, even hitting people with riot shields if they did not move. On my right was a girl who was having a panic attack (from claustrophobia) – shrieking “Where do you want us to go! There’s no space!” – and behind me was a girl screaming and crying because she was in pain from suffocation and being crushed. The police allowed neither girl to leave. Shouts of “We are peaceful. Why aren’t you?” ensued.

This continued. As we could not move any further, police started getting agitated and started using their batons, forcefully pushing people forward and squashing protesters even more. This was all despite knowing that the space was scarce or non-existent; policemen were climbing up walls on the side to see if there was any space. It was at this point that mounted horses were introduced and imposed themselves upon protesters, causing them to dart into any space they could find and running back towards Parliament Square. Five minutes later a large number of students were allowed to leave.

These measures were preventable. Police had been blocking students the entire day and would not let them leave. When groups emerged towards police wanting to leave, the police saw this as a provocation and would force themselves upon students, charging at them and hitting them with ferocity. It was brutal.

Later, students were forced onto Westminster Bridge and they were kettled onto a narrow section of the bridge

(instead of using the entire bridge). Rosa Martyn, who was one of those kettled on the bridge, said “We were all terrified to move in case anyone went over the edge.” She told *The Student Journals* that as protesters were given permission to leave the kettle, they were all but forced to have their pictures taken: “[As] we left in single file, led through a corridor of police, we passed by two riot police with cameras with big blinding lights on. We had no warning so I feel that my attempts to cover my face may have failed anyway.” I also heard from other students earlier in the day that they had been searched and forced to give their details (which is not legally acceptable).

The tactics employed by the police were vicious, malicious and undemocratic. Yes, it is true the car of the Royal family was kicked in and windows broken yet that was a small breakaway group intent on causing violence. The focus must rest on the majority of protesters, the ones who remained peaceful and actively encouraged peace. Prime Minister David Cameron said that violent protesters “must face the full force of the law”. Yet Alfie Meadows was not violent but merely at the front line when bottles and firecrackers were being thrown by other students. Police used ‘full force’ in attacking him; he required surgery to save his life.

Twelve-year-old Nicky Wishart, who wanted to organise a picket outside Cameron’s constituency office, was dragged out of his classes and warned by anti terrorist police that he would be held responsible and arrested if any public disorder broke out at the office. Can we simply allow such scare tactics to be employed in what is meant to be a democratic country?

History books will now mark 9 December as a notable date leading to the demise of the Liberal Democrats as a major party. John Denham stated the Liberal Democrats “have lost all credibility with the country and cannot now

claim to be a party of fairness... they should hang their heads in shame”.

But the date will also be remembered as the day when civil rights were severely challenged. Public interest lawyers have even embarked upon a legal challenge over the use of kettling. Kettling was used as a tactic to ‘prevent violence’ yet it will soon emerge that the policies of the government are leading to the kettling of the nation. Common opinion depicts students as apathetic to politics; the events of this day clearly show otherwise. The majority of the protesters were fighting a law that would not affect them, but subsequent generations.

Students are not the enemy; broken promises in a democracy are.

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<http://www.thestudentjournals.co.uk/education/comment/165-kettled-in-parliament-square>

Postmodernism in the Streets: the tactics of protest are changing

Jonathan Moses, openDemocracy



Whilst MPs voted for the privatisation of Higher Education on 9 December, another British institution – the protest march – was undergoing a transformative moment.

Outside, protesters caught in a police “containment area” were experiencing, many for the first time, a political education: that property comes before people; the rights of the former supersede those of the latter. The extent to which the mainstream media has mourned for windows and car doors, for the monarchy and the mausoleums, is more

than facile hypocrisy. It is an indictment of a society which has internalised the value systems of capital to the point that a young student being arbitrarily batoned into brain surgery is largely ignored, and outrage is reserved for property vandalism over police violence. Yet ultimately, that violence is also an argument that we must change tack.

Three things were revealed by the recent wave of nationwide student protest. Firstly, the demonstrations represented a new political mood, capable of manifesting itself in excess and formless anger. Secondly, they cannot go on as they are: unwieldy, monolithic marches are difficult to control, easily frustrated by tactics such as kettling, and likely to descend into unfocused, pointless skirmishes. Thirdly, the landscape of political organisation is changing, and a new infrastructure is proving capable of rapidly mobilising disparate, localised groups in a way that can give form to the emergent appetite for direct action.

In place of the traditional, top-down organisational models, groups like UK Uncut are pioneering co-ordinated direct action orchestrated through social media and rolling days of local action. For their own part, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts adopted a similar model on November 24th, following the initial NUS demonstration two weeks beforehand, triggering waves of university occupations and other protests across the country. There is no leadership in either organisation. Rather, they channel a coalition of local groups relying on key activists and organic leaders to supplant anachronistic formulas of vanguards and steering committees. My intention is not to disparage conventional tactics employed by long-established organisations like the TUC (whose own protest takes place on 26 March), but it is clearly outmoded to continue applying uniform formulas to heterogeneous social actors.

What makes a fluid approach particularly appropriate within the context of the student movement is the way in

which the informal networks crystallised during the very process of direct action can be utilised to enable its advancement. The recent occupations are instrumental not just in politicising campuses and building opposition to higher education reform, but in creating nascent ‘strike-teams’ capable of coming together at short-notice to take part in autonomous, targeted actions. From the UCL occupation alone, a flash mob staged a teach-in of tax-avoiding high street stores like Topshop under the mantra that “if you marketise our education, we’ll educate your markets”.

What binds these groups internally? What prevents them – leaderless, and in part, self-defining – from a confusion of agendas? Nothing so crude as an ideology, but collective experiences, affections and trust. Call this fey, but the defence of a shared spatial project is a powerful psychological tool for bonding humans in politically tangible ways. It overrides the weaknesses inherent to sectarian ideological foundations; it develops a far sharper appreciation of respective skills and talents. This is political action for the ephemerality of the postmodern era: antiform, anarchic, decentred and spontaneous. Yet it simultaneously avoids the dangers inherent to ‘clicktivism’ and the masquerading aesthetics of A-B marching that are too often appropriated by the very structures they set out to challenge. It restores risk and physicality to protest in a way which disrupts with creative authenticity.

Crucially, these tactics have a broad appeal. Billy Bragg is right to note that the student movement is “determined to avoid... ideological nitpicking” – its instincts lie in a philosophy more akin to avant-garde movements like Situationism than potentially alienating leftist discourses centred around political economy. This is not to dilute its objectives: fighting the marketisation and privatisation of our institutions, and the proliferation of generic tax-avoiding

corporations with their generic contempt for the societies they operate in. Situationism – with its critiques of the destitution of an urban experience held captive to the agendas and spectacle of late-capitalism – offers a pertinent and playful form of resistance to the flattening vacuity of celebrity and consumerism.

By moving away from the set-piece confrontations that enable riot police to gear up and create battle-lines exploited by those looking for a fight on either side, we can begin to fulfil not just political objectives but a duty of care. Flash mobs are one approach, but we should now be discussing how newly networked groups can contribute in major, long-term projects of spatial reclamation in which protest can reciprocate with alternative visions of social participation. Most importantly of all we should not be prescriptive: the old institutions – the mass media, the police, the government – have struggled to classify the emergence of this leaderless, energetic movement. I see no reason to assist them: for once we can be asserting rather than reacting to the political agenda.

Jonathan Moses is a freelance writer, political activist, and aspiring historian, and an organising member within the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. Originally published on [openDemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/jonathan-moses/postmodernism-in-streets-tactics-of-protest-are-changing) 22 December 2010. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/jonathan-moses/postmodernism-in-streets-tactics-of-protest-are-changing>

Kettling – an attack on the right to protest

Oliver Huitson, openDemocracy

As night fell, as the House of Commons moved towards its vote on tripling student fees, the police in full riot gear closed in on the protestors in Parliament Square. They began to corral them towards Westminster Bridge having formed a 'kettle' to contain them. They then trapped them onto the bridge which the demonstrators thought was being used as an exit – and a long cold walk – away from Whitehall. Once they had captured them there the police were ordered to crush the demonstrators so that they could barely breathe. This was indeed an operation of gross police brutality.

It was being used against those who were resisting a package of cuts that bears only a shaky resemblance to the manifestos and commitments of either Coalition parties. What kind of democracy acts in this way?

Kettling has become increasingly commonplace in the UK. Rather than an emergency measure, it now seems to be the first resort when dealing with any large-scale protest. To be detained without access to food, water, toilets or medical treatment is, without question, a serious restriction on the right to protest. It is no good maintaining we have a 'right' if in exercising it we must forfeit freedom to leave an assembly. Protest should not have to be exchanged for liberty. After his experience at the G20 protests, Guy Aitchison described kettling as:

“...a deliberate form of indiscriminate, collective punishment of demonstrators committed to peaceful protest, which seems designed to frighten people from

expressing their disapproval of a system that is now, even by its own admission, dysfunctional.”

Since its introduction in 2001, kettling has been challenged in the courts a number of times, unsuccessfully. Earlier this month, a new claim was brought on behalf of five students kettled at a recent demonstration. Deployed initially as an unplanned response, many now see kettling as a pre-planned weapon to grind down the public’s willingness to protest, and to punish those who partake regardless. There are few more fundamental rights than those currently being attacked, yet the European Court of Human Rights has, so far, offered no protection to those exercising this basic democratic freedom. Bethany Shiner, lead claimant for the most recent legal action being brought, said:

“I was with a group of young people who behaved at all times perfectly properly and lawfully. We then found ourselves kettled in sub-zero temperatures.”

Despite a string of cases in 2009-10, no police officer has been prosecuted for their conduct towards protestors – or those believed to be protesting, in the case of Ian Tomlinson who was killed after a police officer attacked him from behind – leaving the public to question whether the police are above the law. Within a little over eighteen months, they have caused the death of a man walking home and then attempted to cover it up, left a young protester with bleeding to the brain and then attempted to prevent his treatment, bludgeoned a small woman to the ground at the G20 protest, employed a number of cavalry charges against contained protesters – many of whom were schoolchildren, punched protesters in the face, been caught at protests without their identity badges – leading to accusations of attempts to avoid accountability, kettled thousands of innocent protesters for up to nine hours, dragged a 20-year-old with cerebral palsy out of his wheelchair, and have now proposed simply banning

marches through London. When criticised, they respond that the public should be thankful that they haven't deployed water cannons... yet.

There has been barely a murmur from Westminster about the seriousness of the situation developing. Neither the Lib Dems nor the Labour Party has condemned the ongoing attacks on the right to protest. Criticism of police thuggery tends to lead to the same stock response: violent protesters make kettling necessary. Identifying a violent minority is doubtless a difficult task; that is not in dispute. But a solution that effectively strangles the right to protest is not a solution at all; it's an abject failure.

What makes the current police mentality all the more oppressive is the questionable legitimacy of the policies being contested. The cuts package delivered is of a different scale and nature to that proposed throughout the election campaign. The tripling of tuition fees and the removal of funding for arts and humanities has a similar level of popular mandate to the 'de-nationalisation' of the NHS: roughly zero. To embark on such a wholesale rearrangement of the state requires a very clear proposition at election time, which was not forthcoming. Nor is it tenable to describe many of these policies as a 'compromise' made necessary by coalition or the deficit. In the case of its education reforms far from being campaigned for they were campaigned against by the Lib Dems while they are projected as increasing the deficit in the immediate future.

The police treatment of those protesting against the state highlights the diminished role of the British public in their own governance. Having bailed out the banks and taken on a trillion pounds of private debt, British citizens have yet to see any meaningful reform of finance and the City. Having voted for comparatively modest cuts, they have seen the entire fabric of the state come under attack. And those so bold as to protest against this have now been kettled, beaten,

and charged on horseback. The Home Secretary said she was unlikely to approve of water cannon as we had a tradition of policing by consent. Yes, and we also have a tradition of government by consent.

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<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/oliver-huitson/kettling-attack-on-right-to-protest-o>

THE OCCUPATIONS

While students and activists took to the streets in protest, there were the in-between times to think about – and the need to inculcate greater support, awareness, and activist skills within the student movement: over 30 universities across the country went into occupation, many for weeks, with students living, eating, and sleeping in the occupied space. This had great practical benefits, creating spaces to share ideas, build solidarity networks, and plan future protests and actions – and it was also, as Owen Hatherley argues, a symbolic response to the wider privatisation of public space that New Labour had pursued: “It is a protest against the coalition, to be sure, but it’s also a magnificent rejection of the fear, quietism and atomisation that was the result of earlier policies. The students’ use of space is fearless.”

Beyond The Occupation

Oliver Wainwright, Building Design

It has been hard to avoid news of the university occupations this week.

Hordes of ageing commentators, seeing current student antics as a means to relive their imagined youth of '68, have used their columns to wallow in the rosy mists of nostalgic reverie, remarking with surprise that Thatcher's children have turned out politicised after all. Look, today they were all marching, isn't it sweet.

Scrape off the dollops of patronising gloss, and the real legacy of the occupations is only beginning to become apparent. They may have lost the vote in Parliament, but there has been a fundamental shift in the outlook of the new student-consumer towards directing their own education.

Last week, I reported from UCL's occupied Jeremy Bentham room, which – now into its third week – has come to be seen as the nerve centre of the national campaign, attracting such supporters as Billy Bragg, Mark Thomas and last night Razorlight, to come and entertain them.

Such activities have made headlines, but what is really compelling is how the students have actually been curating their own serious programmes of lectures, seminars and classes. In between plotting the media-friendly public actions, they have constructed an alternative model of education.

"I'm learning more from the students than they are from me," says Jane Rendell, director of architectural research at the Bartlett, who relocated her PhD seminar to the

occupation last week. “This isn’t just about political protest; it has become a space for exploring radical pedagogy.”

Such experimental parallel institutions have sprung up within the lecture theatres, offices and events rooms of universities across the country, redefining these dormant spaces as grounds for productive, student-led learning. From Leeds to Sheffield, Bristol to Falmouth, these initiatives have provided an alternative mirror image – they are the real Free Schools of the Big Society.

And they’re not just staying in their nests of slogan-daubed bed sheets and posting songs on YouTube. Like all good community-minded establishments, they have “outreach departments” that plot external actions – coordinated with other occupations through Facebook and Twitter – satellite events that take this new model of teaching out on to the street.

Yesterday evening saw a flash mob “teach-in” at Euston station, while earlier in the week Arts Against Cuts organised a similar event at Tate Britain, temporarily transforming its hallowed galleries into an impromptu lecture theatre – and strategically delaying the Turner Prize presentation in the process. Tonight, they are doing the same at the National Gallery.

A group of Goldsmiths graduate students has established the University for Strategic Optimism, a nomadic institution that pitches up in unexpected places, briefly converting them into spaces of learning. Their inaugural lecture took place in the London Bridge branch of Lloyds TSB, and they have since lectured at Tesco. This is the stuff the Archigram generation could only draw doped-up pictures of; now it is happening for real.

“We seek to not only draw out the political layers inherent within space,” says their fictional lecturer Dr Étienne

Lantier, “but to re-politicise thinking about space, aesthetics and the city by means of performative political action.”

Across town, students at the RCA have gone one step further. Despite being late-comers to the occupation scene (their sit-in only lasted one night after the Rector foiled the campaign by agreeing with their demands), they have already established an alternative educational model in the form of Department 21.

“The RCA should be wall-less,” says Bethany Wells, a second year MA architecture student, sitting at a hastily erected table in the college’s main gallery. “We’re providing a space for people from different departments to meet and develop their own practice.” The initiative has already been running for a year, squatting whichever spaces in the campus happen to be free, and running a packed programme of interdisciplinary workshops, lectures and discussions.

This is an important challenge to the received dogma of the standard model of art and architectural education. “The unit system has proved itself to be redundant,” says Tomasz Crompton, also at the RCA. “It doesn’t work in the interests of the students.”

But, rather than drawing up elaborate aestheticised visions, or hiding behind rhetorical allusions to misread theorists, these students are getting on with building their alternative. And it’s looking pretty convincing.

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<http://www.bdonline.co.uk/beyond-the-occupation/5010289.blog>

At The Occupation

Joanna Biggs, London Review of Books

The stately dome and columns of University College London are dominated by a bedsheet banner proclaiming its occupation and the grey stone is scrawled with coloured chalk: ‘Cut Out Cuts: Don’t Con-Dem Me!’ Inside, the campus has supposedly been put on lockdown. Guards in yellow jackets sit by hastily produced signs announcing ID checks. The students have their own security detail too, only they sit behind a sign saying ‘Welcome!’ and greet you with the devil hand gesture you see at rock festivals. UCL students have been occupying a hall in the main building since 24 November, and are now a focal point for the national student protests. This is day eight.

The occupation began at a ‘What Next?’ meeting on the day of the second student march when a group of UCL students voted to take over the Jeremy Bentham Room (students at SOAS had gone into occupation two days before). A general meeting was then held to draft their demands. The most important, and most often repeated, is that UCL’s management issue a statement ‘condemning all cuts to higher education’. They also want things they might be able to get: for the university to pay UCL cleaners the London living wage, to bring outsourced support staff in-house and to change the composition of the university council to get rid of the majority of corporate, non-UCL members (they’d like a quarter each of management, students, tutors and support staff). Decisions are made by consensus – ‘better than democracy’ a first-year undergraduate explained – at two lengthy daily meetings. Students are divided into working groups according to their talents – IT, media, process (analysis of how the occupation

itself is working) – but there’s no leader, everyone insists. An email account, Facebook page, website and Twitter feed were set up overnight and messages of support started to come in from people like Tariq Ali, Noam Chomsky and Billy Bragg; comedians came to tell jokes, bands to play, novelists to read their books, tutors to give seminars. On 29 November, the day before the third march, they sent a delegation to protest outside the Oxford Circus Topshop about Philip Green’s alleged tax evasion. And on the day of the march itself, another delegation was sent to Trafalgar Square, while tweeters back at the occupation offered tea and biscuits to anyone running away from the police.

There are about 200 in all, graduate and undergraduate students: many more humanities students than medics or engineers – the arts teaching grant is the one that’s set to disappear. And there are union representatives and UCL support staff. I didn’t see anyone from the UCL Labour Club: judging from their Facebook page they’re more excited about the Christmas dinner planned for 14 December. The UCL student union has ‘no official position’. No one I spoke to had taken part in student politics before this; few of them had been on previous marches. I asked about the 2003 Stop the War march: ‘I was 11,’ they said, or, ‘I was 13 or 14.’ Everyone has plenty of reasons for being there: they want Malcolm Grant, the provost, to reverse his enthusiastic position on tuition fees, or to bring his £424,000 salary down in line with Oxford and Cambridge’s vice-chancellors; they want to speak up against the coalition; or to defend the English department from cuts; or to get the security guards the London living wage. There is depth of feeling and attention to detail, along with the inevitable earnestness; reasoned debates take place over coffee – they’d bought a machine since continual café runs had eaten into the kitty – and stale sandwiches donated from a staff meeting. They look cleanish though tired and cold – the heating got turned

off on Sunday night and today is Wednesday – but they’ve learned to get round things: a shower and a night at home every few days, a few hours’ work on their essays before bed, a break for a lecture and to pass out flyers. It’s like a ‘really big sleepover’, one student tells me; another says that it’s almost become a way of life. They talk of the dance-off they’d had with the Oxford Radcliffe Camera occupation via Skype, of the ‘fun’ they’re having. They didn’t know each other before and now they’re a community.

There is paper everywhere: flyers on tables and in hands, the list of demands snaking up the wall, photos of the other occupations; marker-penned slogans, or doodles, or quotes from Goethe; a sinister ballpoint-pen portrait of David Cameron and cards written by solicitors Birnberg Peirce explaining that you don’t need to give your name if searched. The walls are a sort of slogan competition, in the manner of a JCR suggestion book or a library toilet wall: which ones will last? In the middle of the room there are chairs set out in the shape of a horseshoe where constant overlapping seminars take place: they pass a microphone round as they are asked if they are nostalgic about 1968, or what new media mean to their movement. I hear words like ‘alert’, ‘critique’, ‘offensive’ and even ‘Marxism’. At the edges of the room students sit around circular tables hunched over their laptops, as if they knew how much they look like the photogenic Harvard students of The Social Network.

The occupation is busiest online. The website, Ucoccupation.com, was created by Sam, an electronic engineering graduate who now works flexitime for a City firm (‘They don’t need to know I’m here’); he became involved after his girlfriend was trampled by a police horse on the second march. The website has a blog, a Twitter feed, a tag cloud, the latest photos from the occupation’s Flickr page, videos they’ve uploaded to YouTube and Vimeo and a Google calendar. (Wednesday night: SOAS ceilidh band.

Thursday lunchtime: Raymond Geuss.) The thinking is, get it all out there and edit later. This works because, according to Sam, the Met doesn't know enough about the net to keep up with them: 'We're prescient on everything; we're not worried.' But I hear paranoia of one sort or another from everyone: the Tory Club are at the door, the police are watching my Twitter, the fire alarm has been going for an hour. They are able to share so much so quickly that when Territorial Support Group Officer 1202 punched a protester in the face on the third march, they soon had video from two angles up on YouTube, a still showing the number on his epaulette on their Flickr page and, by the next morning, the Facebook profile of the person who got punched.

They're working almost like a news organisation, which is just as well because the mainstream media are no better than they might be. On the day of the third march, BBC rolling news showed snowy scenes instead of the student marchers being punched in the face. Newsnight's Paul Mason visited the SOAS occupation the following day to accuse them of 'polite outrage' and of not being sufficiently like 68ers. Even to Newsnight it's about fees or protest as a rite of passage: no one is talking about the fundamental reorganisation the proposed withdrawal of the £3.9 billion block grant will cause. The front page of the Evening Standard shouts 'Vandals'. While it's impossible to tell what images of the 2010 student protests will last, a frontrunner is the shot from the second march of a chain of girls in school uniform around a vandalised police van: sweet ineffectual schoolchildren and hardened activists. The sort of people occupying UCL – middle-class, articulate, pragmatic, calm – don't figure.

To know in detail about what's happening in the student movement, you have to go on Twitter. On the third march, students ran from police who looked as if they were trying to kettle them in the driving snow, and made the police chase

them all over London. Laurie Penny, a New Statesman columnist and friend of the UCL occupation, can't have been running as fast as she said she was, as her tweets came every five minutes or so: she was at the big Topshop, then running down Oxford Street singing 'You can stick your Big Society up your arse' to the tune of 'She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain', panting at the Royal Courts of Justice, cheering in Trafalgar Square as SOAS students brought tea, then finally home as her phone died and her feet got too cold. Jess, a second-year English student who usually tweets about fashion as @littlemisswilde ('I don't understand politics') has become the UCL occupation's 'Twitter guru'. That day, she tweeted the police's attempts to kettle the protest while keeping up with the rumours that Tom Ford would be the next high-fashion designer to do a diffusion line for H&M. For her, Twitter is a way of 'expanding the room': of including Erasmus students, older and disabled people and of keeping in touch with other student occupations; a way of knowing that there were not only 200 people occupying UCL but thousands behind them. (The downside was the number of people who asked her to tell them what shoes, underwear or dress she was wearing.) It's also a way of targeting twittering politicians like Lynne Featherstone and Ed Miliband or celebrities like Johnny Marr, Armando Iannucci and Lily Allen for money and support.

Late on 30 November the @ucloccupation account seemed to have been hacked: no one liked talking about it but the theory was that the hacker was some sort of internal enemy, as the password had been freely given out. It wasn't until early the next afternoon that they knew for sure the hacker had been shut out. The news that they were back up – given by a boy in a purple hoodie and Clark Kent glasses – got the loudest cheer from the room all day, louder than the cheer that greeted Bob Crow when he came to remind them that it

was only when suffragettes broke windows that the world took notice.

The new media are also a way to become known to the old media: they delightedly tweeted BBC pieces about them and a Guardian video. No one flinched when I told them I was a journalist (apart from someone from the media group, who found me talking to students although I hadn't made myself known to her). They knew how to make the best of being in London, close to the BBC and on the phone to the Guardian; one student told me it 'was all quite cynical really'; another that 'it's a media war essentially'; another judged how they were doing by the fact that 'the international media are listening to us intently'.

There are two ends in sight: the parliamentary vote on fees, which is scheduled for Thursday 9 December, and the end of the UCL term on Friday 17 December. Are they prepared to be here over Christmas? Some say they have train tickets booked; others say they'll stay, get a Christmas tree, organise a Secret Santa. On 2 December the UCL management served the occupation with an injunction (you can see a picture of the actual serving of the papers on their Flickr feed) demanding that they leave; the students will have to defend themselves at London County Court on 7 December. The occupation reacted by organising a flashmob to target the Manchester offices of the legal firm that drew up the injunction, Eversheds LLP, and decided to hold a candlelight vigil for the death of education in the snowy quad, in front of the dome, pillars and banner. Perhaps it is also a vigil for the occupation, which may well be over by the time you read this.

By the entrance to the occupied Jeremy Bentham Room are the remains of an earlier vigil, all melted candles and wilting roses, Diana-like, with slogans among the tea lights: 'Cedric Diggory Was Murdered,' 'Albus Dumbledore Was a GREAT MAN' and 'EDUCATION: The Fourth Deathly

Hallow'. This is the generation who grew up reading about a turreted boarding school called Hogwarts, where Harry Potter, a suburban boy from Privet Drive, could be taught to defeat Voldemort; and likewise it seemed possible for any suburban girl in Blair's Britain, if she kept her head down, did her Sats, her GCSEs, her ASs, her A2s, to go to university and so get a good job – or at any rate a job. They'd been told education is all there is, and now it's been taken away. The UCL occupation has been visited by local schoolchildren, including a contingent of sixth formers from Camden School for Girls; when these nicely brought-up girls wrote to say thank you, they were rather breathless: 'It was inspiring,' they said. 'I want to come to UCL.'

Joanna Biggs is an editor at the London Review of Books, where this piece was originally published, 16 December 2010. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n24/joanna-biggs/at-the-occupation>

30 Hours in the Radical Camera

Genevieve Dawson

At about 1.30pm on November 24, students in Oxford occupied the Radcliffe Camera, the iconic building of the Bodleian Library. Oxford University closed the library and the occupation was declared illegal later that night, but about 50 students remained in the library until the police forced entry the next evening, and evicted the protestors. The following is one student's account and defense of the occupation.

It is now 24 hours since we were evicted from the Radcliffe Camera library, part of the beautiful Bodleian library. I've had time to process everything that happened and come to some conclusions about why direct action against education and public sector cuts, conducted peacefully (not to be confused with quietly) is absolutely justified and necessary.

While it is important to acknowledge the positive outcomes of the occupation, we shouldn't become self-congratulatory. The debate should now turn to finding ways of uniting the students, lecturers, staff and those affected by the public sector cuts. New ways of protesting and resisting must be discussed and planned, using all the avenues possible – writing to MPs, sit-ins, boycotts, demonstrations, flyering, writing, blogging, chanting, drawing and perhaps further peaceful occupation. The discussion must be amongst a wide student body – not just those involved in recent events.

Why a library?

The debate surrounding the occupation will inevitably focus on the disruption it caused to students with serious deadlines wishing to access the library. It was never the occupiers' wish to prevent people from entering the library. I understand that the effect of the occupation in preventing people from entering the library is a fact (not the protesters' wish of course, but an effect of the action), which in many people's eyes, undermines our whole point of being there. The question is a simple one however; does the cause justify the means? I believe it does.

The point of an occupation is to cause disruption. Of course no one wanted to direct this disruption at students; one of the more radical reasons the Rad Cam was chosen as the target for occupation was that it is a centre of learning which should be available to all. Why is there a monopoly on knowledge? The same small section of society continues to hold the key to education; the most liberating and empowering opportunity we can give someone. It has been pointed out to me that members of the public can apply for a Bod Card to access the library. However, a vision of open, accessible education, which sees higher education for the masses, is quite different from the image of the well-barricaded institution of Oxford University we see today.

Had the library remained open to supporters and those wishing to work it would have enacted a vision of open and free education for all and opened up the debates publicly surrounding the issues of 'What is education?' and 'What is a library?' which were being had inside. Lecturers had offered to enter the space to discuss issues with the students. Noam Chomsky, who has been in Oxford this week, made a statement of support for the students and would have come to join in discussions.

The decision to occupy a learning space rather than an administrative one also sparks debate about education and who it's for, why it matters and what education should look like in our country. Unfortunately the Proctors made damn sure that debate was not to be had publicly.

This raises the issue of why the University 'had' to close the library. The closing of the Rad Cam library is understandable, however: it is a direct action by the university to prevent peaceful protest; a contradiction to their statement that they support students' right to protest. Technically this means they should allow anyone to join the protest if they express a wish to. The librarians had also clearly stated that they wished the library to remain functional and would help facilitate that by allowing students to take books from the lower camera to the upper camera for work, while the occupation could continue below. The librarians were at all times friendly and supportive of the protest. They looked on bemused, almost disappointed that we weren't throwing things as discussions drove on into the night, hours on end of proposals and statements, planning and analysing together.

The decision to also close the Old Bod, another key Oxford University library, is an entirely different matter. This building was in no way effected by the occupation. So why did they close it? It seems obvious that the Proctors made this decision to manipulate the student body and make it much more difficult for students to support the occupation, thereby dividing the protesters into the 'occupiers' and the 'students'. I think the majority of students support the cause of the occupation, and had the library remained functional would have had no problem with the occupation itself. It is worth pointing out that at all the other occupations across the UK (some of which continue) university staff and students have been able to come and go from the occupations as they pleased.

Why occupation?

The longevity of, and possibilities which arise from an occupation, mean that this action speaks volumes more than a protest does. The Proctors' internal letter to students and staff, although not a triumph, is an indication that direct action requires the authorities addressed to engage with the students in a way that a demonstration doesn't. I would like to know on what grounds they base their statement within the internal letter, "In any case, occupations do not offer a constructive contribution to the debate."

As far as I'm aware, up until this point there has been no debate between the University authority and the student body. Had the Proctors not closed the library, the nature of that contribution would have had significantly more content.

The messages of support and solidarity from elsewhere up the ladder of authority in the university seems to contradict these claims that the occupation offered no constructive contribution to the debate around cuts. My personal tutor and another two subject tutors sent me emails in direct support of the occupation. One of my lecturers was actually in the occupation for the first five hours and helped formulate our list of demands. He was particularly hot on checking that our grammar and presentation was correct. He came back the next morning to join the crowd of people outside that waved through the windows and chanted throughout the day.

By any reasonable logic, these discussions, the press coverage of nationwide occupations, the solidarity found between students and staff here in Oxford, the debates which ensue in cyberspace, and the Lib Dem's most recent statement that some of them wish to abstain on the cuts vote, all of these events caused by the nationwide occupations and protests, are valuable and constructive contributions to the debate, which the Proctors seem to feel

they are so well versed in. Their only response to the protest remains vague and lacking in any tangible position on the cuts, “We remain committed to ensuring that whatever funding arrangements may be in place in the future, no-one who deserves a place at Oxford will be denied access because they cannot afford to study here.”

A violent occupation?

Let’s distinguish between ‘direct action’ and ‘violent action’. It seems ironic, given the claims by the Proctors that the occupation put the rare book collection at risk, that the only damage done to the library (and the students) was inflicted by the police when they battered down a door and forcibly removed the protesters. The occupation was at all times peaceful, measured and sober. The dance video has caused a lot of upset. Who ever said peaceful protest has to be quiet? I admit, as do most people who were there, that it was thoughtless and perhaps not good for PR in the long run, but it was not thought of as a ‘statement’ at the time it was put online. More videos of the discussions, workshops and actions taken inside are due to be put online in the near future. Hopefully this will quell sensationalist accusations of our apparent all night ‘rave’. If there was one it must have been very quiet because most people were asleep.

I had no expectations of what would happen when I joined the crowd of around 200 students that rushed into the building on Wednesday. I joined in because I felt direct action was necessary to enact our anger, frustration and defiance against a government (acting without a mandate) planning an ideologically fuelled, scorched-earth attack on education. The majority of the 50 or so people remaining at the end of the 30 hours of occupation did not know each other prior to the occupation, so the claims that it was the ‘socialist workers movement’ or a ‘minority group of anarchists’ is based purely on speculation and the manipulation of events by the Proctors. At the pub gathering

after the eviction I found myself in the embarrassing position of having to ask someone's name who I had shared a toothbrush with, and who, only an hour before, I had tightly held on to as police attempted to pull us apart from each other.

Who is the university?

The librarian's solidarity with us proved to me that the University is not made up of Proctors and Masters and Wardens, but by the academics and lecturers who continued to send us messages of support throughout the occupation, the students both undergraduate and graduate, the people who clean our colleges, serve our meals and make this university a living breathing space. The outcome of the occupation should be a positive one which says we are the university; we the students, lecturers and tutors, not you the disciplinarian body of Proctors who says I can't enter this library, and we the university object to the privatisation of education and we will fight the attack on education until we win.

Genevieve Dawson, occupiedoxford.org.

Interview with a Royal Holloway anarchist

Asher Goldman, Libcom.org

This is an excerpt from an interview with Dan, a former member of the Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement who is now living in the UK, and was involved in a two day long occupation at his university in London.

Dan: Student activists learnt a valuable lesson at Millbank – where compliant protest fails to capture media attention, the targeted invasion of property demands it. By the end of November, 35 British education institutions had seen occupations along with MPs offices and tax-dodging big businesses.

Asher: You occupied your university for over two days – how was the tactic decided upon and then publicised? How many people took part, and did they tend to come from the radical left or were they more representative of the university population in general? What happened during the occupation?

Dan: The week after the events at Millbank, the Anti-Cuts Alliance at my uni (Royal Holloway, University of London) held a public meeting attended by about 50 students, lecturers and supporters. Over three hours we discussed, debated and voted upon the direction we wanted the movement to take on our campus, the principles we'd adhere to and defend, and the tactics we'd use to achieve our goals. It was at this meeting that the decision to occupy was made. A few days later, all the logistics were arranged and about 40 of us occupied a part of the building used by college management. After a 40-minute debate with the Principal and Vice Principal, we settled in and e-mailed the entire

university with our intentions. We set up a web-cam so that anybody interested could actually see what we were doing, we postered and flyered campus and we canvassed the campus bars for signatures of support. Over the course of the two days over 100 people took part in the occupation, most of which I would guess were relatively new to political activism, although a core of about 20 radical left-wingers were at the heart of the occupation. Royal Holloway is only a small uni with little history of radical politics, and so the occupation was free from outside interference (as there are no left-wing political organisations on campus).

The occupation was run completely democratically and autonomously, with regular group meetings to discuss the division of labour, responses to media and management requests and the news from the rest of the student movement. Over the two days we held a number of teach-ins, as well as hearing talks from trade-unionists and even the university chaplain (who was a dissident in the USSR). We also organised music gigs, poetry readings and dramatic performances for entertainment in the evenings, all themed around the cuts and anti-capitalism.

Asher: Other universities were also in occupation at the same time as you in other parts of the country. What was communication like between the occupations? Also, was there much communication with high school students who held walkouts in support?

Dan: There were little to no official lines of communication between the various occupations, but most occupations were in close contact with up to five or six others as friends exchanged information via the internet. The universities in London have been particularly close, due to their physical proximity and the London Student Assembly which has been meeting every Sunday over the past few weeks. For Royal Holloway though, our closest allies from off campus come from the Sixth Form College

down the road from us. We received over 250 signatures of support from them and about 10 students actually came up to the occupation to take part in the evening's activities. One of the school-teachers even came along to run a teach-in on Anarchism. In return we sent down a delegation to give a talk on the occupation to the college students and it looks likely now that they will be forming their own anti-cuts organisation at school.

Asher: Obviously it isn't just students who are under attack – have there been efforts to build links between students struggles and struggles in the workplace or beneficiaries struggles?

Dan: On the first night of the occupation we received representatives from Surrey Save Our Services, a coalition of local trade union branches and community groups that are fighting the public sector cuts in the county of Surrey. It is of vital importance that these sorts of groups grow across the country as many of Britain's public services are organised and funded at county level. It will therefore be at the local level that the axe falls heaviest in terms of funding and job cuts, and must be fought against hardest. It was with this in mind that the Anti-Cuts Alliance officially affiliated with Surrey Save Our Services that evening. We have been working closely with the group since the occupation, attending local trade union rallies in solidarity and we hope to set up a Surrey Youth Assembly jointly with them in the New Year.

We have also seen practical support from the trade union movement. When our student union (shamefully) failed to put on transport for demonstrators attending the 9th December demo outside parliament, it was the Royal Holloway branch of the UCU (lecturers' union) who stepped up to the mark and hired coaches for the day. Across the country, students are beginning to look outside of the student movement towards mutual aid with others affected by the government's attacks on the working classes. On the

student demos over the last few weeks the chant has been “Students and workers, Unite and fight!”, whilst at the assemblies and on the blogs students are beginning to talk about how we will show our support “when the general strike happens”. And it is not just students who are awakening and trying to forge links. As I write, the grinding wheels of the national trade union bureaucracy are starting to turn with calls from the TUC (Trade Union Congress) for “support for the students” and “waves of strikes” across the public sector in the New Year.

Asher: Where do you think/hope things will go from here? Are there any particular pitfalls you think are important to watch out for?

Dan: At the moment the country is in a surreal state of calm as both the students and politicians return home for the Christmas break. With the vote in parliament going against students on 9 December, the student movement has got a long fight to save their universities from capitalism. The strength of anger I’ve witnessed within the student movement does not simply dissipate over a few weeks at home and I have no doubt that students will return to their universities in fighting spirit. And that spirit will be needed, for the fight now that legislation has been passed is no longer about persuading the government to change it’s mind, but to topple it before it’s policies can be implemented. This cannot be achieved by students alone. Only a united working class, willing to fight as communities and in the workplace, has the power to realise these goals.

This is an excerpt from a longer interview that originally appeared on LibCom on 15 December 2010. <http://libcom.org/news/interview-anarchist-royal-holloway-student-occupier-23122010>

The Occupation of Space

Owen Hatherley, Afterall

Sometimes, the self-referential, apolitical worlds of art and architecture intersect with politics in unexpected ways. One such telling cross-over took place during the winter's student protests; on the same day as the 30 November demonstration across central London, there was a story in the local and architectural press that, for me, summed up much of what students were fighting against.

This was the granting of planning permission to something called 'The Quill', a tower of student housing for a London SE1 site close to Renzo Piano's 'Shard' - only this was aimed by developers at students from nearby King's College. It's a fine example of contemporary architectural idiocy, a lumpen glass extrusion full of clumsy symbolism. The flurry of steel spikes that gives it its name is 'inspired by the literary heritage of Southwark' - as stated on the websites of both the architectural firm SPPARC and the developer, Capita Symonds - but it's a reminder that students are far from the privileged, cloistered group that some present them as. It's the obnoxiously detailed tip of an iceberg, an epitome of the years of awful student housing that has resulted from the partial privatisation of education.

Developers have made large quantities of money out of some of the bleakest housing ever built in the UK, marketing it as student accommodation usually on sites which would otherwise be allotted to 'luxury flats' or other 'stunning developments'. Student-oriented property developers like Unite and the amusingly named Liberty Living are, amongst other things, revivalists of the prefabricated construction methods favoured by the more parsimonious councils in the

1960s. Their blocks, all with attendant 'aspirational' names – Sky Plaza in Leeds, Grand Central in Liverpool – recall the worst side of modernism, in their cheapness, blindness to place and total lack of architectural imagination. Inside, they're a matter of box rooms leavened by en suite bathrooms, for which the developers charge outrageous rents. The most apparently 'luxurious' of them – the skyscraping Nido Spitalfields in London – charges £1,250 a month for each of its self-described 'cubes'.

It's also a reminder that students were encouraged under New Labour to be an ideal combination of indentured serfs and aspirant yuppies. The actual conditions of students' existence in the 2000s, from the poverty of their housing, to their catastrophic debt, to their part-time jobs in call centres, to their years of unpaid intern labour, were bleak indeed; but all was hidden by an oxymoronic language of inclusivity and privilege – they might have been living in cupboards, but they were cupboards with plasma screen TVs; they might have felt underpaid, overworked and tithed, but were also constantly reminded of how lucky they were to enjoy the hedonistic student lifestyle. Suddenly, under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, one half of that bargain – the expansion of education that accompanied its part-privatisation – has disappeared, and we're now witnessing the fallout.

So it's worth keeping New Labour's student architecture – desperately private, paranoid, gated, restricted, securitised – in mind when you think of the occupations of universities that have been such an important part of the student protests. Implicitly or explicitly, this is the kind of space they are reacting against. It is a protest against the coalition, to be sure, but it's also a magnificent rejection of the fear, quietism and atomisation that was the result of earlier policies. The students' use of space is equally fearless.

The first student protest against education cuts was well before the trebling of fees was announced by the government, in response to the University of Middlesex's decision in April 2010 to axe its well-regarded Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, and it's an interesting comparison with the wider protests seven months later (see *The Matter at Middlesex?*). The Con-Lib coalition's aggressively philistine and class-driven rhetoric was amply anticipated by the Middlesex management. In a prefiguring of the current attack on the Humanities, the University's Philosophy Department - with the highest Research Assessment rating of any of its departments - was clearly considered surplus to requirements, at an ex-polytechnic orienting itself towards business and lucrative overseas campuses in Dubai and Mauritius - eagerly moving to 'emerging economies' like any architectural firm.

The advertisements for Middlesex courses at the Tube stations nearby to the north London campus aptly illustrate how the neoliberal student is conceived of as a series of demands that are alternately hedonistic and utilitarian, and always grimly conformist. Headed by 'I want to be more employable', one of them continues: 'I want to be the best. I want to do my own thing. I want to excel. I want to go to the gym. I want to study business law. I want to see West End shows. I want business sponsorship.' And with particular bathos: 'I want to see what's possible'.

The interesting thing about Middlesex University is how totally suburban it is - a series of disconnected outposts in several outer north London boroughs, and the various protests at Middlesex suggested what could, and possibly couldn't, be done to politicise these places, which are so far from the metropolitan idea of protest as something which happens in highly symbolic central locations (the London sites of recent governmental cuts protests have been Parliament Square, Whitehall and Millbank). Middlesex has

multiple campuses in suburban north London, with an effect of maximum decentralisation. The first occupation took place at Trent Park, the campus where the philosophy department is based, in one of those places where the 'green belt' instituted around London in the '30s is not entirely fictional.

For over a week, Trent Park became a 'transversal space', i.e a Free University, with speakers and actions taking place inside the usual university spaces. One point about Middlesex, which made the protests there so unlike occupations at the School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS) or the London School of Economics (LSE), is that the institution is already the model of the neoliberal university – dispersed, atomised, with no particular traditions of Glorious Rebellion.

If, as Mark Fisher argued in his book *Capitalist Realism*, the 2006 youth protests in France – in which students demonstrated against a bill that would have allowed employers to fire people under the age of twenty-six more easily – were easily presented as conservative attempts on the part of the students to retain privileges, then Middlesex, and the protests of winter 2010, are the opposite – rather, they are what happens when an already neoliberalised student body tries to politicise itself. If, as Middlesex Occupation banners insisted, this particular university is a factory, then like the factory it has learnt one of the principal lessons of the twentieth century – if you want to avoid conflict, decentralise, be far away from the (imagined) centres of power, disappear from public view, and make the question of who actually holds power as opaque as possible.

The tactics of surprise and spectacle used at Middlesex have clear correspondence with those used by recent occupiers, albeit here on a much larger scale. At the first major occupation, at SOAS in November 2010, it was especially interesting to see the movement dealing with such

a central location, right next to Russell Square, where it was much easier to reach a public of some sort than it had been in Trent Park. The place, which is as of now still under occupation, has had the feel of an activist enclave for a while now, and a large banner reading 'THIS HAS JUST BEGUN' currently flies in front of the college. Somewhat larger, and for that and other reasons the focus of much of the media coverage of the events, was the occupation of University College London (UCL), at the other end of Bloomsbury. As fans of Michel Foucault would appreciate, students picked the capacious Jeremy Bentham Room for their base of operations ('Jeremy Says No!' read one poster, depicting the eighteenth-century thinker; adjacent was another poster reading, inscrutably, 'Jeremy Also Says Panopticon'). The Slade School of Art, just opposite, soon followed UCL into occupation – as, indeed, did countless other universities up and down the country, and both SOAS and UCL had a board listing those which had followed suit.

The spatial politics of the occupations themselves are obviously worth consideration. From what I could see at UCL in December, the ten days of hundreds of people sleeping together in one very large room had brought a certain intensity to the proceedings, and had shown how much the protests are becoming not just a critique of the singularly grotesque millionaires' austerity government, but also an attempt to imagine a new kind of everyday life. When I spoke there about student housing and the atrociousness thereof, more than one of the assembled students said something along the lines of 'Yes, we know that's awful, you don't need to tell us – but we're here creating something different, something positive, by ourselves'.

That would be of little interest, though, if it were just confined to what is undeniably a fairly elite university. The UCL occupation was extremely adept at the use of both the media and space itself to publicise their cause. Not only were

they quite astonishingly media-savvy – one corner of the room, a round table dotted with laptops, bore the title 'RESPONSE', and was constantly sending out communiqués on Twitter and elsewhere – but they were also keen to use the space around to draw attention to their demands and those of the student movement in general. This was part of the rationale behind their involvement in pickets of Vodafone (who allegedly recently evaded £6 billion in tax) and of Topshop (whose boss Philip Green is also allegedly both a prolific tax avoider and a Conservative-Liberal coalition adviser, which makes a nonsense of the coalition's already outrageous slogan 'we're all in this together'). It was also the rationale behind one of the protest's more inspired actions, a temporary occupation of the nearby Euston Station, a politicisation of the seemingly advertising-bound technique of the 'flashmob'. As well as using the space to argue their case to the assembled commuters, UCL students also produced a parodic Evening Standard newspaper, in a prescient recognition of the media's hostility to them. The now-utopian (but once mundanely social democratic) promise of its headline, 'New Era of Welfare for All', showed the students' contempt for the prevailing rhetoric of guilty masochism presenting itself as austerity.

Thus far, the student movement has tried to avoid the tedium and predictability that marred the last decade of protest in the UK – whether the polite, and for all its numbers easily ignored, 'Stop the War' protests in 2003, or the various sparsely attended 'Carnivals against Capitalism', which were usually easily kettled and symbolically brutalised by the police. Kettling, a method first used in the UK on a large scale at the 2001 anti-capitalist protests in Oxford Street, currently seems to be the automatic response to any large scale protest on the streets of London. In response, students have developed strategies to avoid police kettles. The riot police's approach to this unpredictability has been

harsh indeed - at the time of writing, over 100 complaints have been presented to the Independent Police Complaints Council.

Some speculate that police tactics were a form of revenge against the students' confident, unexpected use of the streets – specifically, revenge against the embarrassment of the police as they failed to stop the sacking of the Conservative headquarters at the first large student protest at Millbank. Nonetheless, a spectacularly servile media preferred to cover the mild harassment of two royals, as opposed to, say, the police's near-fatal attack on the student Alfie Meadows, or the dragging of a 20-year old with cerebral palsy, Jody McIntyre, out of his wheelchair and across the pavement.

Yet, throughout, this enormously unpredictable movement has shown that it will use the city as it likes. There's no better riposte to the grim, circumscribed, privatised urbanism of the last thirty years than that.

Owen Hatherley is author of *Militant Modernism* (Zero, 2009), *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (Verso, 2010) and the forthcoming *Uncommon – An Essay on Pulp* (Zero, 2011). This article originally appeared on Afterall.org, 21 December 2010 – this version appeared on openDemocracy.net, 9 January 2011. <http://afterall.org/online/the-occupation-of-space>

THE FLASH MOBS

UK Uncut, taxes and direct action

It was the snide retort of countless mainstream media commentators that the student protests were entirely narcissistic: concerned only with disruption to their own lives as undergraduates. This ignored the reality on the ground – that protesters carried banners, chanted, and held views indicating dissent with government policies far beyond the rise in tuition fees. But to grab the attention of those same mainstream media commentators was going to need a different approach. Step forward UK Uncut, whose witty, daring flash mobs targeted major high street shops, to spread the word that while government cuts would disproportionately hit the poorest members of society, ultra-rich corporations were evading billions of pounds they owed to the exchequer: and thus, to everyone. As Alan Finlayson writes: “Media corporations, polluting industries and greedy banks take actions that affect us directly. In challenging or resisting those effects, why dilute energies by diverting them through the Whitehall bureaucracy?” In other words: let’s cut out the middle-men.

Protest works. Just look at the proof

Johann Hari, The Independent

There is a ripple of rage spreading across Britain. It is clearer every day that the people of this country have been colossally scammed. The bankers who crashed the economy are richer and fatter than ever, on our cash. The Prime Minister who promised us before the election “we’re not talking about swingeing cuts” just imposed the worst cuts since the 1920s, condemning another million people to the dole queue. Yet the rage is matched by a flailing sense of impotence. We are furious, but we feel there is nothing we can do. There’s a mood that we have been stitched up by forces more powerful and devious than us, and all we can do is sit back and be shafted.

This mood is wrong. It doesn’t have to be this way – if enough of us act to stop it. To explain how, I want to start with a small scandal, a small response – and a big lesson from history.

In my column last week, I mentioned in passing something remarkable and almost unnoticed. For years now, Vodafone has been refusing to pay billions of pounds of taxes to the British people that are outstanding. The company – which has doubled its profits during this recession – engaged in all kinds of accounting twists and turns, but it was eventually ruled this refusal breached anti-tax avoidance rules. They looked set to pay a sum Private Eye calculates to be more than £6bn.

Then, suddenly, the exchequer – run by George Osborne – cancelled almost all of the outstanding tax bill, in a move a senior figure in Revenues and Customs says is “an

unbelievable cave-in”. A few days after the decision, Osborne was promoting Vodafone on a tax-payer funded trip to India. He then appointed Andy Halford, the finance director of Vodafone, to the government’s Advisory Board on Business Tax Rates, apparently because he thinks this is a model of how the Tories think it should be done.

By contrast, the Indian government chose to pursue Vodafone through the courts for the billions in tax they have failed to pay there. Yes, the British state is less functional than the Indian state when it comes to collecting revenues from the wealthy. This is not an isolated incident. Richard Murphy, of Tax Research UK, calculates that UK corporations fail to pay a further £12bn a year in taxes they legally owe, while the rich avoid or evade up to £120bn.

Many people emailed me saying they were outraged that while they pay their fair share for running the country, Vodafone doesn’t pay theirs. One of them named Thom Costello decided he wanted to organise a protest, so he appealed on Twitter – and this Wednesday seventy enraged citizens shut down the flagship Vodafone store on Oxford Street in protest. “Vodafone won’t pay as they go,” said one banner. “Make Vodafone pay, not the poor,” said another.

The reaction from members of the public – who were handed leaflets explaining the situation – was startling. Again and again, people said “I’m so glad somebody is doing this” and “there needs to be much more of this.” Lots of them stopped to talk about how frightened they were about the cuts and for their own homes and jobs. The protest became the third most discussed topic in the country on Twitter, meaning millions of people now know about what Vodafone and the government have done. The protesters believe this is just the start of a movement to make the rich pay a much fairer share of taxation, and they urge people to join them: go to ukuncut.org.uk to find out what you can do this Saturday.

You might ask – so what? What has been changed? To understand how and why protest like this can work, you need some concrete and proven examples from the past. Let's start with the most hopeless and wildly idealistic cause – and see how it won. The first ever attempt to hold a Gay Pride rally in Trafalgar Square was in 1965. Two dozen people turned up – and they were mostly beaten by the police and arrested. Gay people were imprisoned for having sex, and even the most compassionate defence of gay people offered in public life was that they should be pitied for being mentally ill.

Imagine if you had stood in Trafalgar Square that day and told those two dozen brave men and women: “Forty-five years from now, they will stop the traffic in Central London for a Gay Pride parade on this very spot, and it will be attended by hundreds of thousands of people. There will be married gay couples, and representatives of every political party, and openly gay soldiers and government ministers and huge numbers of straight supporters – and it will be the homophobes who are regarded as freaks.” It would have seemed like a preposterous statement of science fiction. But it happened. It happened in one lifetime. Why? Not because the people in power spontaneously realised that millennia of persecuting gay people had been wrong, but because determined ordinary citizens banded together and demanded justice.

If that cause can be achieved, through persistent democratic pressure, anything can. But let's look at a group of protesters who thought they had failed. The protests within the United States against the Vietnam War couldn't prevent it killing two million Vietnamese and 80,000 Americans. But even in the years it was “failing”, it was achieving more than the protestors could possibly have known. In 1966, the specialists at the Pentagon went to US President Lyndon Johnson – a thug prone to threatening to

“crush” entire elected governments – with a plan to end the Vietnam War: nuke the country. They “proved”, using their computer modeling, that a nuclear attack would “save lives.”

It was a plan that might well have appealed to him. But Johnson pointed out the window, towards the hoardes of protesters, and said: “I have one more problem for your computer. Will you feed into it how long it will take 500,000 angry Americans to climb the White House wall out there and lynch their President?” He knew that there would be a cost – in protest and democratic revolt – that made that cruelty too great. In 1970, the same plan was presented to Richard Nixon – and we now know from the declassified documents that the biggest protests ever against the war made him decide he couldn’t do it. Those protesters went home from those protests believing they had failed – but they had succeeded in preventing a nuclear war. They thought they were impotent, just as so many of us do – but they really had power beyond their dreams to stop a nightmare.

Protest raises the political price for governments making bad decisions. It stopped LBJ and Nixon making the most catastrophic decision of all. The same principle can apply to the Conservative desire to kneecap the welfare state while handing out massive baubles to their rich friends. The next time George Osborne has to decide whether to cancel the tax bill of a super-rich corporation and make us all pick up the tab, he will know there is a price. People will find out, and they will be angry. The more protests there are, the higher the price. If enough of us demand it, we can make the rich pay their share for the running of our country, rather than the poor and the middle – to name just one urgent cause that deserves protest.

And protest can have an invisible ripple-effect that lasts for generations. A small group of women from Iowa lost their sons early in the Vietnam war, and they decided to set

up an organization of mothers opposing the assault on the country. They called a protest of all mothers of serving soldiers outside the White House – and six turned up in the snow. Even though later in the war they became nationally important voices, they always remembered that protest as an embarrassment and a humiliation.

Until, that is, one day in the 1990s, one of them read the autobiography of Benjamin Spock, the much-loved and trusted celebrity doctor, who was the Oprah of his day. When he came out against the war in 1968, it was a major turning point in American public opinion. And he explained why he did it. One day, he had been called to a meeting at the White House to be told how well the war in Vietnam was going, and he saw six women standing in the snow with placards, alone, chanting. It troubled his conscience and his dreams for years. If these women were brave enough to protest, he asked himself, why aren't I? It was because of them that he could eventually find the courage to take his stand – and that in turn changed the minds of millions, and ended the war sooner. An event that they thought was a humiliation actually turned the course of history.

You don't know what the amazing ripple-effect of your protest will be – but wouldn't Britain be a better place if it replaced the ripple of impotent anger so many of us are feeling? Yes, you can sit back and let yourself be ripped off by the bankers and the corporations and their political lackeys if you want. But it's an indulgent fiction to believe that is all you can do. You can act in your own self-defence. As Margaret Mead, the great democratic campaigner, said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

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The philosophical significance of UK Uncut

Alan Finlayson, openDemocracy

When activists under the banner of UK Uncut protest outside high-street shops tomorrow they will be doing something of great political importance. But they will also be demonstrating and articulating something of immense philosophical significance. The political mainstream – journalists, commentators and Parliamentarians – is trying to ignore this. Certainly they are confounded by it. For with UK Uncut what that mainstream thought impossible has come to pass: ethics and ideology are once more at the forefront of political contest in Britain.

The demand that corporations cease exploiting the tax loopholes government created for them is ethical in a precise way. It addresses itself to the quality of the actions of Philip Green and others like him. It finds those actions at odds with the principle that ‘we are all in this together’. It then publicly declares those actions unjust. The purity, simplicity and accuracy of all this confounds the political mainstream. Confronted by it they systematically mobilise the argument that since tax avoiders are doing nothing illegal, there is therefore nothing to be said against them. That was the line pursued by Tom Harris MP when he debated with Neal Lawson, Chair of Compass, on *The Today Programme* after the first Top Shop demonstration. It was repeated by Gavin Esler on *Newsnight* as part of a challenge put to Daniel Garvin of UK Uncut and again by Sarah Montague, on *Today*, questioning Murray Williams, also of UK Uncut. The frequency with which this line appears suggests it is either an

organised ‘talking point’ or simply indicative of a shared outlook – an ideology.

Consider for a moment the real implications of the proposition that no act can justly be criticised unless it is against the law. The implication is that law is a full and total expression of moral values. Only totalitarians think that. Everybody else recognises that, while certainly informed by morality, the function of the law is to provide a framework within which civil society can function and can debate the rights and wrongs of actions. And it would be a cold and brittle society that relied on the law for the expression and support of all values, and that could not tolerate citizens sorting things out between themselves. Just as in sport we recognise that something can be within the rules yet still condemned as unsporting, so too most people recognise that behaviour can be wrong even when it isn’t actually illegal.

In fact only one social group regularly seeks to justify actions simply by insisting that they don’t break the formal rules. And that group is the one that rules us. MPs justified themselves in the expenses scandal by protesting that they hadn’t broken a rule; maybe they didn’t need to claim for a second house but doing so was allowed and therefore no wrong was perpetrated. Bankers may have wrecked a financial system while accruing vast personal fortunes but so long as nothing they did broke a rule they think themselves the victims. And our former Prime Minister thought that the only thing needed to justify a reckless war was someone to ensure it wasn’t strictly illegal. In refuting this self-justifying logic UK Uncut exposes the moral vacuity of our contemporary establishment.

It also exposes a fundamental error of ruling political theory. A second criticism routinely made of UK Uncut is that if they think there is something wrong in tax rules then they should protest only through Parliament. It is somewhat surprising to hear this kind of argument today, especially

from Labour MPs who, if they had any awareness of their own history and tradition, would know instinctively that, fundamental as it is, there is more to politics than Parliament. Rights and protections for workers, women, ethnic and sexual minorities were won through general forms of public protest. Furthermore, these required not only the force of law but continued action in civil society promoting and affirming the culture that could sustain them. That included directly challenging persons and institutions in society at large that sought to marginalize and contain minorities. To put it plainly, Rosa Parkes refused to go to the back of the bus. She didn't sit there and compose a polite letter to her Congressman. Racism is kept at bay not only by the law but by decent people standing up to racists wherever they are. The harm caused by greed and excessive self-interest can be prevented only if decent citizens, instead of relying on politicians, themselves stand up against it.

But the point is larger even than this. Parliament is not the central and not the only power in the nation. Imagining that it was, was one of the most fundamental errors made by New Labour and its sympathisers. They thought that they could end inequality just by passing a law to ban it. They thought that they could improve people's diets, literacy or savings behavior through regulations and more agencies. It seemed not to occur to them that the purveyors of bad food, junk culture and excessive loans might also be powerful forces and that they might need to be contended with directly.

The activists in UK Uncut clearly understand what many do not: that power in society does not only flow vertically but also horizontally, and that some of the most important of social relations are transversal. Media corporations, polluting industries and greedy banks take actions that affect us directly. In challenging or resisting those effects why dilute energies by diverting them through the Whitehall bureaucracy? Government matters. Of course it does. But

seeking to inform our fellow citizens directly matters just as much. And challenging excessive power, wherever it takes form, matters even more.

The way UK Uncut is organised reflects this more sophisticated political theory. Political parties have atrophied as every branch has been tightly managed from the centre. The self-declared ‘army of citizen volunteers’ mobilized under the banner of UK Uncut is structured but not controlled. Groups are able to adapt to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Communication between them isn’t filtered through a central directorate. Through online means everybody can speak to everybody else, which also means that everybody can learn from listening to everyone else. That – and not the coalition in Whitehall – is the new politics.

All of this did not come from nowhere. It has roots in the radical tradition not only of the UK but of Europe and the rest of the world. Today’s activists are in touch with and learn from their colleagues all over the globe. There are also precedents in the achievements of the Citizens Organizing Foundation, which has been effective in organising campaigns to put pressure directly on local interests and powers. The ideas shaping movements such as UK Uncut also have formal intellectual expression in currents of contemporary continental philosophy that draw from Marxism and post-Marxism but also from science and complexity theory, yet which resist being contained by any of these. Such philosophy is a tool in politics not the driving force.

That all of this is now expressing itself on the streets indicates the coming-of-age of a range of political, cultural and intellectual tendencies that have long been in ferment. It also indicates the emergence of a generation which knows that it needs to call to account Thatcher’s children, too many of whom have grown up with nothing in the way of a

philosophical, ethical or political compass and now find themselves adrift. Faced by a challenge from young people who believe in something, our political and media mainstream is confounded. It is also scared. And it should be.

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<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/alan-finlayson/philosophical-significance-of-uk-uncut>

'Santa Glue-In' as 55 Anti-Cuts Protests Hit Tax Dodgers Across The Country

UK Uncut, Big Society Revenue & Customs

Press release: Posted on Sat 18th

Dec 2010, 2:33pm

For Immediate Release

UK UNCUT: 'SANTA GLUE IN' AS 55 ANTI-CUTS PROTESTS HIT TAX DODGERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

UK Uncut have today held their biggest day of action yet against the coalition's public sector cuts and wide-spread tax avoidance by the wealthiest in society.

Branded, 'pay-day', there are estimated to have been 55 protests by the Big Society Revenue & Customs taking place on high streets up and down the country as people expose the arguments behind the austerity cuts as lies.

In Brighton, two activists dressed as Santa glued themselves inside BHS, while their 'disruptive tax dodger tour' also shut Dorothy Perkins and Burton. On Oxford Street, London, protestors were organised into two main blocks. Trading was disrupted at the flag-ship Topshop store as activists held a 'sport-day' with people holding egg and spoon races, playing football, doing sit-ups and star jumps, in an attempt to stop the £160m cuts to school sports. Further along the street, activists closed the flagship Vodafone store with a 'read-in' in an attempt to save public libraries from being axed.

There have been further confirmed store closures in Edinburgh, Truro, Manchester, Cambridge, Liverpool,

Wrexham, Walthamstow, Brixton, Tunbridge Wells, Islington, Bristol, Nottingham, and Oxford.

Protests are believed to have taken place in a further 40 locations around Britain today.

Protesters have even designed an iPhone app to help people angry at the cuts to locate their local tax avoider and join their nearest protest.

Sir Philip Green and Vodafone remained the focus of the growing public anger, but Boots, M&S, Barclays and HSBC were also targeted nationally. Tax avoidance by multi-national corporations and extremely wealthy individuals is estimated to cost the public purse £25 billion every single year.

Sir Philip Green owns the fashion empire Arcadia, which spreads across 2,500 UK stores and includes top brands such as Topshop, Miss Selfridge and Dorothy Perkins.

Green's empire Arcadia is owned by Taveta Investments Limited – a holding company registered to a small office on the tax-haven island of Jersey.

Sir Philip Green is not however the official owner of Taveta Investments. Instead, the owners are his wife and immediate family, who reside in Monaco.

Monaco is of course famous for its 0% income tax. As a result, when Sir Philip Green – the 9th richest man in the UK with wealth estimated at £4.4bn in 2008 – in 2005 made the largest single dividend payout in UK corporate history to his wife of £1.2bn, he avoided paying a reported £285 million in tax to the British public purse.

Steven Hall, 31, said “Philip Green is a multi-billionaire tax avoider, and yet is regarded by David Cameron as an appropriate man to advise the government on austerity. His missing millions need to be reclaimed and invested into public services, not into his wife's bank account.”

The UK Uncut movement started in October, when over 30 Vodafone stores were closed by ordinary people who blockaded and picketed the store's entrances to stop trading.

Those protests were sparked after Vodafone reached a 'settlement' on a long standing tax dispute with HMRC earlier this year, following the change in government. Some experts believe the deal meant that Vodafone saved up to £6bn in tax.

When questioned about the meaning of the Big Society Revenue & Customs, Steven said "HMRC is due to lose 13,000 jobs. David Cameron wants ordinary people in their spare time to carry out vital state run services that have been cut, so this is exactly what we're doing. If they won't chase down tax avoiders, then we will."

Rebecca Davies, 32, said: "Over four years £100bn is expected to be lost from the public purse to tax avoidance, which could pay for so many of the cuts that will hit the poorest in our society".

"The argument that only way to cut the public deficit is to cut public services is a lie. The coalition is ideologically smashing a public sector that supports the poorest in society."

"Ordinary people around Britain will stand up and show that they will not be lied to, and that we will not let these unnecessary cuts happen without a fight."

ENDS

This press release originally appeared on ukuncut.org.uk, 18 December 2010
<http://www.ukuncut.org.uk/blog/press-release-santa-glue-in-as-55-anti-cuts-protests-hit-tax-dodgers-across-the-country>

THE UNIVERSITIES

The Browne report into higher education published on 6 October did more than raise a lot of questions. Out of it came the policy of tripling student fees in the form of loans, removing any direct government grants to the humanities: marketising higher education and tearing down any public interest in its intrinsic values. At the same time it presumed a distinctly old-fashioned approach. "Policy-makers are persisting with an institutional model that was created in the midst of a different age," writes Aaron Peters. At the heart of the crisis of university funding lies a debate about the future of higher education, one played out in a series of exchanges between Alan Finlayson and Tony Curzon Price. Ultimately: what are universities for?

Universities in an age of information abundance

Aaron Peters, openDemocracy

The Browne report on the future of university funding released this week has been subject to much debate in the political blogosphere and media. The broad proposition central to both the Browne report and the government's stance on reforming higher education funding is that, for teaching quality to be maintained, increased levels of funding for British universities are a necessity in the medium to long term.

While the manner in which such funds would be raised is an area of disagreement among all three major parties, this key point, that greater amounts of capital will be required, has been broadly accepted as correct, especially amongst the Labour shadow cabinet.

The NUS and indeed many Lib Dems say that this should come from public funds. The government looks likely to propose an increase in tuition fees, while the opposition flip-flops over the progressive alternative of a graduate tax.

But what all parties neglect in the debate is the role of technological change and how this is already reducing the costs of what universities seek to do with students – namely reproduce, disseminate and explicate information so that students become participants in learning. Indeed it has been contended that Moore's Law of exponential technological improvement will have a greater impact on the quality of delivery in education (primary and secondary as much as tertiary) than any increases in government spending or student spending over the coming period.

Information wants to be free

In *Free: the Future of a Radical Price*, the editor of *Wired* magazine, Chris Anderson, discusses some of the implications of living in a world where information is so ubiquitous that one can refer to a situation of ‘informational post-scarcity’. Anderson claims that it is within this context, where internet bandwidth, computational storage and computing power halve in cost approximately every 18 months that information wants to be free. Such a position stands in antithesis to the thinking of policy-makers on the issue of tuition fees – whose thinking on the subject, no doubt subsequent to much lobbying by the Russell Group of universities, seems more consistent with a paradigm where information is becoming more expensive to distribute.

Only it isn't. The cost of information is not going up, it's halving and has been doing so approximately every eighteen months since the release of the first commercial transistor in 1954 and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The proposal to increase fees thus shows a political class out of touch with communication ecology that is fundamentally transforming the social world. Policy-makers are persisting with an institutional model that was created in the midst of a different age, one where information was highly scarce.

The proposition that in the 21st century ‘information wants to be free’ is true in two key respects – firstly, information and content can move more freely between persons and communities than ever before and are no longer the monopoly of elites as evidenced in peer-to-peer file sharing, citizen journalism and blogs. Secondly, and perhaps more pertinently, the costs of information creation, reproduction and dissemination are being reduced much more quickly than legislators can ever possibly hope to adapt to.

Just as the arrival of the printing press permitted the possibility of universal literacy and hitherto impossible social innovations such as public libraries, mass education and informed, deliberative public spheres through the distribution of newspapers and other printed documents, as described by Jurgen Habermas, so too the information abundant world means that institutions predicated on the realities of information scarcity will become historical anachronisms. As Bruce Bimber puts it; “..vertically integrated firms, retail stores, administrative organisations and even universities are in part adaptations to a communications ecology in which information is costly and assymetric.”

We are often told of the decline of those historical intermediaries of content and commodities between producers and consumers – namely newspapers and ‘offline’ retail stores. The implications of this same trend however for those ‘repositories’ of information of the industrial age, namely universities, is rarely explored.

While the Conservative party in government has talked of being “post-bureaucratic” in its efforts to explain why, with advances in communications technology superior public policy outcomes need not necessarily depend on greater levels of funding (and many information technology scholars would agree with such an assertion) such thinking has not been extended to higher education.

The rise of the university

While the university within a European context can be traced back to eleventh century Bologna, the modern research-intensive university that sought to educate an increasingly affluent and mobile society first came into existence in Germany in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The techno-economic context within which it was

founded was one where the creation and dissemination of information was prohibitively expensive.

This model was broadened throughout the second half of the twentieth century, by the architects of Europe's post-war welfare states, to include individuals regardless of their ability to pay. The organisational model was not called into question (with the exception of the visionary Michael Young – founder of the Open University) fundamentally because although there had been alterations to the communications and information ecology it was still broadly speaking the same as it had been in the nineteenth century – with classes, seminars and libraries in fixed 'offline spaces', communication by mail and content being distributed through face-to-face interaction and the printed book. While the dreams were those of post-war twentieth century progressives, the means were very much those of nineteenth century technology.

And so to the era of the Blair-Brown years where we had a fees-and-grants based system that still attempted to synthesize social mobility and the values of a meritocracy with a dynamic and resource-rich higher education sector premised upon higher levels of government funding coupled with fees from those who could afford them.

The Coalition is now proposing to raise tuition fees to compensate for a reduction in state support for higher education. Many left progressives want to scrap fees (or at least they did), while those on the right voice opinions ranging from advocating the 'Harvard system' of stipends and grants for the most deserving to a system of outright market determination of tuition fees.

The tragic point is that both right and left just don't see that the costs of what universities do is getting cheaper, quickly. It has never been so cheap and will only get cheaper for the foreseeable future. All we have to do is adapt.

The question that must be asked then is. "Why on earth should students be asked to pay an increased contribution in the form of higher tuition fees (or even hypothetically a graduate tax) when the fundamental costs of running a university are lower than ever before?"

Now this might seem like nonsense, but all those great, sweeping platforms you might have used at university in the last few years such as Moodle, Portico, are – guess what – free. A few years ago while doing my graduate degree at UCL a friend showed me how all his post-graduate lectures at the LSE were digitally recorded and available as shared course content. My initial reaction was to think 'wow, that's what you pay your money for' and indeed this was a reaction born of the idea that we live in an age of information scarcity and that such innovations are expensive. Yet, as we all know, innovations such as the embedding of wikis, video and audiofiles within the online presence of any graduate course are in fact remarkably cheap.

And it's not just Moodle. Open source platforms are a veritable bonanza for higher education – why use Microsoft packages that include Office and Explorer when the free Open Office and Mozilla Firefox are so much better? Likewise, why have Windows as an operating system when Linux is free and by many measures a superior product?

In fact, why should universities have computers at all? After all the exponential drop in computing costs means that within a handful of years the idea of not owning several 'prosumption' (capable of both production and consumption of content) computers be they netbooks, notebooks, tablets, desktop and smartphones will be absurd. The computing capabilities and costs of universities will be a wifi or VPN network and a Moodle-like course platform which utilises very cheap and exceptionally useful sound and video technologies. Furthermore, with the advent of the e-reader, universities will no longer need to buy costly editions of

books but will rather purchase copies of texts that will be available to students to lend, as is currently the case with books using platforms such as Google Books or Amazon who will inevitably establish bespoke products for universities.

Here too we are presented with a massive opportunity for savings and an increased number of texts available to loan for students. There will be need for far fewer librarians, course administrators and – thankfully for the environment – less paper. Greater numbers of graduate students coming on stream with fewer teaching jobs available means only one thing and this is already happening: greater numbers of graduate students teaching undergraduates.

Within this new paradigm the costs of university are massively reduced with running costs primarily residing with the things that they always have done and which have relatively little to do with the increases in quality over the last few years, namely estates and teaching staff. Lectures could even be conducted online, with students later discussing the merits of the material in smaller ad-hoc seminar groups overseen by research students, thus leaving professors more time to carry out what makes them passionate as scholars and what adds value to research intensive universities, namely research.

We have to contextualising universities as ‘repositories of information’ in an age where information wants to be free. In the debate over funding neither the ‘regressive’ nor the ‘progressive’ options have adapted to the technology realities education can now utilise. It is not money but the ever-reducing costs of computing and communicating that can drive up standards.

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<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/aaron-peters/universities-in-age-of-information>

Britain, greet the age of privatised Higher Education – an argument and a debate

Alan Finlayson and Tony Curzon Price, openDemocracy

Alan Finlayson:

I: What is really going on

Let's be clear about what has happened. The House of Commons has not voted only for a rise in tuition fees in English universities. It has voted for the privatisation of British Higher education.

In July of this year, David Willets announced the creation of Britain's second private university – the first for 20 years. That university, offering Business and Law degrees, is run by BPP, a provider of various professional qualifications, listed on the Stock Exchange since 1986. In 2009, BPP became part of Apollo Global Inc. – a joint creation of Apollo Group, an Arizona-based company listed on the NASDAQ, and private equity firm Carlyle Group (famous to fans of filmmaker Michael Moore as the organisation that joined the Bush political dynasty with the Bin Laden's and which featured in his *Fahrenheit 9/11*).

The purpose of Apollo Global is to make profit from the opportunities presented by a global knowledge economy in which individuals need qualifications in order to sell themselves on the global labour market. But entering that market is challenging. The entry costs are high. It takes a lot of money to build and staff a campus, and years to develop the kind of reputation that inspires full confidence in potential applicants. And there are already lots of established

'brands' providing Higher Education, many of which have the advantage of operating in a state-supported environment and which, as public interest organisations, do not need to create profits for shareholders.

That is what the coalition has changed.

Remember that the changes to Higher Education funding do not only raise student fees. They also reduce, and in some subject areas entirely eliminate, the support provided by government. In raising fees to £6,000, universities will not be bringing in twice as much as before, but simply breaking even. Since they are already short of funds, the incentive to raise prices higher while cutting costs is huge.

Three things are thus likely to happen in just a few years.

Firstly, as the established universities raise their prices, the market for cheap distance learning degrees, delivered through a combination of online courses and occasional meetings in hired halls, will rise. This is the model developed by BPP.

Second, established universities will find it attractive to go into partnerships with such providers, either sub-contracting courses to them or being sub-contracted. Many universities already make use of a lot of part-time and temporary labour (notoriously hiring people on nine-month contracts and avoiding salary costs over the summer vacations). A private firm that organises that cheap labour (including those academics who lose their jobs in the cuts) could make decent profits for minimal outlay.

Third, as the University and College Union has repeatedly stressed, there will be universities forced into bankruptcy. When they are, the government will blame those institutions and praise market forces while making their remains available for sale – at a no doubt enticing price – to any global asset company wanting an easy entry into the newly liberalised market for residential degrees in the UK.

There are plenty of impressive-looking private universities all over the world. But Harvard, Yale and others are venerable self-regarding institutions using their funds and investments to sustain their own prestige. The private universities that will come to fill Britain will be owned by international shareholders unconcerned with the global intellectual status of teachers, researchers and students, preoccupied instead by the quarterly return on their investment. As a result, our private providers will pack classrooms, hire cheaper teachers (demanding that government put pressure on outdated trade unions and professional associations), and put on shorter degrees in the cheapest subjects.

That is the very opposite of what the coalition claims will be the result of its policy. But it is what has happened with all the other public services the Conservatives sold off last time they were in power. The only thing that we cannot be sure of this time around is which Liberal Democrat minister will be the first to leave the cabinet in order to take up a position on the board of a private provider of Higher Education.

But this is not all. For the funding reforms do not affect all subject areas evenly. The decision to target resources at STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) seems, on the surface, very sensible. These are expensive fields and there is a need to ensure that there are more graduates skilled in these areas. But that good sense provides cover for an outright attack on the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. In removing all funding from these areas, the coalition is both rigging the market in which it pretends to believe and deliberately undermining the very fields of learning that can best contribute to collective understanding of our social, economic and political situation. That is to say, it is seeking to undermine the kind of thing that enables citizens to understand what is being done to them, why, and

by whom. It is seeking to weaken the fields that help people know who they are or what they might be; knowledge that is part of what everyone needs to question authority and become fully human in fast changing times.

And so, the coalition takes a bold step to a very clear future. A nation already dependent on others for food and energy will become dependent on others for education, skills and qualifications, and will no longer be educated to recognise or question such dependency. Well done Conservatives. Well done Liberal Democrats. First class.

II: David Willetts himself

There are many different kinds of magic trick. Some require the use of cards; others balls and cups. But for all of them, one technique is the most important: misdirection. While your attention is fixed on the magician's left hand, you don't notice what is happening on the right. Of the many practitioners of such magic, David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, is one of the best. As far as I am aware he doesn't do card tricks. But he does do misdirection, making you look one way when the real trick is happening elsewhere.

Here is Willetts, speaking on BBC Newsnight, appearing to make many thousands of pounds disappear:

“There's been several references during the programme to 'paying the fees'. Of course they are not going to 'pay the fees'. The taxpayer is going to provide the money for students, of course then to pass the funds on to the university. No family is going to have to reach into their back pocket to pay for their child to go to university.”

Fees are going to increase from just over £3,000 to as much as £9,000 (while in many cases universities will receive less than at present). Now we can examine how the government wants to fool us into consenting to this. Because

the money is not demanded from the student up-front, Willetts believes he can make you think it doesn't exist. Later he made the point this way: "It's a contribution from the graduate. It's not from the student," as if, on graduating, students turn into entirely different people. The same sleight of hand is used by the salesman who promises you a car and thousands of pounds in 'cashback' without anything to pay on the day of sale. With one hand he tries to make you think that you are getting a free car and free money, while with the other he is preparing the high-interest loan agreement that will haunt you for decades.

On the same edition of *Newsnight*, Willetts explained to a student worried about the future quality of university teaching how he thought the fees reform would make everything better:

"Our philosophy is that the money should come through the choices of the student... what I want to see is universities looking out and thinking what exactly is the teaching experience we offer our prospective students and how can we make sure that it is world-class so that students want to come to this university... they won't be able to get money through quangos any more, they'll only get it through the choices of students."

There are several levels of misdirection in this market logic. Willetts implies that universities currently get money without having to get students, that they get it in some obscure and shadowy way, and that students have no choices about where to study. He also falsely implies that at present university teachers never have to think about what their students want and need. All of this is chaff to prevent us from noticing the historic shift in policy. Universities – under consistent attack for three decades and from all political parties – now take the final step across the Rubicon. With the removal of all national funding from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and its drastic reduction in

others, higher education in the UK has ceased to be a public good. It is now a wholly private and tradable commodity. That will be the case in Wales and Scotland just as much as in England, notwithstanding the fact that students in the devolved regions will receive funding for the fee increases.

The choices that will be most enhanced by this are not those of the student, but rather those of investors in for-profit university education, who will soon have a lot more choice about where to put their money. Speaking at Oxford Brookes University in June of this year, Willetts proposed a “cost-effective means of spreading educational opportunity in straitened times”. Universities currently both teach and examine. Willetts’ proposal was to separate these out and to create “new institutions that can teach, but do so to an exam set externally”. That would mean that more FE colleges could teach degrees and that it would be easier to develop “non-traditional” higher education institutions that would provide a “real competitive challenge to universities”. As I have shown these “non-traditional” providers will be private and for-profit companies such as Apollo Inc. Their interest will lie in providing a cheap service, with a high and quick turnover of students. One can easily imagine these new institutions teaching to exams set by a for-profit qualifications agent, itself well motivated to provide assessments agreeable to institutions that want to appear as successful as possible.

On Newsnight, answering a question about the harsh impact of his reforms upon particular subject areas, Willetts said:

“We are not against social sciences. These are changes that operate fairly across all disciplines. I am not sitting in a government department – and nor is Vince Cable – trying to pick the subjects that students should do or trying to tilt the field against one discipline or in favour of another. What we believe in is well-informed choices by students”.

But Willetts does sit in a government department, thinking about exactly how those students will be informed. As he explained on November 3 to the readers of the Daily Mail, he plans to introduce a new system of “kite-marks” validating degrees and providing customers with the information they need to make a purchasing decision. These kite-marks will indicate how highly employers rate universities so that, as Willetts was quoted as saying, “At last, students will be able to see the courses that can get the jobs they aspire to and those that do not perform well”. This is a very particular way of determining the quality of education. The question it raises is not ‘Who will educate the educators?’ but ‘Who will assess the assessors?’

Waving his left hand, Willetts tells prospective students that they won't have to pay any money, will be free to choose whatever university they want and will be better informed about the products available. But with a wave of his right hand, he makes the public university disappear, invites a range of new interests to access wholly new income streams flowing out of the pockets of students and their families, and puts in place mechanisms by which the government set the criteria according to which universities will be judged.

Lots of things are wrong with our universities. The quality and the extent of teaching are variable. The system is under pressure from high numbers and low pay. University management is too often inexperienced and inept. Policy is driven by elite concerns to the detriment of most. Social, cultural and technological change have increased the number and the kinds of things there are to know, as well as the range of people that need to know them. Responding to all that needs careful thought. It needs a confident academic profession, thinking hard and engaging honestly in dialogue with other citizens.

But Willetts and Cable, Osborne and Cameron, have bypassed all that effort and controversy through the

application of self-interested market dogma. They have begun building a higher education system that will make some people (probably people who don't pay taxes in the UK) lots of money, at the same time as it gives governments new and important powers over the regulation of the content and form of university education. And they have done so while saying the magic words of 'freedom' and 'choice'. Hey presto. Watch out for their next trick.

Tony Curzon Price:

First, let me say I agree with your assessment of the problems:

"Lots of things are wrong with our universities. The quality and the extent of teaching are variable. The system is under pressure from high numbers and low pay. University management is too often inexperienced and inept. Policy is driven by elite concerns to the detriment of most. Social, cultural and technological change have increased the number and the kinds of things there are to know, as well as the range of people that need to know them. Responding to all that needs careful thought. It needs a confident academic profession, thinking hard and engaging honestly in dialogue with other citizens."

I also am very aware that choice has usually meant, over the last 30 years, "let's just wash our hands of this and offer ourselves up defenceless to sophisticated producer interests". This certainly happened in the areas that I was closely involved in utility regulation. The notion of central government kite-marks "to inform students" fills me with horror.

But I cling on to the notion that choice – individual or collective – is a really critical part of empowerment. There is a lot wrong with the reforms and how they will get realised – we know how rapidly Westminster becomes colonised by cheque books and the promise of post-career directorships

– but I don't think we should decide that choice is at the heart of the problem.

Just to get clear on the principles, imagine we separate the choice issues from the affordability ones. So each student is given £30k to spend on education. If we're going to say that this is going to lead to bad outcomes, it seems to me there are three sets of reasons why it might be so:

1. Producers capture the market and offer educationally terrible products (your main hypothesis)
2. Students don't know what's good for them (which inspires the kite-mark style nannyism)
3. The process of choosing undermines the good in question (this seems to be some of the "marketisation" argument)

The first might happen. But the problem is not the choice. The problem is spineless, captured politics. I don't much like the tone of the second. It is true that students don't necessarily know what's good for them – who does? But I don't like the thought that their decisions should be directed from Westminster. Friends, family, secondary school, civil society, church, curiosity, media, television, accident ... these are the ways choices are made and surely these are the places that anyone caring about the type and quality of culture we pass on to the next generation ought to concentrate their efforts.

I always like the third reason as a criticism of any process – that the way you do something changes what you do. It is overlooked by most economists and mechanistic wonks.

But we've got to recognise that it is not in itself a substantive argument. There is no neutral process. The assumption about the loan/fee method of funding HE is that it will make students think only about making as much money as possible. That seems to be the heart of the "marketisation" critique. Actually I don't think it will universally have that effect. If you said to many young people something like the following:

"This philosophy degree will cost you about the same as a basic mobile phone subscription from the time you're done with it until you're 50; but it will enhance the quality of your life and will give you an ability to be an engaged member of society. It will probably give you a slightly better income than you could have earned without it, but you know, going into philosophy, that you're not doing it for the money."

I think that many would respond enthusiastically and would wear their hair-shirt with pride. Those that reject the argument and always saw education as a means to more money may well find more efficient institutions. But where then is the loss?

So the critique of marketisation needs more flesh. And not just the critique. So does the constructive alternative – as you agree, one doesn't really want to be cornered into defending the Higher Education Funding Council and its technocratic ways. In what way do the alternative models enhance what we make by the way in which it is made? What are the models?

These are not rhetorical questions. I agree entirely that education should not be about financial returns. I suspect that, except in vocational disciplines, where education is really like an apprenticeship, education in itself in fact doesn't enhance financial returns. Yet it is terribly important. So I agree with you that the last thing we want is commodified education. But I think that avoiding that is long, hard, patient work, much of it peripheral to education policy per se and has much to do with our wider politics, values and culture.

Alan Finlayson:

Tony, thanks for the thoughtful response – and thus also the opportunity to clarify some things.

I am not against 'choice'. My argument is that the choice being presented by Willets is illusory, a trick. Choice is not

what is on offer. The purpose of Willets' HE policy is to enable for-profit enterprises to expand into the UK Higher Education market. He wants to convert what has been a public good and a public service into a new source of profit for private companies. I do not think that this is an arguable claim. Pearson Education has just announced its intention to get into the market for degrees (see here) I don't think that they thought of this the day after the Commons vote. I think they have been planning it for sometime. I think that the Department for Business and Innovation knew all about it.

I think that Willets is wrong to do this on several counts. Firstly, because he and Cable are doing this without being explicit, without inviting the country to debate it and that is dishonest and unfair. Secondly, because I think that this will lead to an overall loss of national revenue (universities currently generate income for the country but under Willets' reforms such income will leave the country, going to overseas shareholders rather than being invested in our national educational and research infrastructure). Thirdly, because, as you also note, I think that the capitalist marketisation of Higher Education will lead to capture from producer interests and a decline in the quality of the Higher Education provided.

But I am not against choice. However, we need to be clear about how choices are going to be made and in this instance that means being clear on the answers to two questions: choice by whom and of what.

Choice by the individual student is not the only choice that matters. There are very good reasons for collective concerns about what universities do and do not do and it is potentially legitimate for the collective to act on those concerns. To be clear I don't think that collective concern should always outweigh individual needs and demands be they of students or academics. But the community has a necessary and legitimate interest in what young people do

and do not get to learn. That interest certainly is in part economic but it is also about culture, values, heritage, identity and more. Such matters hardly feature in the debate about fees and one effect of Willets' and Cable's policy is to remove them from the debate by turning Higher Education into an isolated contractual relationship between an individual student and an individual provider both of which are supposed to be thinking about nothing other than profit-maximising. This is a reduction of choice not its expansion.

Choice of what? Is the relevant level of choice the institutions, the departments, the courses, the modules, the subjects within the modules?

Students currently have a choice of institution. They apply to various institutions and for various courses. That choice is restricted, particularly by cost (more students now study from home because of the costs of living) and also by the entry requirements (although since attainment is so linked to how much was spent on secondary education this would seem to be a matter of cost also). I don't see how increasing fees and opening up the market to for-profit providers changes this. It seems to me likely to reduce it rather than expand it. For sure it will lead to variation in product – but that will be so as to sell to the varied parts of the market. There will be expensive degrees for rich people who want to go away to study, and have lots of activities arranged for them (a new kind of finishing school) and cheap degrees for those studying from home while holding down a job. I don't see how this represents empowered choice.

What if we actually took choice seriously? That would mean opening up degree programmes and subject areas. It would mean thinking about how a student of, say, Engineering, can also choose a supplementary course in, say, Mandarin or Ethics. Now, that might sound simple but in actual fact, to make that possible in most UK universities would require a change in institutional structures and

cultures and that in turn requires patience, thoughtful management etc.

What about choice within subject areas?

In many subjects students in their final year get to choose a topic of focused research – what if we expanded that, allowed students to set curricula, define the problems that they and their tutors might collectively work on? Might the students not only learn better but, in taking responsibility for themselves, in managing aspects of their study, might they not – instead of learning only how to be customers – gain experience in being reasonable and rational, to give and take, to listen and explain, to project design and manage? And aren't these skills that might be of use in their later lives at work, at home, in public and in private? All that can be done but it requires overall programmes designed to provide people with a good grounding in a field of study so that they can decide where and how to specialize and it requires adaptations in institutional structures and cultures.

The Willets' reforms have nothing to say about these kinds of things. They are not about expanding pedagogical expertise or promoting new kinds of interdisciplinary and open study. They are about selling it all off to BPP and Pearson and Kaplan.

The constructive alternatives, then, lie at the basic level. Instead of policy being shaped by very generalised dogmas it should start with thought about what actually happens in different subjects and different places, about what is needed in the context of our changing culture and about what university is; and with encouraging that thought to be wide and collective. That entails reforming university governance so that students are involved in different ways, faculty re-empowered (the last 25 years have seen power shift from classrooms of teachers and students to offices of auditors and marketers, a shift the Willets reforms will not reverse)

local and regional communities – all sorts of ‘stakeholder’ – involved.

Universities are currently caught in a limbo between public service and private selling. That limbo has been awful for students and staff and has led to all sorts of perverse incentives. Willets wants to resolve it by letting go of the public concerns and imposing the discipline of the market. I think we can resolve it by embracing the freedom and reason of democratisation.

Tony Curzon Price:

"There are very good reasons for collective concerns about what universities do and do not do and it is potentially legitimate for the collective to act on those concerns ... the community has a necessary and legitimate interest in what young people do and do not get to learn. That interest certainly is in part economic but it is also about culture, values, heritage, identity and more."

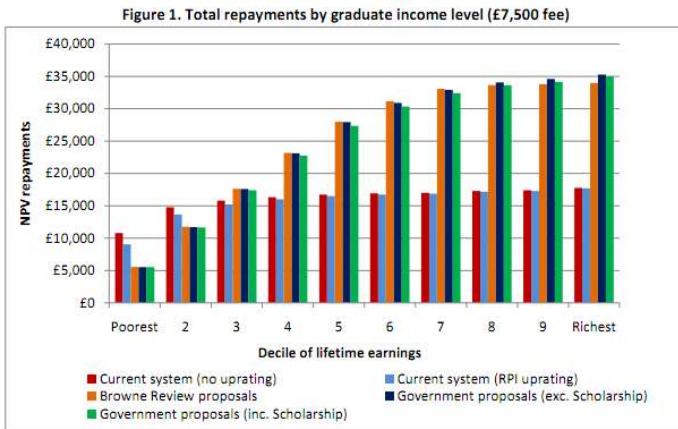
I agree with this (I think it is a version of my third reason for rejecting personal choice dogma – that the way you choose affects what you get).

My next question is: what should the institutions be for the community interests to express themselves? I think the old system failed to make the ultimate ends of education a community decision. I think that community interests in education need to be re-localised – handed back to local democratic control. But I wonder what you think are the right institutions to realise the right form of community choice.

"There will be expensive degrees for rich people who want to go away to study, and have lots of activities arranged for them (a new kind of finishing school) and cheap degrees for those studying from home while holding down a job. I don't see how this represents empowered choice."

Yes, but there will also be expensive degrees for the less well-off.

This graph is taken from the IFS report on the education reforms. It shows how much graduates will repay depending on their lifetime income levels. If you are not well off – in the poorest 20% of graduate incomes (which is higher than the poorest 20% of all incomes) – then you are paying back much less than under the current scheme which so many want a return to. If you are in the poorest 10% of graduates and you initially borrowed £25,000 for a 3-year course, you end up paying back just one fifth of that, £5,000. Under the current system, you would be paying back around £10,000 in the same circumstances.



Thinking just about loans and fees (and not EMA), I do not know what there isn't to like about the reforms from a distributional point of view compared to the current system. Peter Wilby has been onto this argument and it needs serious consideration.

There is a welcome redistributive aspect of the policy. And cheaper degrees while working does not sound to me like a bad option in many cases. These are not choices about ultimate ends – the grand collective choices – but they can be

fine tactical micro-choices and should be part of a sensible educational system.

"What if we actually took choice seriously?"

I agree that there are really exciting pedagogic and organisational aspects of choice. They require a lot of experimentation; people with ideas need to be backed by people with resources; experiments must be allowed to fail and good ones to be copied and modified. This was not a hallmark of the old system, I don't think. (Maybe I'm wrong – what do you think?) I am not sure that the Willetts system will be worse than the old in this respect – it does not preclude that experimentation (and might in some ways make it easier than it was under the old regime); but I agree that educational institutions need to be given more autonomy than they would get under the strict student/university contractual arrangement that the current system proposes.

"Instead of policy being shaped by very generalised dogmas it should start with thought about what actually happens in different subjects and different places, about what is needed in the context of our changing culture and about what university is; and with encouraging that thought to be wide and collective."

Again, I agree with this. But I would like to know what the institutional reforms are that will deliver this.

I suppose I am really trying to understand not your opposition, but the vehemence of your opposition. To me, the reforms seem to be a long way from what one would actually want for HE in England; but there are aspects that are quite welcome; and the moves I would really want to see – for example with re-localisation of education policy – involve a re-arrangement of power that, while very necessary, goes well beyond the educational sector.

Is it that you think that there will be contagion from BPP-style institutions to all others? I agree that this would be very unwelcome, but it seems to me the risks are slight. I think that the value of a real education is well recognised by individuals, families and communities and therefore BPP-type institutions will always be seen as either vocational – which is fine (what is wrong with training lawyers this way?) – or as a second-best.

Alan Finlayson:

Tony, thanks again. In response to your last two paragraphs, let me reiterate the most important parts of my argument. This will, I hope, make clear the ‘vehemence’ of my opposition.

The fees policy is not about fees. The motivation behind it is not to generate more income for universities, nor is it to save money and cut the deficit (although both are provided as justifications). It is partly about further applying market dogma. But it is mostly about enabling the privatisation of UK HE. That is one reason why the graduate tax was never going to be accepted. Such a hypothecated tax might generate income, save money etc. But it would only work in an HE system comprised of public and non-profit institutions. The coalition does not want an HE system comprised of public and non-profit institutions.

It is not that I think that there will be ‘contagion’ from BPP. I think that BPP (and now Pearson Education and others) will expand. I think that some currently public institutions will go private. I think that some currently public institutions will be bought up and others will close. I think that elements of the HE system (examinations, provision of some specific types of degree etc.) will become private and for-profit concerns. Over a period of time (10 years? 20 years?) what was a public good will have become wholly private. And then there will be no point in even

talking about localising or democratising or encouraging experimentation in universities. What they do will no longer be anybody's business except that of their shareholders. At the moment, as an academic employed in a public university, I have a responsibility to various parties including you. As of Sept 2012 I will not. I will have a responsibility only to my employer who contracts my services to sell them to students. And at some point in the future that employer will have a responsibility only to the shareholders.

In short, the tuitions fee policy is part of the 'Con-Lib con'. It is a trick to enable the government to take something part owned by everyone and give it to a few people who can then make money from it.

I hope that clarifies my point and explains my 'vehemence'.

It does not follow from this critique that I think the present system is perfect. I have already given some reasons to think that it isn't (and part of the problem is too much of the wrong kind of marketisation). That has led us to a discussion of alternative institutional arrangements. I don't have in my back pocket a blueprint for a democratic, progressive and quality HE system let alone for how to convince government, professionals, the public and students to implement it tomorrow. But to explore ways forward, we might think about how best to build on the Higher Education Academy and its efforts to promote academic teaching, as well as how to connect the ideal of a profession buried within it to the professional standards and values embodied in the union.

We might also think about some kind of national academy for university administration and management, even established training schemes. These could be open to the sorts of discussion and scrutiny of other public bodies (such

as the BBC) enabling them to become part of the national conversation.

Many universities already have a formal governing body that includes not only representatives of a students union, University and College Union etc. but also local authority reps etc. We could think about examining the roles such bodies are assigned in statutes and who else to require on them. Maybe an element of election? Maybe we should demand that local head teachers and local chambers of commerce be represented? That would bring us into the area of your concern with 're-localisation of education policy' and a 'rearrangement of power that, while very necessary, goes well beyond the educational sector'. But we'd also have to think about the fact that many universities are not local and quite properly operate at a national and international level.

At present, although curricula are not nationally defined (and it would be undesirable for them to be so) there are various subject-specific 'benchmark' criteria that are set and which Departments must show they are conforming to. These are developed by the QAA in partnership with subject-specific professional organisations and with 'the great and the good'. Perhaps the processes by which such things are developed could be opened out to include students, to include discussion at local levels etc. What would be important in all this would be the process more than the establishment of a once and for all specification of the 'ends' of HE; the enlarging of mentalities.

And then we'd need to think about the research funding process and the ways in which that has been and is being reformed to take account of wider public interest (the definition of which is not clear and which seems to many to steer research into primarily commercial directions).

There is no one-big-thing that I can propose. As I have said, part of my criticism of the coalition policy is that it is

driven by dogma disconnected from attention to or interest in the specifics of universities. But the main point of my critique is that the policy is intended to make discussions of the sort we are having pointless by taking the universities away from us. If unchecked, the policy Liberal Democrats and Conservatives have pushed through will mean that there will be no UK higher education system for us to think about, just various cost centres of different kinds, many of them belonging to corporations and shareholders with no interest in the UK at all.

Tony Curzon Price:

Alan, thank you for helping me get to the bottom of this. I think you've convinced me that the reforms are no good.

And this is not because there aren't lots of elements in them that I actually like: I have no trouble with students paying, with the welcome redistributive aspects, with a reduction in the number of 18-22 year-olds on three year humanities courses, and with lots of new private HE institutions. All that is fine.

But the point that convinced me is that this policy no longer leaves room for the difference between a public university and any other HE institution. By putting all these institutions on the same footing, I think you are right that there will be no distinctly public university whose ends, organisation and methods we could be arguing about. And that is a real loss. I have no idea how big that public university should be, but I agree that it was one of the really positive innovations of the nineteenth century that should be maintained. These reforms are akin to the loss of a species, not the change in balance of an ecosystem.

Alan Finlayson:

I think this is an excellent way of putting it: "These reforms are akin to the loss of a species, not the change in balance of an ecosystem". I think you have convinced me to think more

deeply about that ecosystem and ways in which its variety might be usefully increased. For instance, would it be possible to enable the creation of some kind of 'public-interest' but non-state HE institutions, in whose statutes certain commitments were established? This could enable the development of new 'variations of the species' – such as small colleges specialising in general upper-level education, rather than specialist public and corporate research?

This exchange originally appeared on openDemocracy.net in mid-December 2010.

Where are the conservatives, as the true history of education goes undefended?

Peter Johnson, openDemocracy

December's fascinating OurKingdom conversation between Alan Finlayson and Tony Curzon Price on the subject of the Government's higher education reforms crystallised into this:

“... there will be no distinctly public university whose ends, organisation and methods we could be arguing about.”

A factor behind this fear is the quiet opening of the door to the provision of higher education ‘services’ by for-profit organisations. An analogous policy is being formed for primary and secondary education. It's currently unthinkable that Whitehall would abandon the power to impose revenue and cost constraints. But the energy, transport, and telecommunications industries warn us that controlling the selling prices or profits in a competitive utility market does not of itself guarantee good services or value for money.

The trouble is that the good parts of both the higher and schools education policies are likely to be damaged by over-strong producer interests and demoralised or weak governance. And this, as Tony and Alan discussed, is just at odds with the idea of a public university or public (in the sense of publicly owned and governed) school. Reform is being driven forward on the premise that the only demands that matter are those of consumers and producers and the only proper supplier of resources to satisfy those demands is

the leviathan at the centre. This kind of reform dismisses, on principle, all other layers of activity as unproductive of that output known as an education.

But there is another view of education, both conservative and liberal, that neither party in the coalition (nor for that matter the main party in opposition) would recognise. It's a view that suggests that whether or not the reforms are declared a success in their own terms, simply attempting them risks destroying all that actually matters: the habits, cultures, and institutions that educate.

The conservative, though by no means Conservative, British political philosopher Michael Oakeshott considered an education "'liberal' because it is liberated from the distracting business of satisfying contingent wants" (*A Place of Learning*, 1975). A liberal education is a shared adventure in human self-understanding. Whether in the sciences or humanities, it entails the constant exploration and development of our culture.

Much earlier, in his wonderful and still pertinent 1950 essay *On the Idea of a University*, Oakeshott wrote this:

“...current talk about the ‘mission’ and the ‘function’ of a university goes rather over my head; I think I can understand what is intended, but it seems to me an unfortunate way of talking. It assumes that there is something called ‘a university’, a contrivance of some sort, something you could make another of tomorrow if you had enough money, of which it is sensible to ask, What is it for? And one of the criticisms of contemporary universities is that they are not as clear as they ought to be about their ‘function’. I am not at all surprised. There is plenty that might properly be criticized in our universities, but to quarrel with them because they are not clear about their ‘function’ is make a mistake about their character. A university is not a machine for achieving a particular purpose or producing a particular result; it is a manner of human activity.”

He warns of the risks of allowing universities to be judged or governed according to notions of ‘higher education’, ‘advanced training’ and so on – ideas that belong to a world of power, utility, exploitation, egoism, activity, and achievement. This world is impatient with whatever doesn’t contribute to its own purposes, and because it is rich and powerful, is apt to mould everything in its own image. Later he writes:

“The pursuit of learning, like every other great activity, is unavoidably conservative. A university is not like a dinghy which can be jiggled about to catch every transient breath of wind. The critics it should listen to are those who are interested in the pursuit of learning, not those who find a university imperfect because it is not something other than it is.”

Meaningful reform requires a thoughtful, serious, principled consideration of the things that people in fact do, and of the institutions that arise with that doing; what they are, what history and practices they embody, what relationships and ethical values they exhibit. Institutions are the habit and accumulated knowledge of immemorial human conversations, often not directed to ends, and healthy institutions are less self-regulating in a legal or commercial sense than self-sustaining or self-healing. In this view, reform undertaken as a constructive activity designed to achieve certain pre-determined ends is just a categorical mistake: it misunderstands the nature of the things being reformed and will very likely damage, if not destroy, precisely what we wish to protect.”

But where are our conservatives now? For many years (I’d say since late Thatcher, but the exact date is unimportant), there has been no conservative party in the UK. Being a Conservative has usually meant appealing to die-hard tendencies on immigration, the EU, the military, tax, punishment, business, and so on, but not in a conservative

way. Right-wing perhaps, but not conservative. Conservatives in other parties likewise seem to have died out.

This is only partly about an establishment that would rather not rock the boat. As well as the change itself, the way change happens is important. Should it, where possible, emerge freely, organically and unpredictably through the subtle interactions of complex people in complex institutional relationships, or does change always require a blueprint, a rationally-determined idea of the end-point, a principle, an objective, milestones? As Michael Kenny wrote in the *OurKingdom* debate on the Big Society, Oakeshott tells us that civilised and civilising social exchange simply can't be reproduced by design.

In fact, all our political parties are now fully paid up members of a new establishment that, as in Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, wants to change everything so that everything should stay the same. This upheaving to no effect is as far from being conservative as it is possible to be. Institutions are casually ripped apart and the pieces glued back together, following some plan in the name of progress or modernisation, whilst their – and our – accumulated practice and culture blow away on the wind like chaff.

The conservative instinct is a delicate thing inseparable from the customs and practice of the institutions it cares about. It can no more be rustled up by rational design than a good judiciary or a good cricket team. The disappearance of a serious conservative movement in the UK and its replacement in all political parties by the kind of rationalism that aims to construct a better world from policy papers and dismembered symbols is a cultural disaster for our country. Will the conservatives please stand up?

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<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/peter-johnson/is-there-conservative-in-house-in-clash-over-uks-universities-no-party-defe>

Universities should be more inventive than the profit motive

Rosemary Bechler, openDemocracy

Peter Johnson's lament for 'the university' conjures up a lost age and it will be hard for any reader however much they disagree not to feel a real stab of nostalgia. There must have been an age when a scholar was a scholar and knew his classics; when a priest knew what it meant to be a holy man and preferred prayer to pederasty; when a regular workingman felt solidarity instinctively and did a hard day's labour taking pride in his skills; when an employer cared for his company and not just profits; when the House of Commons debated; when MPs were honoured for being, well, honourable; a time when, even if they were difficult as they often were, women knew their place; and when, as he says, you didn't ask what is a university for, let alone for goodness sake what might be its function! It was what it was: a university.

The first thing to say is that it is very easy to mock the expression of that sentiment now, in our own time. It expressed the presumption of a period that held that our governing institutions were organic not conceived, inherited not made, and could therefore be fought for and died for with the assurance that they expressed what we are.

Within this worldview the 'meaning' of the university too was like the meaning of life – both were God given. And, of course, the traditional university that Peter conjures up was originally a clerical institution. The education it provided

was general and not limited to those intending to be priests. But all praised it together at evening song.

We cannot return to this time. We cannot even half return to it. We are all too conscious that our institutions are socially made. If they are not to be justified by market competition they still have to be justified somehow or they will crumble from lack of inner-belief. For while Peter complains about what is being imposed on the universities from outside – and rightly so – they have no inner comeback.

You can see in some of the intense debates about the purpose of education that have exploded amongst the UK's latest student population, the rejection of the 'you-may-want-to-feel-solid-but you-must-melt-into-air' imperatives of the global marketplace. This places them on the side of those who see part of the point at least about learning being for its own sake. Like self-discovery this can't know the 'output' it wants beforehand, let alone demand a metric of its average annual salary after one year, as the Browne Report envisages. This puts the spirit of the student movement on the conservative side against market forces, hence the delicious irony of Peter's intervention. Who, in the clash, are the conservatives?

But the dominant ideology of the student protest seems to be a traditional socialist one thoroughly opposed to any tradition except its own. For this conservatism and tribalism there surely is no serious future apart from its remarkable capacity to preserve and reproduce itself unchanged. I wish all socialists would read articles like Tom Nairn's new reflection on Ernest Gellner as well as the work of Gellner and Tom himself (e.g. *The English Postman*). But the thrust of the argument – that people have to attach themselves to their communities and that globalisation generates differentiation – suggests that they won't. Cass Sunstein observed the phenomenon that people will use the web to read what they already agree with and work around the

harder-to-combat objections to their world-view, leaving them to be characterised as beyond the pale by their community's spiritual gatekeepers.

Tom argues in Gellner's footsteps that "particularity" is the essential characteristic of human life, hence the failure of big theories of capitalism and globalisation. The global corporations however have adapted to this all too well, with their massive investment in differentiated market research, product placement and the manipulation of choice.

It seems to me that any political and cultural way forward has to develop forms and means of deliberation that are not alienated from the public. Paul Hirst (who was one of the student activists when Leicester University was occupied in 1968) was perhaps the first thinker to argue for the importance of the nation state and against the theorists of globalization, while insisting all the while that the nation was the primary arena for democracy – for representing 'who we are' in the world as a whole in the ongoing transformation we call modernity. But what he realised was that this democratic nation had to be filled with secondary, local arenas that it protected and sustained while national politics itself needs to be thoroughly democratised with proportional voting and a democratic constitution.

There is no way back to Peter Johnson's organic university. We need universities that are conscious of their place and role, are accountable for what they do and answerable for what they fail to achieve, above all to their students and staff but also to society as a whole. If the mechanism for achieving this is not to be the market, or at least not exclusively the market, then it has to be democracy. Only, clearly, not democracy as we know it.

This is where, it seems to me as an outsider observing the student debates, the arguments over whether or not it is a leaderless movement are so important. In the narrow sense

there are obviously leaders, opinion formers, organisers, prime movers and those who want to listen, follow and join in without speaking or suggesting. And we are all aware of the tyranny of uncodified, informal, and supposedly structureless syndicates! These are yet another form of the 'organic' denying and masking the advantages for those who run things behind the scenes (giving them power without responsibility).

The fundamental challenge thrown up by the idea of a leaderless movement, however, goes wider than this. The question it raises is whether there is an alternative way of running things for everybody. Can we develop ways and means of deliberation that release energy, permit and encourage invention and exploration, and return to assess consensus and assent? Does the way forward does not have to be decided by a cabinet or committee whose immediate concern after it has taken a decision is who is for it? and who against? and how will troublemakers be managed? At the moment it always is. Unlike the market, politics in capitalist societies is all about closure and tribalism. The left is as prone to the cultivation of these kinds of hatreds as the right. If the market is ever to be governed for the good of society as a whole, it needs a democracy of deliberation that is even more open, inventive and energetic than the profit motive.

This article originally appeared in [openDemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net), 6 January 2011.
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/rosemary-bechler/higher-education-debate-exposes-need-for-new-approach-to-social-organisa>

I defied the Whips and voted against my government

Trevor Smith, openDemocracy

The previous Labour government commissioned the Browne Report on the future funding of higher education. It was debated in the Lords on 27 October; I raised three main objections. On 14 November the Coalition introduced legislation to implement the Browne proposals with one or two modifications. To be consistent with my earlier objections, I felt obliged for the first time to defy a three-line Whip and vote against the legislation.

Many have pointed to the problem of inter-generational inequality built into the Browne proposals. I won't cover this issue here. The other two objections I set out focus on the unintended consequences of Browne for the future structure of the higher education sector. These were inherent in his very restricted terms of reference.

First, I warned that among top-tier institutions, there would be massive rationalisation and re-structuring. Many Russell Group universities have closed loss-making departments, including chemistry, physics and foreign languages over the past decade. This trend will now continue apace. Smaller specialist areas such as palaeontology, oceanography and architecture will be excised from the curriculum. What will happen to conservatoires is still undecided. The erstwhile cross-subsidisation of disciplines, essential to the whole 'ecology' of a university, is being killed off, as vice-chancellors are forced to balance the books by focussing their 'offerings' on courses that maximise 'returns'.

Higher Education institutions that are solely or mainly based on the social sciences or humanities may well privatise

themselves: bereft of publicly-funded teaching support there is every reason for LSE, SOAS, the Courtauld Institute, the London University of the Arts and the like to declare independence from the state. Top-tier ones will seek to recruit even more foreign, particularly non-EU, students.

Second-tier higher education institutions will be decimated, leading to closures and mergers. They may benefit from more students choosing their local one and living at home but this will not prevent attrition in this sector.

To offset the full effect of being driven by market forces I proposed an Oxburgh-type review of all areas of study to promote a rational distribution of subjects nation-wide (Lord Oxburgh rationalised the provision of geology thirty-odd years ago). In addition, I called for the introduction of a three-tier tertiary system in each region of the kind Clark Kerr invented for California in the mid-20th century. This would make for a coherent system of higher education provision, offering greater participation while maintaining quality research.

These and other considerations ought ideally to be examined by a major Robbins-type inquiry. The piecemeal approach adopted by successive governments over the past three decades is highly unsatisfactory. It will distort higher education across the UK, leaving it unrecognisable.

I have never voted against my party's three line Whip before. But in this case, I could do nothing else. The university system and higher education across Britain badly need change but my government's reforms will make them worse.

Trevor Smith is the Liberal Democrat working peer; he is the former vice-chancellor of the University of Ulster. This article originally appeared on openDemocracy.net, 17 December 2010. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/trevor-smith/why-i-defied-whips-and-voted-against-my-government%E2%80%99s-education-policy>

THE UNDER 19S

The Education Maintenance Allowance and the electorally disenfranchised

It was a striking aspect of the student demonstrations in London that the presence on the streets was not, despite right-wing commentators' suggestions to the contrary, one composed of privileged middle-class undergraduates, dilettantes from Oxbridge aged 18-21. Because, along with the stratospheric tuition fees rise, the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition had announced the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), a means-tested government stipend which had seen an increase in the numbers of students from poorer backgrounds staying on in post-16 education. With its abolition, many under 18s from poorer backgrounds would simply not be able to afford to stay on to do A levels – at a time of record-breaking youth unemployment, no less. To make matters worse, these young people had not even had the right to vote for the coalition that was currently selling their futures down the river – though of course, they were old enough to pay taxes to it. “We’re from the slums of London, how do they expect us to pay £9,000 for uni fees, and no EMA... What’s stopping us from doing drug deals on the streets anymore?” one protesting teenager asked the BBC.

Whether through UK Uncut actions or at the student demonstrations, a generation of young people barely old enough to remember Tony Blair were learning very quickly about political protest, and risking detention to exercise their democratic rights to do so.

The real nature of the EMA debate

Anthony Painter, Left Foot Forward

In a tweet last week, the director of Policy Exchange, Neil O'Brien, described Education Maintenance Allowances as 'one of the least effective policies' ever. In essence, he was referring to the so-called 'deadweight loss' of the policy. The basis for this charge is a survey conducted by the National Foundation of Educational Research on behalf of the Department for Education.

It found that 88 per cent of EMA recipients would have stayed on anyway without the income support. Government ministers and acolytes have leapt on the findings. Game, set, and match EMA abolitionists?

Not so fast. The 'deadweight' argument is actually an exceedingly misleading one. Any major public policy will have a degree of 'deadweight', i.e. people who receive a benefit or service but don't 'need' it. Let's take a simple example. Millions of us have GP check ups every single year.

However, only a tiny proportion of us have a serious illness that is uncovered in the consultation process. Using the logic of the Government and its supporters, given the huge 'deadweight' of GP check-ups, the funding should be discontinued.

Imagine if Coca Cola decided that only 12 per cent of its advertising spend led to people buying its product. Would it then cut its advertising budget by 88% in order to eliminate deadweight? Of course not. It would be impossible to target the reduced budget on those who would have a propensity to buy a can of Coke if they saw an ad for the soft drink.

So the ‘deadweight’ argument is an utterly nonsensical one – albeit one that is draped in the language of common sense. If we accept it as a way of evaluating the effectiveness of a policy then almost all public policy interventions fall apart: common education, national health, universal welfare, public transport, and so on. It is toxic and it is wrong.

There are two genuine questions when it comes to assessing the success of a policy: does it work and is there a cheaper way of securing the same outcomes? On both these counts EMA stacks up well.

The most useful report in assessing the success of EMA has been published by the IFS. It finds that, in areas piloting EMA, participation rates for recipients of the payment increased by up to 8.1% for females (at age 17) and 5.5% for males (4.5% at 17). It isn’t clear from the report what the baseline (pre EMA) participation for EMA recipients is but a not unreasonable assumption would be that in the pilot areas it was 40% (for comparison the IFS report shows that participation in full time education for 17-year-old females who were eligible for free school meals was 44%). This would imply that EMA resulted in a 20% increase in participation for females and 14% for males.

A policy that increases participation amongst those groups most prone to chronic underachievement by somewhere in the 12% (according to the DfE survey) to 20% range is a strong policy. Moreover, with changes, i.e. cuts, to benefits elsewhere – housing benefit etc – the participation impact of EMA would increase if it remained in place. Families are more likely to be comfortable about a 16-18 year-old kid (or two!) staying in full-time education with the EMA.

Its impact on educational outcomes is similarly significant. The 157 Group of Colleges has published research based on the experience of its constituent members (mainly large, inner city colleges.) For example, students at Lambeth

College who receive the EMA are 13% more likely to pass their courses than those who do not.

When you bear in mind that these students are more deprived than non-recipients, this outcome is remarkable. Other colleges report similar impacts and this is supported by the IFS research which, for example, shows a 6.2% increased likelihood of black females in EMA pilot areas receiving a full level 3 (equivalent to 2 A Levels).

There will be anything from 72,000 to 120,000 students who would not be in education if EMA did not exist based on extrapolation using the participation rates calculated above and the total number receiving EMA. What would these students be doing if they were not in school or college?

For each one who ends up as a NEET, i.e. not in a job as we know they won't be in education or training, it will cost the public purse £56,300 over their lifetime according to York University research conducted on behalf of the Audit Commission. If just 18,000 or so end up workless then EMA pays for itself.

Finally, let's consider the alternative policy – to invest £50million in hardship funds instead of £500million in EMA. It's important to state that £50million is better than nothing! And if it were £100million, that would be even better. But just as Coca-Cola can't eliminate its 'deadweight' advertising, this scheme will impact significantly those in need as well as those who could do without.

Colleges and schools will have to decide upon who are the worthy recipients. How can they? There is no way to identify a genuinely needy case. There is also a moral hazard here- it provides an incentive for students to threaten to drop out or claim that they will not attend without hardship support. So the alternative becomes a bit of a scattergun.

So the policy choice is quite simple. It is not between a wasteful failure with 'deadweight' and a targeted efficient

alternative. It's actually the complete opposite. It's between a policy that works but is more expensive (which is what enables it to work!) though pays for itself and a policy that, while it does some good, will be nowhere near as effective.

The coalition has chosen the latter but they should be under no illusion of the significant costs to individuals, educational attainment, social mobility, and the public purse in the long term as a result. Just let us be clear about the real nature of the choice.

IFS shoots coalition's deadweight argument to pieces

Using a new fangled technique – called cost-benefit analysis or something – the Institute for Fiscal Studies yesterday finally shot to pieces the coalition's arguments in favour of abolishing Education Maintenance Allowance. It is a decision not based on sensible public policy; it is quite simply about cutting come what may. They reached for any argument possible in the process hence the peculiar and, credit where credit's due, original use of the 'deadweight' argument. It's just not a good way to assess the impact of programmes and investment – at all.

Last week, I confronted the 'deadweight loss' argument which the Government claims is 88 per cent based on a survey that was conducted on its behalf. My argument was that a whole swathe of public policy interventions would be discontinued if this were the test. Let's not get into a statistical to and fro.

In fact, let's play a game. How many policy areas can you think of where there is large degree of 'deadweight'? There will be dozens and dozens.

My opening shot was GP check-ups (the vast majority would pay for health check-ups if the government didn't so that's the 'deadweight'). The IFS came up with two more: the government's policy to support start-up businesses

outside the south-east which arguably has a deadweight of 96 per cent and child benefit payments to the families of kids over 16. Anyone else for the 'deadweight' game?

The IFS research goes further. Not only does it find that EMA improves participation and attainment – its central objectives – but it pays for itself. Improved qualifications lead to improved wages which means more growth and more taxes. And when the £56,000 lifetime cost per NEET is taken into account also EMA, on a balanced cost-benefit analysis, starts to look like a rather good policy.

The IFS findings understate the impact that colleges are finding on participation and attainment where success rates (which is retention multiplied by achievement) in excess of 5 per cent above college averages are often reported for recipients of EMA.

Hot on the heels of EMA abolition comes the Skills Funding Agency's 'Guidance note 6' also published yesterday. Sounds relatively innocuous doesn't it? If anything the changes to the funding of further education contained with the note are more damaging to the least advantaged than even EMA. From a policy standpoint it is also perplexing as it will evidently hold back active welfare policy and, yes, social mobility.

The real horrors are in section 13. Fee remission will be discontinued for the following over-24-year-old groups (with the exception of those going for a GCSE equivalent level 2 qualification):

- - Those in receipt of Council Tax Benefit
- - Those in receipt of Housing Benefit
- - Those in receipt of Income Support
- - Those in receipt of Working Tax Credit
- - Those in receipt of Pension Credit
- - Those in receipt of contribution-based ESA (unless in the Work Related Activity Group)

- - The unwaged dependants (as defined by the Department for Work and Pensions) of those listed above.

The very first paragraph of the note states: “This reform is founded on the principles of fairness, shared responsibility and greater freedom: Fairness means supporting those in need, including prioritising young adults; the unemployed on active benefits; and those without basic literacy and numeracy skills.”

How on earth can this be seen to be fair, share responsibility, and provide for greater freedom? This is a continuation of this coalition’s nasty habit of saying it is doing one thing while actually doing the diametric opposite.

A qualification is not only a way to become more active in life, it provides work opportunities and helps an individual keep work once they have it. The IFS hasn’t done one of those new fangled cost-benefit things on this policy. If they did I am almost certain the impact would be enormous. Quite why the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Treasury were willing to allow this policy through is bizarre. For the individuals impacted they are now faced with a £2,000+ charge for a standard full-time qualification. It is just not going to happen.

EMA was just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the impact on the least advantaged of the myriad of changes to the funding of skills. It is far worse than the abolition of EMA alone. All there is left to do is plead. Yes, plead to Vince Cable. Please do not do this. It makes no sense. It will wreck lives. It will hold people on benefits and they will increasingly suffer there. Please revisit these policies immediately. That’s what it has come to – pleading.

Anthony Painter is a writer and political commentator. Originally published as two separate posts on leftfootforward.org, 9 and 15 December 2010
<http://www.leftfootforward.org/2010/12/the-real-nature-of-the-educational-maintenance-allowance-debate/> <http://www.leftfootforward.org/2010/12/ifs-shoots-ema-cuts-argument-to-pieces/>

EMA Stories: My Brother, Charlie Martin

Ben Martin

Though the student movement ultimately failed to prevent the rise in tuition fees passing through Parliament, something larger grew from the fire – a new generation of young activists, some as young as 14.

It will be, ultimately, those who suffer. With this in mind, I contacted my younger brother, Charlie Martin, to discuss his plans for higher education, and more specifically how the now scrapped Education Maintenance Allowance has helped him as a college student.

Charlie, 17, lives in Barrow in Furness, a less than aspirational town on the southern tip of Cumbria. It relies heavily on its status as an industrial hub of the northwest. BAE systems, which produce the UK's fleet of Vanguard nuclear submarines, are the town's largest employer, providing jobs for 28% of its 70,000 population.

Charlie, in his second year of college, studies A2 level courses in Biology and Business Studies, and AS levels in Law and Geography. A good, diverse selection that would – alongside his bright and intelligent nature – guarantee him the pick of any degree course he set his mind to.

Coming from a poorer background than some, Charlie has been entitled to the New Labour legacy of EMA, or Education Maintenance Allowance. A means tested scheme devised to make college education more attractive to students from poorer backgrounds, EMA awards students £10, £20, or £30 per week for perfect attendance, with the

promise of Christmas and Easter bonuses of up to £100 if attendance has been above average throughout the term.

Alas, as part of the enormous slashes in Higher Education spending (from the 0.7% it currently is – one of the lowest in the developed world), EMA is going the way of the dodo.

Katherine Birbalsingh, British teacher and darling of the pre-election Tory conferences, used a poorly argued and ill-thought-out blog on the Daily Telegraph website to state that EMA is no more than a bribe for problem students to attend college, and ultimately ruin it for the ‘good students’. She even went as far as to attack those students collecting payments as “goons”.

Now, of course, not every student uses their EMA allowance as intended – but the coalition ministers using this argument should think twice before lecturing their public on following through with intentions.

I asked Charlie if receiving EMA payments was an incentive to go to college, or merely a bonus for being there.

“EMA was originally a good incentive for me to go to college, as, liking money and not really appreciating academic stuff as much, it seemed an extra reason to go.

“But I’m glad I did, as I really appreciate how much better off I will be with some further education under my belt.

“If I didn’t go to college, I could have already done a year’s training and be earning over £10,000 per annum with yearly pay rises. Being young and wanting a lot of money this would have made the prospect of work very appealing.”

I put Birbalsingh’s charges to him, and asked how they made him feel.

“There might be some truth in what she said, but for those kids who did see it as a bribe, I think they’re glad they did, as they appreciate how much further education has done for

their future career prospects – with or without going on to University.”

Charlie is entering the final stages of his A levels, and is optimistic about the future.

“[I’m] hoping to secure an apprenticeship with either BT or BAE. This will put me on a starting wage of £15,000 minimum and I will be sent to university for free one day a week.”

As his brother, I know that his outlook would not be as rosy had he not enrolled and worked for a good start in life.

As a member of my family, I know that it would not have been nearly as easy for him, or my mother, without that £30 a week.

As a student in their final year of university, I count myself lucky to have lived through a time that offered greater opportunity, and I resolve to do more than just stare at the bonfire of our public services and mutter *Vale*.

Ben Martin is a political activist, and studies Journalism at Bournemouth University.

EMA Stories: An umbilical cord to education

Ben Braithwaite

The abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) will slash a vital umbilical cord to some of the poorest young people in this country. Though I've done little compared to the many student activists who have worked tirelessly for the anti-cuts cause, I've spoken to many people in my small, specialty college in inner-city Leeds. I've tried to agitate, to encourage people to protest against what is going on. I've spoken to teachers who have multiple students who rely on EMA to afford transportation to the college, now threatened with the prospect of dropping out. I also met pockets of apathy. 'I don't get EMA, why should I care?' Ultimately I believe this lack of solidarity, which requires empathy and understanding, is the reason the axing of EMA has not been more widely opposed than it has.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, a respected think-tank, has several good reasons to care about EMA, even if you don't receive it or know anyone who does. In a study they found that the cost of EMA, at £560m a year, is exceeded by the economic benefit of increased educational attendance. They also make other observations I can attest to, that students "who receive EMA and would have stayed in education regardless of it might still benefit educationally through other channels: for example through better attendance, or more study time as a result of not having to take on a part-time job."

My personal situation is one story amongst thousands that reflect this. I live in a town on the periphery of Leeds. I was bullied at the local high school and their sixth form did not

offer what I wanted to study. I travel by train every day, because it is cheaper than the bus, though train fare increases for 2011 have been announced. I am not eligible, as a 19-year-old, for the discount fare card my local travel authority offers. My mother, whom I live with, has recently divorced and had to re-mortgage, leaving the family with less money than ever. My stepfather recently accepted a pay cut to keep his job. Walking into the city takes an hour and a half, and whilst that isn't beyond my physical capabilities like it perhaps is for other students, 3 hours a day spent travelling would cumulatively rob me of a lot of time I need to spend doing college work. I don't have a part time job, partly for the same reason, but partly because my history of depression makes me less than an ideal employee (people often forget that fatigue and sleep problems are common symptoms). I study graphic design, a subject which requires a considerable amount of printing, and though my college is generous, it does not cover all material costs.

I'm merely one individual, but my story is far from unique. Our financial situations are affected by a multitude of factors, and every EMA claimant will have a story of their own. Understanding and listening to these stories, and considering what it is like to be in these situations, is the key to appreciating why the loss of EMA is a critical error. I don't think that anyone deserves to be robbed of their potential by the nebulous insistence that 'we're all in it together' when it's evident that the bankers are substantially less 'in it' than our country's youth. I believe a majority of the public would be inclined to agree.

Ben Braithwaite is a student at Leeds College of Art and Design.

We are not the Topshop generation

Anna Mason, UK Uncut



People's surprise when I tell them that I'm balancing studying for my GCSEs with actively fighting the recently announced public sector cuts never fails to shock me. After all, the student demonstrations that were recently held nationwide, when it was announced that the ConDem government was pushing for an increase in tuition fees, throwing the life plans of many young people into uncertainty, received widespread media attention. The protests were one of the main reasons for the gap between the majority voting in favour of the fees rise, and minority voting against the fees rise being slashed by 75% – proving that not only do teenagers have a voice, but we are being listened to, especially when we're fighting to defend our rights.

I've been interested in politics for as long as I can remember. My dad was involved in politics and often took me along to Stop The War meetings and demonstrations all over the country, encouraging me to develop my own political opinions. However, when he left England for work when I was 14, I became less involved, until this September, when, furious over the Tory's plans to cut NHS funding, I went to the demonstration in Birmingham outside the Conservative Party Conference. There I met the wonderful Anna (@thespyglass) on the bus, who told me Twitter helped her get involved in political events. I joined immediately, and it's become my main platform for finding out about new events, and planning them as well. It's also how I found out about UK Uncut.

The appeal of UK Uncut is obvious, not only does it oppose the cuts that will effect every section of society, particularly the most vulnerable, but it also provides a solution to the cuts: getting the money back from the big businesses like Arcadia and HSBC who have taken it from the tax-payers' pockets. The direct action protests are creative, effective and, perhaps most importantly (for me at least), not violent. Despite what some newspapers and David Cameron would have you believe, the majority of people my age do realise that smashing up war monuments and throwing fire extinguishers off tall buildings is not the most effective way to get people to empathise with us.

Also, UK Uncut is easy to get involved in. You can post an event on the website just a week in advance and people will come along and join you, regardless of who you are: with social networking being such a key part of spreading the message, it's likely that someone will let you know they'll be joining you within hours. The movement is snowballing, and everyone from OAPs to housewives to GCSE students like me are being heard, with over 50 events across the country held yesterday. It doesn't matter where you live, anyone can

stand on the front line and oppose the tax avoidance and Tory cuts that are damaging our public sector.

I sometimes question whether this is the right time of life for me to be so politically active, especially when I'm in the run up to so many important exams, but the way things are going I'm not going to be able to get into university anyway, regardless of exam results, and my doubts never last long. Although it did worry me when I arrived home from the Pay Day warm-up protest I'd organised on Thursday to revise for the French GCSE I had the next day, to find the majority of my anxieties had lifted – I was more worried about people turning up and what I'd say to *The Guardian* than I was about doing well in an important exam. Whilst some people in my year at school do think it's weird that, at the weekend, they're getting off with people at parties whilst the only parties I'm gossiping about are the political ones, I'm greeted with support everywhere I go, my friends think it's really interesting, and even my teachers are more likely to wish me good luck than send disapproving glances my way. I really hope that other people in a similar situation as me are just as lucky.

Because it's not just me. I'm certain there are loads of other 15-year-olds across the country who are fuming about the way the politicians, whose university educations were paid for by our parents and grandparents, aren't seeing us as capable people with bright futures but merely as drains on society. No, we are the future, and we are fighting for our future, not because we want to but because we need to: because we're mad as hell and people need to know about it. Of course it's difficult but for me and the hundreds of other teenagers who think like me sitting down and taking it is simply not an option.

Anna Mason is 15 and a member of Liverpool Uncut. This originally appeared on UK Uncut's 'Big Society Revenue & Customs' blog on 29 December 2010 >
<http://www.ukuncut.org.uk/blog/we-are-not-the-topshop-generation>

Physically sick

Tasha Bell

Physically sick. How many times have I heard that phrase before? And each time I associated it with melodrama, a tool to heighten the situation; but now I'm rushing away from the crowd – away from my friends – bending over readying myself. Nothing happens. Of course nothing happens, I haven't eaten anything today.

My throat is sore and my mouth is dry. My tummy feels like it's been turned upside down and my legs won't stop shaking. I'm back in the crowd now. Back on the front line. And they're still pushing. They won't stop.

“Get back! Geettt Backkkk!” They're shouting at us. It's like they're not individuals but something more mechanical... like robots. They start pushing us back and his shield is digging into my ribs. There's screaming and spitting, and we're screaming and crying and... where are my friends? I'm turning around to search the crowds now for my friends. But they're right behind. The same shield digs into my back and I can't help but join in on the pained screams that keep shooting up only to be squashed back down by the brunt of their orders. I turn back round to face them holding Ellie's hand and Sam's arms are wrapped around my waist so that we don't get separated.

“Please stop! You're hurting us! Please... just listen to me.” I'm begging, but his eyes are stony, emotionless, and he just shouts at me to get back.

Just as suddenly the police line clears. They're all running to the left. Where are they going? What's happening? Are we free...? The screams increase as the crowd panics at the change and we are scattering in all directions. I can see the

horses now, huge, (are they scared too?), I'm running, we're all running. But there's nowhere to run. I turn round and the horses have stopped. There's a boy in front of them. Ellie grabs hold of my hand again and I grab hold of Sam's. We're walking backwards, while the horses trot forwards, the fluorescent yellow on top of them forcing us back. Callum and Jack are next to us, but I can't see Ben. Suddenly he's on the ground, and the horses encircle him. "Ben! Get up!" we try to rush forward. He's getting up, he's standing up now. They're circling him, closing in. He's gonna get hurt. We manage to slip between the horses and we're next to him, surrounding him, we make a line in front of him and we're screaming at them to stop. I'm standing there with my arms out. I'm a girl... they won't hurt me.

"I'm sixteen! Stop pushing us. There's nowhere to go!" But I seem to be invisible because they can't see me. They don't hear my screams... I don't have a voice. I'm just an invisible being in an invisible line of beings. We've already established that.

But one of them looks. He's heard me, he's seen me. He's still pushing me backwards and there's nowhere for us to go. "You're crushing us. Please I'm sixteen."

Suddenly six of them rush forward and it's happening too quickly. They've got hold of me and Ellie and they're pulling us backwards towards them. They're pulling me by the hood of my coat and two of them have their hands on my arms. I can see them pulling Ellie back, and they drag her back behind the line. The crowd are pulling me back now, and they've let go, somehow I've landed on the ground but I'm being picked back up by the crowd.

"Are you okay?" Callum's asking me. "They've got Ellie" Sam says, and it's true because I can't see her anymore.

By now we're back to the beginning again. They've pushed us from the top of the road to the bottom, using their thick

lines, their horses and their batons. The crowd has thickened, and now I'm not on the front line anymore I'm deep in the middle. I have no control. I can feel my phone vibrating and I'm trying to move my arm to get it but I can't. I can't move anything because the bodies around me are so tight now that I can feel myself being squashed and I'm catching my breath. They've kettled us, packed like sardines, and there's nowhere to move because there's so many of us, but they're not going to stop. They're not riot police, they're TSG and they're not trained to stop until the last man, woman, or child standing is down. The crowd tries to scatter but they're part of the crowd now and it feels like they're attacking all of us.

I can sense Sam behind me, and I feel safer for it, but I'm still petrified. Now we're on the pavement, and I can't tell which screams are mine and which aren't any more. I'm pushed up against a smashed up phone box and I try to turn around to see what's happening.

"Get on the wall! Get up onto the wall. They can't get us there." And we surge as a body forward, to where it is covered with photographers. I clamber up and others come up behind me and we walk along it to where there's space.

Sam's in front of us and a police man climbs up onto the wall separating us with his baton raised. I can feel the tears spring to my eyes. Not again.

"Oh please no! Please we're not doing anything. We just want to be safe please don't hurt us" I can hear myself pleading.

"Get down! Get down!" he says and he pushes the boys down. I bend my knees readying myself to jump down, and Ben has his hand out ready to help me, but just as I'm about to do it he nudges me from behind and I only just manage to land on my feet.

“Hurry up” he snaps to us. “They’re the last ones” he shouts to his mate. The man at the end of the police line is ordering us forwards directing us between the space. We run through it and I turn behind to look back, the gap is closing up. I can see everyone else on the other side, and I can hear the screams. I stay looking at where the gap had just been. We are the last ones.

Tasha Bell is 16 years old and a pupil at Camden School for Girls.

THE STATE AND VIOLENCE

If any illustration were needed of the establishment's relationship with the democratic right to protest, it came on #dayx3. As the tuition fees bill was passed, the Metropolitan Police kettled protesters in Parliament Square and on Westminster Bridge for eight hours. The next day's newspapers ignored the horrors of the kettle, choosing instead to regard the brief scare encountered by Prince Charles the Duchess of Cornwall as the day's only story. In the parliamentary debate later that day, Home Secretary Theresa May reiterated in the House of Commons three times that there had been no kettle in Parliament Square – regurgitating, no doubt, the information passed to her by the Met.

Tied up in this web of establishment self-preservation is a key myth: unlike those hot-headed foreigners, British people “just don't do” protest, proceeding with calm, Whiggish decorum – though the entire history of progress and change in this country proves otherwise.

As James Butler writes, “the rotting sump of hereditary privilege” still presides over this sceptred isle. Is it any wonder that this government's ideological cuts target the poorest members of society, when 18 of the 23 members of the cabinet are millionaires? Yet Butler's phrase should not lull us into thinking the establishment is not canny in its ability to adapt to new threats to its power: and in the tactical brutality of the Police kettle, we have its newest incarnation. It is up to us – as it has been throughout British history – to stay one step ahead.

Riotous Protest – an English tradition

Daniel Trilling, New Statesman

"Drum and bass is playing and the beer is open." That was how the Sky News presenter Kay Burley ended a report on the student protests of 10 November, which culminated in the invasion of Tory HQ on Millbank in central London. The affected horror and banal sensationalism of her words encapsulate the mainstream media's reaction to the day's events.

The next morning, almost every national newspaper published an identical photograph of a masked man kicking at one of the plate glass windows that lined the ground floor of the building. (A wider crop of the same picture, circulated online several days later, showed the man surrounded by a throng of photographers.) How could a protest consisting of the "sons and daughters of Middle England", as one BBC reporter put it, be hijacked by "anarchists"?

The truth is that the protest was not hijacked. The invasion was a spontaneous display of the anger shared by many of the 52,000 people who had turned up to march that morning. Most of the several hundred teenagers and twentysomethings who streamed into the foyer and on to the roof of 30 Millbank were not hardened subversives. They showed themselves capable of distinguishing between minor property damage and violence directed at people, rounding on the idiot who threw a fire extinguisher from the roof, with boos and chants of "stop throwing shit".

What's more, the breakaway protesters had a clear, coherent political message. As one told a Guardian journalist at the scene: "We stand against the cuts, in solidarity with all

the poor, elderly, disabled and working people affected. We are against all cuts and the marketisation of education. We are occupying the roof of Tory HQ to show we are against the Tory system of attacking the poor and helping the rich. This is only the beginning."

Those words could prove to be prophetic. In recent months, as talking heads have debated whether England could or would emulate the mass protests against spending cuts seen in continental Europe, we've been given the impression that social unrest is something that happens elsewhere. The prospect of its crossing the Channel has been invoked as if public protest were a foreign disease, picked up on summer holiday, perhaps, and brought home to wreak havoc in the winter months. Strikes, protests and riots are a speciality of the French and Greeks, so goes the suggestion, and not very English. That's not how we do things here.

Yet England, too, has its own submerged history of protest; one that stretches from the demonstrations against Charles I in the 1640s, to the dockers' marches in 1889 that gave birth to the modern trade union movement, to the Cable Street battle against Oswald Mosley's fascists in London's East End, to the riots and mass campaign of civil disobedience that greeted the poll tax in 1990 (although notably, this began in Scotland, with its own unique history of political dissent). In England, as elsewhere, the great advances in democracy have been pushed forward by unrest; popular movements that the wealthy and their defenders in parliament or the press have sought to denigrate, dismiss and repress. "The thing that is frustrating," the historian Edward Vallance, author of *A Radical History of Britain*, tells me, "is the sense that mass demonstrations and riots are different from politics. They come from the same source. They are an extension of the kind of political developments that we think are part of politics – for example political parties, holding elections and electioneering."

Vallance's point is well illustrated by the long struggle for votes of the 19th and 20th centuries. At St Peter's Field in Manchester in 1819, a peaceful crowd numbering well over 60,000 assembled to see the radical politician Henry Hunt demand universal suffrage. Soldiers charged the crowd on horseback, killing 15 people and injuring hundreds. The Peterloo massacre, as it became known, inspired Shelley's poem "The Masque of Anarchy", with its exhortation to "Rise like lions after slumber/In unvanquishable number!".

It seemed as if his call had been heeded a decade later when, in 1831, after the House of Lords voted against the Reform Bill, a number of cities erupted in violence. Nottingham Castle was burned to the ground and gangs of men armed with muskets took over the streets of Bristol. In 1839, the first wave of the Chartist movement came close to resulting in a general strike, as the campaign's leaders debated whether to call a "national holiday" if their petition to parliament was rejected.

But it is the story of the suffragettes, who achieved the greatest extension of democracy in British history, that shows the crucial role direct action can play in a protest movement. In 1908, well over a quarter of a million women attended a London rally, wearing ribbons with the purple, white and green colours of the Women's Social and Political Union. Sylvia Pankhurst later described it as "the greatest meeting ever known"; yet it was only one face of a long campaign that included other, more contentious forms of activism.

The suffragette Margaret Thomas recounted in her autobiography of 1933 how militancy "had come like a draught of fresh air into our lives. It gave us release of energy, it gave us that sense of being some use in the scheme of things, without which no human being can live in peace. It made us feel we were part of life, not just watching it... It

gave us hope of freedom and power and opportunity... nothing can stop this movement."

This is not to promote violence as a preferred political solution. In 1968, shortly after anti-Vietnam War demonstrators in March of that year protesting against the violent assault on Indochina had attempted to storm the US embassy in Grosvenor Square and had been charged by mounted police, the cultural critic Raymond Williams drew parallels with the Victorian era. In his essay "A Hundred Years of Culture and Anarchy", Williams recounted the outrage that followed the violence that erupted after an attempt in July 1866 by the Reform League, which campaigned for the right of working-class men to vote, to hold a demonstration in Hyde Park in London.

A crowd of 60,000 workers converged on Marble Arch, only to find the gates of the park locked and guarded by police. Most of the demonstrators trudged reluctantly off to Trafalgar Square, but a smaller group stayed behind and ripped up the park railings. The rioters reportedly trampled flowerbeds, "raced over the forbidden turf" and threw stones at houses in upper-class Belgravia. Many liberal observers at the time were horrified. Matthew Arnold, the poet and literary critic, encouraged harsh action against the Hyde Park rioters. The government, he said, had a duty to repress "anarchy and disorder; because without order there can be no society; and without society there can be no human perfection".

Williams noted that similar language was being deployed against the Grosvenor Square protestors. He argued that there was an intellectual sleight of hand practised by critics of direct action. They overlooked or obscured the root causes of public anger. Indeed, in 1968 the rhetoric was largely successful: media hysteria about the March protest meant that one held in Grosvenor Square the following autumn had a far more subdued character.

In the current context, it is notable that David Cameron, fresh from a trip to China where he had been piously preaching human rights (although not to the extent that it might sour trade relations), made no significant comment on the Millbank invasion until a group of lecturers from Goldsmiths College in south London praised the "magnificent" demonstration. Their transgression, which brought swift condemnation from Downing Street, was to point out that "the real violence in this situation relates not to a smashed window but to the destructive impact of the cuts." As Williams wrote: "The attachment to reason, to informed argument, to considered public decisions... requires something more than an easy rhetorical contrast with the practices of demonstration and direct action."

The point, for Williams, was not to celebrate disorder for its own sake, but to restore a sense of proportion to the discussion of protest (as he noted in a different essay, "the last really violent demonstration I went on was across the Rhine in 1945") and to show how it has become necessary at "those points where truth and reason and argument were systematically blocked". Have we reached that point once again? Or does recent history teach us how easily politicians ignore popular protest? After all, Tony Blair was able blithely to disregard the two million who marched against the Iraq war in 2003. And while the anti-capitalist protests that have been a feature of the past decade have gathered large crowds, they have been marked by a strangely weightless, carnivalesque feel; a celebration of a cause without any real political direction, which the critic Mark Fisher has described as "feelgood feelbad".

The stereotype that the English don't really "do" protests is just that – a stereotype. But it exists for a reason. Since Margaret Thatcher's assault on organised labour in the 1980s, including the famous battle of Orgreave during the miners' strike of 1984, and her deliberate destruction of the

industries that fed the unions, protest has been neutered. This has gone hand in hand with a reigning ideology that there is "no alternative" to the neoliberal economics that led us to the financial crash of 2008. In the words of the US theorist Fredric Jameson, we have been living through a time in which it has seemed easier "to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism".

University reform is a clear example of this ideological straitjacket. It was initiated by a Labour government and is now being carried through by the Conservatives, with the help of the Liberal Democrats, a party that won votes and seats on a clear pledge to oppose it.

However, as a political activist who was one of the first through the door at Millbank described it to me, 10 November was a "game changer". Before the protest, even commentators on the centre-left, such as the Guardian's Polly Toynbee, initially dismissed in advance the students as "middle class" and their plight insignificant in comparison to the devastation that is about to befall benefit claimants. Now, even the right recognises that the attack on Millbank was about more than just increases in tuition fees, while Toynbee herself praised the students and joined a flashmob protest against tax avoidance. Writing in the London Evening Standard the day after the protest, the pro-cuts financial columnist Chris Blackhurst warned that the increasing gap between rich and poor in Britain was stoking popular fury. "The temperature is rising all the time," he wrote. "Already, we've had strikes from the Tube drivers and firefighters, and now students are taking to the streets. More groups are likely to follow suit... Disturbingly, the scene is set for more yesterdays. The police will undoubtedly be better prepared. But that is not to say there won't be trouble or that the rage is going to disappear."

Those on the right of the Labour Party have no doubt watched this story unfold with disgust. They will see it as a return to the early 1980s, when the left was wiped out electorally, despite the anger at Thatcher's reforms. But this is not the 1980s: unlike Thatcher, the coalition cannot buy popular support with the sell-off of council houses or public utilities.

After almost ten years of slaughter in Afghanistan and Iraq, there is much less appetite for Falklands-style jingoism. The huge personal wealth of the current cabinet makes Cameron's insistence that "we're all in this together" ring hollow. As Fisher wrote recently, that slogan "may turn out to be a phrase that comes to haunt the Tories in the way that 'Labour isn't working' dogged Labour for a generation... cuts of this kind being forced through by a cabinet of aristocrats and millionaires make brutally apparent a class antagonism that the New Labour government obfuscated. Whenever the ruling class tells us that 'we're all on the same side', it is a sure sign that we can hurt them."

Rather than dismissing protesters as "Trots" and "anarchists", as Caroline Flint did on Question Time, the Labour Party should seek to give a parliamentary voice to this discontent. As for the anti-cuts movement, what it needs is unity and the recognition that a range of tactics, including protests, strikes and direct action, will be necessary. The president of the National Union of Students, Aaron Porter, who days before Millbank was stormed had declared his support for direct action, has since wavered and condemned the action as "despicable". What he and others who are unsure about the correct way to fight the cuts should ask themselves is: would anyone have cared about the demonstration otherwise?

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Sharing The Pain: The emotional politics of austerity and its opponents

Jeremy Gilbert, New Statesman



Keep Calm and Carry On?

“Keep Calm and Carry On” was the fashionably arch, post-ironic catchphrase for Phase One of the Financial Crisis. Its popularity as a motif first on posters and then on every conceivable kind of merchandise peaked during the period following the critical moment in September 2008 when

Lehman Brother collapsed and the entire international banking system teetered on the edge of an abyss.

Technically, it was a piece of nostalgic kitsch – an obscure home office poster designed in 1939 for use if the Nazis invaded the UK. Presumably while there would have been fighting in Kent there would have been an even greater need for production in Lancashire and it was prepared with this in mind. The poster was never distributed during the war, but was rediscovered and reproduced for its comedy value in 2000, becoming a popular ironic decoration in many workplaces during the early years of the twenty-first century. It's a powerful image: on the one hand, a clichéd yet outmoded expression of 'traditional' English stoicism, on the other hand an example of emotional exhortation by the state, whose almost Orwellian tones render it both anachronistic and vaguely sinister.

The peculiarity of such a slogan in today's unstoical world – where we are all supposed to value 'emotional literacy' over reticence and calm resolve – and its apparent naiveté in the face of the perpetual crisis of late capitalism, are certainly enough to raise a smile in anyone. But it's hardly hilarious enough for that to explain its extraordinary popularity. To understand the latter, I suggest, we have to consider the ways in which this slogan – 'keep calm and carry on' – condenses and expresses perfectly the parameters and constituent elements of the whole affective regime through which emotional responses to the crisis of neoliberalism are being organised by powerful forces today.

On the one hand, the phrase deliberately evokes at once a general history of English sang froid and the specific instance when this national characteristic is widely assumed to have been most crucial in the very survival of the nation, when the attempted Nazi invasion was held off by virtue of the sheer determination and immovability of a historically rather conservative British people. On the other hand, the fact that

the poster was designed for use in the event of a full-scale German landing which never happened (with the overtone that it might succeed in becoming a successful occupation) lends it a certain otherworldly quality, evocative as it is of another possible world which did not come into being, but could quite conceivably have done. But this otherworldliness seems only to reinforce the slogan's potency, rather than diminishing it by virtue of its unreality. Why should this be? Surely it's indicative of the fact that the very act of reviving this particular piece of pre-emptive propaganda expresses something more than the apparently rather casual stoicism it purports to endorse: something which is perhaps latent in that stoicism even while it might seem at first glance to be rather alien to it. That something, I suggest, is a certain paranoia which is itself constitutive of a whole emotional economy of reticence, passivity and control.

A degree of paranoia clearly motivated the very production of the poster in the first place, intended as it was for use only in a moment of national defeat, the very possibility of which more optimistic minds would have refused to countenance. But the imagined scene which it conjures up is simply infused with paranoia on every level: an invaded people maintains its stoicism even while surrounded by the forces of an advancing, potentially victorious enemy. Just think what is really implied in this imaginary scenario: a national community is sustained in the face of its possible destruction only by a wilful denial of the reality of its defeat, carrying on as if nothing has changed, as if to admit to the reality of the situation and to respond with appropriate emotion were to invite destruction.

Keep calm – any display of emotion is dangerous. As is well documented, this was a view of emotional and social life prevalent in England between the wars and by no means restricted to imagined doomsday scenarios. The historian Ross McKibbin argues persuasively that the crystallisation in

the 1930s of a 'national character' whose striking feature was emotional reticence and affective inexpressivity was a direct consequence of the need for a hegemonic but threatened middle class to overcome very quickly deep historic cultural differences (particularly between the Anglican and Dissenting traditions) in the face of an immediate threat both from organised labour and from the crisis of capitalism which shaped that era, adopting a behavioural code which simply narrowed the range of acceptable conversational topics and tropes to the point where no significant antagonisms could be given expression within 'polite society'. 'Keep Calm and Carry On' seems to express the view that maintaining that code would be even more important to the survival of the nation than would the adoption of the traditional response of an invaded people – anger, retreat, retrenchment and counter-attack.

Of course, I don't mean to imply for a moment that any of the people wearing 'keep calm' t-shirts over the past couple of years have been genuinely simply nostalgic for the classic English 'stiff upper lip'. But they weren't simply mocking it either. The ironic appeal of those shirts clearly derives from the perceived split between, on the one hand, the apparent impossibility of actually maintaining such a position of 'calm' in the chaotic maelstrom of contemporary capitalism; and, on the other hand, the recognition of the fact that we do all have to try to keep our sanity under such circumstances, if we are to go on functioning at all. This is the position that we find ourselves in when we realise that the price for failing to 'keep calm and carry on' is increasingly high, as competitive pressure intensifies at every level in the labour market (keep calm, carry on – or lose your job, house, credit-rating, life...), but that it is precisely the abstract agency of the market making these demands on us to remain calm which also renders them impossible to meet.

Without a certain genuine identification with the exhortation to ‘keep calm’, and its implied aims, the ironic force required to raise the requisite smile in the viewer would be quite lacking. As such, I’d want to insist that there is a degree of genuine nostalgia – albeit for a complex amalgam of past instances – implicit in the sheer enthusiasm with which so many consumers have participated in this apparently ironic revival a never-used official slogan. Most of those consumers, I would postulate, may be aware that there is something increasingly absurd about the fantasy that we could simply ‘keep calm and carry on’ indefinitely with liberal consumer capitalism as we know it; but I nonetheless I think they are genuinely expressing an authentic wish that we could. At the same time, a certain element of nostalgia for the historical moment when such slogans could be something more than ironic, when states, governments and communities could realistically expect to act decisively and together even in the face of major existential threats, is certainly present here also.

It is worth reflecting, then, that even while this slogan seemed to appear everywhere as a smugly self-deprecating acknowledgement of the extraordinary nature of the times in 2008-9, keeping calm and carrying on is precisely what the emergent movement against government cuts proposes that we should not do. Keeping calm and carrying on is exactly how the coalition wants us to behave: about to lose your public sector job? Stay calm, retrain, go to work in the private sector. About to lose the right to subsidised Higher Education? Never mind – it won’t make any difference really. In this context, getting excited, angry, hopeful, furious, passionate and inspired – as protesters have been doing all around the country for the past few weeks – is exactly what the coalition does not want us to do.

We are currently facing a historic assault on what remains of British social democracy – which was, in so many ways, a

product of the experience of the second world war. Indeed, the welfare state was arguably the institutional expression of the vigorous, inclusive, expansive, optimistic version of British Englishness, which won the war against the Axis abroad and the struggle against petit-bourgeois liberalism at home. As such, the use of this slogan from the early days of WWII, advising calm resignation in the face of defeat, at precisely the moment when we should be becoming very angry in defence of the legacy of that same war, is significant, however ironically intended.

The slogan can be seen as an expression of two things: the official culture of defeatism and appeasement, which still continued after Chamberlain's declaration of war and, second, the fact that it was prepared for a successful invasion having actually taken place. If we fast forward the same scenario to our own time, it suggests that in some way we feel we have indeed now been invaded (let's say, for the sake of argument by international corporations having acquired our banking, water, electricity and gas supplies) and that we have to accept this in the spirit of appeasement. In this way it expresses a profound sense of the scale and nature of the imminent defeat. Of what? Of the welfare state itself that was the British people's prize for winning the war.

It is surely important that the slogan originates in the earliest phase of the war before Churchill had asserted his leadership with a quite different rhetoric of "we shall fight them" and "blood, sweat and tears". By contrast "Keep Calm and Carry On" takes us back to the political establishment of the 1930s – steeped as it was in Victorian liberalism and resolute anti-socialism. Churchill himself was, of course, an imperialist and anti-socialist. But of a quite different temper. His improbable but historically crucial elevation to the head of a government was made possible, indeed it was insisted upon, by the Labour leaders of that generation – who were to be the key figures of the UK's greatest reforming

government, 1945-51. Is it interesting to contrast the rhetoric of resolute, fearless stoicism which Churchill mobilised so brilliantly with the paranoia and pessimism which seem to have characterised official attitudes during the first year of the war, of which 'keep calm and carry on' was one official expression, and to reflect that something about the transition from one to the other way bound up indissolubly, if still rather mysteriously, with Britain's transformation from a liberal to a social democratic state.

Just imagine what would have happened if instead of an ironic, half-despairing mobilisation of this 1939 slogan, 2008 had seen some public mobilisation of the spirit of 1940, of a determination to unite the country against a threat (in this case, the threat to our way of life posed by the merciless caprice of international finance) which could only be fought on the basis of a radical new egalitarianism. If Brown really had wanted a 'Churchillian role' this would have been it. (The rest gets in the way).

More important, seen from this perspective the student call to "Fight Back!" is a Churchillist response to the Coalition's attack on the wartime and post-war settlement. It is the protestors who are saying, "We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender" while it is the Coalition who are saying that we must surrender to the bankers and allow them their bonuses or they will leave for some other low tax haven.

This argument has many ramifications which I have pursued elsewhere. But just to take education, the Minister, David Willets, wants to entrench at the heart of English higher education the individualist model of the satisfied / employable student-customer. It is not enough to counter this with a moralistic appeal to the traditional value of the humanities and liberal education. Within the radical

tradition it has always been assumed that the fundamental aim of education is collective empowerment – and unless we can make a public argument that restates this case fully, while affirming the indissoluble connections between such empowerment and the sheer creative pleasure which education should entail – then we might as well all stop protesting and go home.

This is a crucial point, because it is in the recognition of the intimate connection between collaborative collectivity and real creativity that we can find the resources with which to counter this marketising trend. Just as everyday life and culture – from the busy streets to Glastonbury festival, from the dancefloor to the seminar room, from Facebook to the Women’s Institute – is full of instances of collective invention and self-organisation, so the new anti-capitalist politics which is re-emerging in the university occupations and on our high streets has many sources to draw on for inspiration and enrichment. If we want to find social and institutional models which can express the radical potential which all of these phenomena manifest, then it will not be enough, even in the universities, simply to defend the status quo, clinging to the faded relics of 20th century social democracy. Rather, we will have to initiate a new wave of institutional and cultural experiments which aim to ensure knowledge is not treated as a commodity and does so in new ways and enable new forms of democratic collaboration between students and teachers, and in the governance of the institutions themselves.

I say ‘a new wave’ – that is not the same as saying ‘an entirely new type’. There is a great danger of ahistorical hubris in much of the rhetoric surrounding the recent protests at the present time. They have not been the biggest protests since the Anti-Poll Tax campaign, as many now routinely claim, and they haven’t come close to the level of public mobilisation which saw literally millions across the

UK protest against the invasion of Iraq, less than a decade ago. Virtually none of their decentralised organising techniques are new: they almost all belong to the repertoire described in detail by Marianne Maeckelbergh in her excellent book, *The Will of the Many: How the Alterglobalisation Movement is Changing the Face of Democracy* (Pluto 2009). Twitter has not yet actually demonstrated itself to be any more effective an organisational tool than did the use of telephone trees by roads protesters in the 1990s (which is not to say that it won't!), and the ideals of 'horizontal' and radically participative organisation stretch back through the early history of the New Left to the libertarian socialists of the 19th century to the utopian communities of the 17th.

Despite the extraordinary convergence of sonic, kinetic and political energy that we saw in some pockets on the recent demonstrations (as discussed here and here), we've yet to see anything resembling the displays of public, militant conviviality which characterised the best of the 1990s

Reclaim the Streets actions, or of the free festival movement which was so comprehensively crushed between 1985 and 1995. The ridiculous, but apparently now-widespread, idea that being caught in a 'kettle' is something to be proud of – when kettling was a technique developed by the metropolitan police precisely in order to prevent street protests remaining the open sites of joyful collectivity that Reclaim the Streets had turned them into – is surely a sign that the current movement has something to learn from that history if it is to escape the limitations of its own collective masochism (symbolically and literally). The wonderful actions undertaken by UKUncut are drawing on techniques developed by North American anti-corporate campaigners, such as Reverend Billy, over many years. Many of these tactics and ideas are in turn a legacy of the counterculture of the 60s and 70s, so often belittled by 'leftist' commentators

such as Zizek because of its partial co-optation by consumer capitalism (as if this co-optation really were evidence of some inherent corruption, rather than the outcome of a series of partial defeats).

I don't make these points in order to belittle the achievements or to dampen the enthusiasm of the current cohort of protesters, but rather to point out that there is no need for us to waste time or precious energy in re-inventing the wheel when a long history of struggle lies behind us, and informs everything we do. The realisation that humans working together can transform their world, and are the source of all meaningful change, is at least as old as the belief that they must be prevented from doing so by wise authority, and it is one which has informed a great tradition of thought, practice and culture. Much of the world we inhabit today is its product and its legacy. We should look to this tradition for inspiration and information, even while we seek out genuinely novel routes to changing the world.

What this tradition teaches us is clear: the most fundamental elements of the pro-austerity world-view are wrong. Privatisation = deprivation, at every level of existence (psychic, social, physical, emotional, political). Pain and weakness are not good for us and are not the only things that can be shared. In fact there is no pleasure without power, no power without collaboration, no collaboration without co-operation and experiment. This is true in the classroom and it is true on the streets, and its truth is our greatest resource.

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The Media, the police and protest: now both sides of the story can be reported

Ryan Gallagher, openDemocracy

At the student fees protest in London last week, a young man with cerebral palsy was allegedly twice hauled from his wheelchair and dragged across the ground by police officers. Footage of the incident soon appeared on the internet, while the man, a 20-year-old activist and blogger named Jody McIntyre, was invited onto BBC News to recount his ordeal. “Did you shout anything provocative, or throw anything that would have induced the police to do that to you?” he was asked by the presenter, Ben Brown. “There’s a suggestion that you were rolling towards the police in your wheelchair, is that true?” McIntyre kept his calm and replied. “Do you really think a person with cerebral palsy, in a wheelchair, can pose a threat to a police officer who is armed with weapons?”

The BBC has already received a number of complaints about the interview. But the sneering tone of Brown’s questions, which repeatedly punctuate the 7-minute interview, are typical of how the mainstream media have responded to protests and the policing of them both past and present. Their automatic assumption is that the police are protectors of our best interests, defenders of public order, righteous upholders of the law. Protesters, on the other hand, are automatically perceived as a threat and a potential destructive force – they are folk devils: outsiders, troublemakers and vandals of decency.

The police are therefore at an immediate advantage in the media realm, for they are always given the benefit of the

doubt. Officers may have had to crack a few skulls during the fees protests, however only because they were provoked by what David Cameron described as "feral thugs". And it is for this same reason that McIntyre was repeatedly placed on the back foot throughout his BBC interview. Was he a "cyber-radical?" Did he want to build a "revolutionary movement?" The police would never just attack a defenceless disabled man in a wheelchair, would they?

This problem is not a new one. For years protesters have been jarred by the gulf between the reality of protests and the way they are reported by the mass media. During the G8 summit in Gleneagles in 2005, for instance, I witnessed firsthand unprovoked police baton charges on Edinburgh's Princes Street. Dressed in all black, wielding shields, batons and with their faces covered, riot police lunged indiscriminately at anyone within arm's length – male or female, adult or youth. The sight was shocking. Yet the next day, there was not a whiff of it in the newspapers. "Those seeking to cause disorder laid down the gauntlet to police officers who were determined to keep control," reported the BBC.

Likewise, when Ian Tomlinson died after being assaulted by a policeman at the G20 protests in London last year, almost all media outlets initially reported the police's account of events uncritically. Tomlinson had collapsed and stopped breathing, we were told, so officers quickly sprung to his assistance. Police medics tried to revive him as hell-bent protesters threw bricks, bottles and planks of wood – but it was already too late. Of course, none of this was true. There were no bricks or bottles or planks of wood, and neither did the police attempt to assist Tomlinson as he fell to the floor. In fact, as it later turned out, Tomlinson was pushed to the ground by a policeman and it was protesters who helped him to his feet.

It is a difficult thing to accept – that the police, the very individuals whose role it is to protect us, can occasionally perpetrate hideous acts of violence. But those who witnessed police tactics at the recent fees demonstrations will know that the friendly British bobby has a darker side, too. A new generation of young people is consequently now waking up to the grim fact that all is not as it seems. However, unlike in previous eras of mass civil unrest – such as during the 1960s and the 1980s – this generation has technology at its disposal.

As in the case of Jody McIntyre and Ian Tomlinson, camera-phone footage can hold the police to account for their actions like never before. If the reality of the protest is absent from television reports, the truth will eventually surface via the internet. Mainstream media outlets may still continue to negatively portray protesters, but their credibility will slowly begin to wane and disintegrate if they do so for much longer. With the advent of YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, there is now, finally, a platform from which both sides of the story can be told.

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The military response to direct action, General Kitson's manual

Tom Griffin, openDemocracy

General Frank Kitson's 1971 counter-insurgency manual *Low Intensity Operations* has long been of interest to students of the Northern Ireland Troubles. Within months of its publication, its author was commanding 39 Brigade in Belfast where he pioneered the use of the Parachute Regiment as shock troops, and of plain-clothes 'counter-gangs' to combat paramilitary groups.

However, what struck me most when I obtained a copy recently was not the book's obvious significance for such controversial episodes, but its striking relevance to events in Britain in recent weeks.

That's because Kitson gives considerable attention to the question of how a government can combat a campaign of non-violent direct action. He devotes a whole chapter to the subject, despite showing considerable scepticism about the value of direct action as a tactic:

“It is rare to find large numbers of people who are so interested in a political cause that they are prepared to abandon their work and sacrifice their recreational time merely to stand around in a group being troublesome to the government on the off chance that it will make concessions in some direction which will probably bring them little personal benefit or satisfaction. In fact only the hard core organizers are likely to be sufficiently dedicated to behave in this way, and such people are normally viewed with suspicion

by the normal working man or housewife and even by the majority of the student population.”

Kitson argued that to overcome this problem, the hard core organizers need to mobilise an intermediate group of 'politically conscious idealists' in sufficient numbers to goad the authorities into discrediting themselves by some violent action.

Kitson wrote primarily on the basis of his experiences in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus, dealing with highly centralised communist or nationalist movements, in situations where direct action was ultimately replaced by outright insurgency.

He did recognise that the students involved in the then recent events of May 1968 in France were resistant to centralised control, but he regarded this as illustrating a general weakness of direct action, its dependence on mobilising large numbers of ordinary people.

For Kitson, the workers and students of 1968 had been bought off with concessions on wages and universities, frustrating the larger socialist ambitions of the organisers. His practical recommendations are a generalisation of this model:

“In practical terms the most promising line of approach lies in separating the mass of those engaged in the campaign from the leadership by the judicious promise of concessions, at the same time imposing a period of calm by the use of government forces backed up by statements to the effect that most of the concessions can only be implemented once the life of the country returns to normal. Although with an eye to world opinion, and to the need to retain the allegiance of the people, no more force than is necessary for containing the situation should be used, conditions can be made reasonably uncomfortable for the population as a whole, in order to provide an incentive for a return to normal life and to act as a deterrent towards a resumption of the campaign.

“Having once succeeded in providing a breathing space by these means, it is most important to do three further things quickly. The first is to implement the promised concessions quickly so as to avoid allegations of bad faith which may enable the subversive element to regain control over certain sections of the people. The second is to discover and neutralise the subversive element. The third is to associate as many prominent members of the population, especially those who have been engaged in non-violent action, with the government. This last technique is known in America as co-optation.”

Given these techniques, Kitson regards dealing with direct action as a relatively straightforward problem.

So what are the implications of his model for the recent wave of direct action against the coalition's programme of cuts, which many expect to see expanding in the new year?

The first lesson is that the various tuition fees, EMA and tax protesters have already succeeded in crossing a fairly high 'direct action threshold'.

One wonders whether kettling isn't a tactic designed to push the protests below that threshold by making conditions 'reasonably uncomfortable' for Kitson's intermediate group of 'politically conscious idealists'.

There is little sign as yet of Kitson's recommended concessions. He assumes that such measures must always be conceded to a majority by the minority, otherwise they would have been achieved by parliamentary action. It is perhaps the peculiar genius of the UK Uncut campaign, that it challenges this assumption when it comes to taxation.

Without meaningful concessions it becomes in turn more difficult to practise co-optation. If anything the Government's actions have only helped to marginalise the obvious candidates – the NUS leadership.

That leaves Kitson's third technique, neutralizing the 'subversive element'. The Telegraph's profile of ULU President Clare Solomon was a textbook example of an attempt to play on the faultline that Kitson identifies:

“Whilst her public image has been as a protester driven by concern over student fees and education cuts, her agenda goes much wider: to bring down capitalism and replace it with a socialist society where the ruling class is expropriated and wealth is spread equally.”

Supporters of the coalition have been keen to hint at various left parties or blocs as hidden hands behind the protest. Such centralised direction would make the protests a much easier target, in terms both of intelligence and of propaganda.

The reality may not fit that model, however. One doesn't have to be a techno-utopian to question whether any amount of forward intelligence would enable the police to predict the movements of the twitter-enabled smart-mobs that have characterised the protests.

The demands thrown up by the nascent democracies of the student occupations, are not those of a vanguardist elite. Indeed, Tony Curzon Price has remarked on their conservatism. In terms of legitimising direct action, at least, that may be a strength rather than a weakness.

That is not to say that direct action cannot challenge the status quo. Again, UK Uncut looks like a good example of how to create real pressure while evading attempts to alienate the public from the campaign by imposing a 'subversive' label.

Nevertheless, the defensive nature of the campaigns may be one reason why the direct action threshold has been breached so decisively.

Kitson's model has arguably been inverted. He saw direct action as the strategy of an ideological hard core seeking to opportunistically impose an essentially unpopular programme by manipulating naive liberals unaware of the real nature of their revolutionary goals.

In 2010, that doesn't sound like a description of the protesters. It sounds like a description of the government.

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Image of the Year

James Butler, Pierce Penniless



It's a fascinating image. You can see why it made the front pages. SHEER TERROR IN HER EYES, ran one of the headlines. A bit mendacious, that: it's not terror, really, it looks more like she's clucking and hooting in rage or confusion. It really does have it all: that semi-vacant, half-O face, across which all sorts of emotions could flicker, the gaping witlessness of her husband beside her, electric Regent street Christmas lights flashing in the shiny paint of a vintage Roller. It's one of the moments you'd never really have the temerity to write as fiction: the heir to the throne gets driven in a vintage Rolls-Royce through a riot, en route to preside at the annual ritual where the media caste scrape and grovel in wonder at the rotting sump of hereditary privilege.

Nice. Those of us kettled in the cold in Parliament Square got the news not long after it happened. A friend mentioned it disbelievingly. It sounded like the rushed news you sometimes hear at actions, which turn out to be entirely fictional later. Rapidly, two forms of analysis emerged: the first held that the action was an error, either strategically (it would dominate press coverage, or alienate the public) or morally (some variation on ‘scaring pensioners’); the second that it reflected the scale of feeling, or presaged the start of a wider insurrection. Such debates played themselves out in the following days, with ubiquitous fear over media portrayal being one of the dominant threads. I cheerfully admit my reaction was one of unalloyed pleasure, and fascination at the circulation of the image itself.

One could use the image to talk about ‘violence’ and its uses, or to bewail the cosy, craven stupidity of newspaper editors, or indeed that, thirteen years after Diana, the royals apparently still haven’t learnt to wear seatbelts. One might, more interestingly, remark on the disproportionate emphasis given by some more centrist protesters to the impact on message rather than the impact of police batons on other protesters’ heads. But those things should all be obvious. I am more interested in why the photo has lingered in memory, and what’s not articulated behind the assumption that the photo embodies something shocking – i.e., that it’s a clear icon of disruption of some order we should all know instinctively.

That order itself has something to do with both what royalty is, and what form ‘protest’ should take; its disruption is tangible in the notion that there was something uncanny about the event, the deep conviction that this is a thing that should not happen. Nowhere did we read that the scandal might be that a man by dint of birth is driven through the streets in a vintage car, where others can scarcely afford to

eat; everywhere was the assumption that somewhere along the line, something important had ruptured.

It was precisely the irruptive nature of that event that makes it both so disquieting and so characteristic of the student protests as a whole. In moments like these, I think one can see the authentic swell of anger among grassroots, and the radicalisation that comes as a consequence of experiencing protest. To me, what's key is precisely that the destruction of a Topshop window, the graffiti on the Treasury, or the blockading of a royal convoy is not mindless, but quite the antithesis: the point at which structural inequality, when the whole, stinking, hypocritical con becomes utterly apparent... and is sitting there in front of you in a chauffeur-driven car.

These worlds are not supposed to coincide: it is precisely the illusion of their separateness that shores up their concentration of power. A couple of days later, the *Standard* ran a fervid and unintentionally amusing story 'revealing' the apparently scandalous news that Camilla had been prodded with a stick. That moment of touching, and what turns upon it, evidently offered some considerable allure.

It's tempting here to think about the ancient notion of the King's Evil, that the touch of a king could cure scrofula, or the enduring psychological presence of myths about sacred kingship and taboo. Perhaps far more interesting here is Kajsa Ekholm Friedman's suggestion that, far from evincing a fundamental ground for notions of sovereignty, such myths and taboos come to exist, or at least are most stringently enforced, in times of great social and political upheaval. (Bloch notes, indeed, the propagandistic uses to which the royal touch was put in the English Civil War.) No one seriously believes in such things these days; either in the supernatural locus of sovereign power, nor that, should the crops fail or banks collapse, royal blood should drip off the altars of Westminster Abbey. But the aura of order and

taboo surrounding them continues to work its stupefying charms, now perhaps propped up with the myth of the 'apolitical' head of state.

Order and touching are related: there's rarely an occasion where someone touches Elizabeth Windsor that someone else doesn't rumble along to talk about protocol, dignity, and respect – and, underneath that lies some occult fear that to act upon the body of a sovereign presumes that the body of the State itself can be acted upon. The fiction of order that surrounds the royals at all times – the eternal smell of new paint, extensive cleaning, ordered ranks of dazzled people – is really only rarely broken, and almost never by anything more than something that can be written off as a lone nut's solitary plan.

Where does dissent fit in this picture? It's not that royals have never encountered protesters before, but they have largely been of the banner-holding, neatly-assembled, contained type – what we might also dub the ineffectual type. Ineffectual precisely because their 'dissent' becomes a recuperated part of the very system they want to protest against – and is seen as a sign of its pluralistic values, its healthy, democratic spirit. This argument should by now be familiar: it is the rationale behind direct action, behind the refusal to co-operate with a system designed to make protest ineffectual and non-disruptive.

But it is precisely the disordered nature of such protests that makes for the most compelling narrative in that picture, because so much of state, police and reactionary response has been to seize on disorder as the central metaphor for what happens on the streets. That is to say, from the implication that protesters fail to understand the plans for education, to the suggestion that to protest in anything other than the approved form was dangerously crazy or fanatical, or indeed to the general police response, the emphasis has

been on dissent as a disorder not solely in a tactical sense but a medical sense as well.

That metaphor has characterised police thinking throughout: from the 'sterile zones' to 'containment', to the argument that protesters had somehow been 'contaminated' by ultra-leftists; from here it is an easy step to justifying violence as a medical response to infection, and some of that was abundantly clear from the continued police jibes about students needing to take a bath. But the virtue of the medical organising metaphor is precisely this: it views politicisation as a symptom of a malady that can be wiped out, that any action resulting therefrom can be viewed as symptomatic behaviour, as lacking in cohesion as a fever-dream, that political positions dissenting from particular articles of faith are a sign not just of unsound beliefs, but unsound minds and unsound bodies. How much easier to beat a teenager when you have drunk so deeply of that poisonous brew that you think you're doing them a favour.

Of course the state has to think of such a movement as an infection, and one that is dangerously spreading through the body politic, but it is not a metaphor that we need to accept. One thing is to make clear that we can reject the notion that political reason is found only in the heads of Westminster politicians, but is found inside every single one of us; that we can reject the logic that Cameron or Clegg or any of their class of politicians and media hypocrites claim to set the bounds of rational objection; that, precisely, we know how deeply the law courts, the glitz of Oxford street, the Treasury and the relic in the Roller are all connected.

What to draw from this? It's apparent to me that the odd disjunctions highlighted by these kind of actions are part of the movement's strength. Call it an infection, or think of it in terms of resonances, or rhizomes, or weeds, but it's clear this decentralised approach does not preclude ideological engagement, or political commitment; that it is precisely the

strength found in autonomy that has allowed such actions to proliferate. To break with the traditional model of dissent is also to find a freedom in one's targets; things without the bounds of 'traditional' and easily-neutralised protest. The image of a red and black flag over Millbank, or the wave of innovative occupations, or a stick in the ribs for Camilla: these things should send an uncompromising message that we're not acting out a puppet theatre politics, where we stick to the hollow ghost of real protest, which has been relied on to prop up the mythic pluralist bedrock of sham 'democracy' for decades. When the most arbitrary, fossilised, absurd avatar of class privilege and cheery face of its entrenchment gets driven into your protest what can you do other than see him for what he is? What better sign that we're not 'all in this together'?

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<http://piercepenniless.wordpress.com/2011/01/02/image-of-the-year/>

Geographies of the Kettle: Containment, Spectacle & Counter-Strategy

Rory Rowan, *Critical Legal Thinking*



“Those who live by the spectacle will die by the spectacle.”
Jean Baudrillard

The last few weeks of student-led protests against the ideologically blunt and financially reckless Tory-Liberal Democrat cuts and the massively short-sighted, brutal and regressive cuts to third level education in particular may well have marked something of a turning point in modern British history. They have won back the power of political protest that was seemingly lost after the defeat of the anti-war marches in 2003. Tony Blair’s smug platitudes about spreading democracy in Iraq saw it dissolve domestically in a sea of bitterness and apathy. The last few weeks have seen

people learn once more, indeed seen school children and students teach us, that people do have power and that political protest can be effective. But if these protests have rinsed the smile from Cameron's face and applied the defibrillator of dissensus to the heart of British democracy they also raise questions about the strategies of protest adequate to a police regime reared on football hooliganism and 'event management'.

The first question that needs to be asked is what these protests serve to do. Primarily they provide a symbolic representation of opposition to the Tory-Liberal Democrat government and its neoliberal policy agenda. This symbolic opposition can be broken down in to two further sets of roles which I would rather clumsily refer to as 'ideological' and 'affective'. The ideological role of the protest is to reframe the situation in which the government poses its policy. By powerfully signalling mass opposition pressure will be put on the government's ability to implement policy and a leverage created with which to prise open the coalition government. Further, it creates an opportunity for the public to rethink government policy, especially those uncertain of it, those in support of it and those merely otherwise unengaged.

In both cases this ideological role is directed outward from the protesters, at the public and at the government. The affective role of the protest is rather directed inward and allows the ties within the opposition to be built and strengthened and for militancy to be cultivated. This is not of course to suggest that signalling symbolic opposition to the government can be or indeed should be the only goal of protest movements but whilst the UK is ripe with potential energy at the current juncture the movement currently lacks the strength, support and crucially any coherent vision for a wider reformulation of the state, economic policy or the organization of social structures. To say this is not to doom

the movement to mere protest or longer term irrelevance. On the contrary, any viable alternatives will arise through and build upon the current protest movement and the politicization it has produced, if not entirely then at least in part.

Despite the fact that both the ideological and affective roles of this symbolic protest are crucial, the strategy of concentrating masses in defined spaces in order to produce a spectacle of opposition is revealing its limitations in the context of the UK's policing regime, and strategy needs to be rethought. The standard form for modern symbolic protests has been to gather a concentrated mass of people in a defined space to produce a spectacular opposition. Of course such protests work to disrupt the daily functioning of the streets and hence economic and other activity but the main aim is to produce a semblance of 'the people' visibly standing in opposition to the government or its policy. This relationship between concentration and spectacle leaves protests vulnerable to the police containment strategy known as 'kettling' which so easily re-symbolises legitimate opposition as violent disorder.

Part of the problem of approaching police kettling is that the phenomenon has not been fully understood. Although it may at first seem the grossest form of numbskull territorialisation it is in fact a more complex spatial strategy that works precisely within the same logic of concentration and spectacle as symbolic protest. It is important therefore to unpick the logic of the kettle in relation to symbolic protest. I would argue that the kettle aims to achieve two seemingly contradictory results simultaneously: to restrain and incite the crowd. Likewise it works on two simultaneous terrains; one, the physical sites of protest and the other, the virtual terrain of the media landscape it seeks to shape. The relationship between these two pairs of aims and terrains must be kept in mind.

First of all the kettle aims to restrain and mute the crowd. At the most basic level the kettle establishes a spatial container which restrains the protest by keeping the crowd in a specific site and hence limiting the disruption it can cause, the damage it can do to property, and the scope of the threat to 'public safety' and 'public order'. The kettle further aims to mute the crowd by wearing down their energies and holding them until they have been subdued with the passage of time. If these two aims concern the specific day of the protest, the kettle obviously plays a longer-term and more repressive role in trying to put people off future protests. By making the kettle so unpleasant and boring (something that should work particularly well in certain weather conditions – very cold, very wet or very warm) the hope is that people will be put off ever protesting again hence limiting the work the police have to do implementing government policy.

As the kettle aims to restrain the crowd it simultaneously seeks to incite them. By making the kettle unpleasant and by limiting the protester's freedom of movement as such the police aim to provoke an angry and violent response from the crowd. As Richard Seymour has noted this tactic is based on the assumption that the protesters can be broken down in to two basic groups: reasonable 'peaceful' protestors and unreasonable violent 'anarchists'. The aim here is to identify, isolate and arrest the 'trouble-makers' so that they are punished, both making an example of them and putting them off further engagement in protest. But the crux, I would argue, is not to produce violence in order to produce arrests, but to produce violence itself. By inciting the crowd the police guarantee a violent spectacle that will feed the media's addiction to violence, which always makes a news-worthy story.

This brings me to the second pairing in the logic of the kettle, i.e. its operation across the physical terrain of the protest site and the virtual terrain of the media coverage.

The kettle of course seeks to divide the space of the city into spaces inside and outside the kettle and to isolate and manage disorder within a defined site in order to maintain it elsewhere. But what needs to be understood is that this spatial strategy of physical containment is also a media strategy which seeks to concentrate the spectacle of violent protest into a defined space precisely for the media. Thus the physical terrain of the kettled site is marshalled to produce violent spectacle for media consumption. It is a type of siege that lets the police appear under attack. The kettle thus needs to be understood as a form of media strategy deployed by the police to delegitimize protests and re-symbolize legitimate protest as unlawful 'riot'. The kettle attempts to cast opposition protests as such as radical, violent and in need of police repression, whose brutality is legitimated by this same spectacle of student violence that the kettle aims to facilitate.

It should be noted of course that as with any system of ordering the police are not fully in control of the kettle. Kettling is not an immobile state but a dynamic process which is playing its aims against each other and against the unpredictability of the crowd. The lack of police control over the kettle was seen last week at the protests in London against the increase in student fees on December 9th. A greater number of the crowd were incited than had been expected and hence the assumption of a simple division into the peaceful and the violent members of the crowd began to dissolve. It should be noted that this greater level of violence from the protesters was in direct response to the growing violence of the police who have made kettling an increasingly brutal exercise in coercion and terror. At one level this increase in police violence from the very beginning of the 9 December protests can be seen as a police strategy to increase both tendencies they seek to elicit from the crowd – restrain in avoiding future protests and a spectacle of

growing student violence. On the other hand it is testimony to the fact that the police are losing control of this game and are following the greater ingenuity and growing militancy of the protest movement with the rather pathetic reliance on horse charges and truncheon assaults. Crucially of course the police violence itself plays into the hands of media spectacle and despite the best efforts of the BBC, Sky News and even supposedly supportive media outlets such as The Guardian to cast the protest as a riot, the totally disproportionate and provocative brutality of the police's own actions have shone through.

Despite this it is clear that a protest strategy based on concentrating spectacle walks straight in to the trap the kettle sets – not simply in terms of the physical site of the protest but of the virtual terrain of the media spectacle. A new spatiality of protest, a new geography of opposition is needed that can prevent spatial containment becoming the medium for a media spectacle that delegitimizes protests at the same times as it legitimizes government policy and police brutality.

This is not to say that there is no room for symbolic protest as it appears to be the only level at which opposition can effectively operate in the current conjuncture. Further it is not to say that there may be the need for more large-scale concentrated protests in the near future, in which case preparation should be made for turning a kettle into a camp and hence turning containment back against the police, laying siege from the inside out. However, if concentrated spectacle is the only trick up the protesters' sleeves, it is sure to meet increasing violence that can be repeatedly re-symbolized in delegitimizing spectacles. It would be unwise to rely on the growing sympathy of either the media or the public as more beatings are meted out (something which the BBC's disgraceful interrogation of Jody McIntyre, filmed being dragged from his wheelchair by police during the

protests on 9 December, lays testament to). We may like to think such a change would occur but relying upon it would be to give a free-hand to the police and the media. Rather, the initiative the protestors have thus far had over the police needs to be maintained.

A spatial strategy is needed for protest that avoids the possibility of concentration and containment and the type of media-friendly *guerre en forme* seen recently. It is time to return to Deleuze and Guattari, to Debord and the Situationists, to Lefebvre, even to Tiqqun and Hakim Bey and to take them seriously (perhaps for the first time). A form of protest is needed that places dispersal over concentration, mobility over stasis and perhaps even disruption over symbolism. If multiple smaller mobile groups were to simultaneously occupy key strategic sites and disrupt vital processes the momentum of symbolical opposition could be maintained without the police being able to herd opposition toward spectacle. The crowds could continuously move between temporary occupations to ensure the police are divided and chasing but to refuse them the pleasure of pitched battle. Imagine multiple small groups (perhaps numbering from 50 to 1,000 depending on the site in question) emerging at once to occupy government buildings, banks, constituency offices, party headquarters, shops, airports, train stations, tubes, buses, corporate office towers, Scotland Yard, Buckingham Palace, monuments, museums, universities, schools, roads and streets before dissolving and regrouping again – and not just in the centre but across London and not just in London but across the country.

This is not a novel suggestion of course and such civic swarming has already successfully occurred during the protests on November 30th when police gave futile chase to small bands of protestors across London's snowy streets and again on December 9th when some who escaped the kettle temporarily occupied the National Gallery and ran amok on

Oxford Street (and around the royal carriage). However, this strategy needs to be developed and spread so that small isolated clusters can become a 'swarm' (developing an alternate terminology of protest is also an urgent task). Such a strategy presents some serious planning and logistical challenges but a rough organizational frame can be provided by the numerous groups involved in the protests from student unions, groups in occupation, political activist groups and artists' collectives and so on.

The ability of those involved in the protest movement to work together has already been proven and there are ready-made frameworks for realizing such a new spatiality of protest. Of course the police will be preparing for this strategic shift and are not as heavy footed and slow witted as some would like to believe. Therefore preparation has to be made for their attempts to corral crowds into numerous smaller kettles, and perhaps to more violently attempt to block protesters' passage. The aim must be to keep evading the nexus between containment, violence and spectacle, to avoid concentration and to keep moving. The police will of course, as always, have the law on their side, and as there is no way for such forms of protest to be sanctioned there is likely be a greater number of arrests if protesters are caught. A step outside the kettle will be a welcome step outside the law, and the consequences must be followed through even if we can't yet know 'where'.

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THE TRADE UNIONS

Recent British history tells us that the institutions at the heart of popular protest are the trade unions – though many protesters were not even born at the time of the miners' strike, let alone in the winter of discontent or earlier. With a few exceptions, the leadership of the trade unions were almost comically slow to react to the threats to working people presented by this government. Students laughed, then sighed, that while they were organising occupations and almost weekly mass demonstrations, union leaders were planning to do their bit by scheduling a protest for the end of March.

'The revolution will already be over by then!' some joked. Slowly the reality of the situation dawned, and Unite leader Len McCluskey penned a comment piece for The Guardian suggesting that they would have to make up for lost time. With 490,000 public sector redundancies predicted for the lifetime of this parliament, the student protest movement will need the solidarity of trade unions – and wants it too. On whose terms this happens is very much up for grabs; but the students have certainly set the pace.

Unions, get set for battle

Len McCluskey, The Guardian

Len McCluskey is General Secretary of Unite

Britain's students have certainly put the trade union movement on the spot. Their mass protests against the tuition fees increase have refreshed the political parts a hundred debates, conferences and resolutions could not reach.

We know the vast rise in tuition fees is only the down payment on the Con-Dem package of cuts, charges and job losses to make us pay for the bankers' crisis. The magnificent students' movement urgently needs to find a wider echo if the government is to be stopped.

The response of trade unions will now be critical. While it is easy to dismiss "general strike now" rhetoric from the usual quarters, we have to be preparing for battle. It is our responsibility not just to our members but to the wider society that we defend our welfare state and our industrial future against this unprecedented assault.

Early in the new year the TUC will be holding a special meeting to discuss co-ordinated industrial action and to analyse the possibilities and opportunities for a broad strike movement.

The practical and legal hurdles cannot be dismissed. Thatcher's anti-union laws, left in place by New Labour, are on the statute book for just these occasions. But we must not let the law paralyse us. The bigger issue is winning working people to the conviction that the cuts can be stopped. It is vital to rebuild working-class confidence.

Unless people are convinced not just that they are hurting – not hard to do – but also that there is a coherent alternative to the Cameron-Clegg class war austerity, then getting millions into action will remain a pipedream. That alternative needs to be one the whole movement can unite around. A key part must be a rejection of the need for cuts. "What do we want? Fewer cuts later on", is not a slogan to set the blood coursing.

So I hope Ed Miliband is going to continue his welcome course of drawing a line under Labour's Blairite past, in particular by leaving behind the devotion to City orthodoxy, which still finds its echo in some frontbench pronouncements that meet the coalition's cuts programme halfway at the least.

I would argue there is no case for cuts at all: the austerity frenzy has been whipped up for explicitly ideological reasons – to provide the excuse for what the Tories would have loved to do anyway, completing Thatcherism's unfinished business by strangling the welfare state. If the deficit is seen as a problem – it is not high by either historical or contemporary standards – a positive growth and tax-justice programme should be the main means of addressing it.

Trade unions need to reach out, too. Students have to know we are on their side. We must unequivocally condemn the behaviour of the police on the recent demonstrations. Kettling, batoning and mounted charges against teenagers have no place in our society.

It is ironic that young people have been dismissed as apathetic and uninterested in politics – yet as soon as they turn out in numbers they are treated as the "enemy within", in a way instantly familiar to those of us who spent the 1970s and 1980s on picket lines.

And we should work closely with our communities bearing the brunt of the onslaught. That is why Unite has agreed to

support the broad Coalition of Resistance established last month, which brings together unions and local anti-cuts campaigns from across the country.

The TUC's demonstration on 26 March will be a critical landmark in developing our resistance, giving trade union members the confidence to take strike action in defence of jobs and services. These are Con-Dem cuts, and this is a capitalist crisis. An attempt to blame Labour local authorities for the problem is a shortcut to splitting our movement and letting the government off the hook.

That doesn't mean Labour councils should get off free. There are, alas, Labour councillors embarking on union-bashing under cover of cuts, something we won't tolerate. Labour needs to understand that any social alternative to the present misery needs strong trade unions. And this is the moment when we have to prove ourselves.

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Just what does the Guardian think trade unions are for?

Keith Ewing, openDemocracy

After the vigour and excitement of the student demonstrations against the cuts, a Guardian leader (19 December) derides Unite's new general secretary Len McCluskey as a 'Bourbon'. Why? Because he proposes trade union action and strikes rather than defeatist acceptance of the government's unjust and counter-productive deficit reduction plans. Has the Daily Mail leader writer been picked up on a free transfer? Has the cold weather affected normally sound judgement?

Just precisely what does the Guardian think trade unions are for? What does the Guardian editorial team – embedded in secure jobs in a plush new office – expect of trade union leaders in the face of the most swingeing attacks on jobs and services in a generation, imposed by a government with no mandate for its actions?

There may or may not be a need for budget cuts. But the promises made at the last election and the ambiguous level of electoral support for the different political parties suggests strongly that government action should be driven modestly by the need for consensus, rather than arrogantly by the conceit of dogma.

But dogma has trumped consensus, and workers are vulnerable, very vulnerable, as a result of the Blair bequest – promised first in the columns of *The Times* on the eve of the 1997 general election – that under New Labour the United Kingdom would have the most restrictive employment laws in Europe.

That is a promise he kept, a promise which helped his party to lose the last election, and a promise that yields bitter fruit now about to be served up in large measure by the Conservative-led (ConDem) government. As in the 1980s (and history is important to prepare us for the future), workers are about to discover that their contracts of employment are worthless.

Public sector staff will find out soon enough that their terms and conditions are to be changed without their consent (as in the case of the London fire-fighters), employers using specious devices like the so-called Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, section 188; others will be dismissed for redundancy after a charade of consultation.

Those made redundant will find that their job was worth no more than £380 for every year of service. If they have been unfairly selected for redundancy and wish to claim for unfair dismissal they will have to appeal to a tribunal system that is groaning under the weight of other claims. They will not get their job back, no matter how unfairly they have been treated, and will have to settle for modest compensation.

Nor will most of them find work in the fabled private sector. BBC research reveals that companies are not recruiting. And where there are jobs, those redundant public service workers will find themselves in a bitter competition with dozens of others in a labour market underpinned by a minimum wage of only £5.93 an hour.

So Merry Christmas to you too.

In the meantime, let us have a grown up and informed debate about the role and function of trade unions, and the manner of their response to the most challenging circumstances many of their members will have ever faced. The starting point in these circumstances must surely be that

the primary responsibility of trade unions and their leaders is to promote and protect the interests of their members.

It is that basic. It is what trade unions are for. In the good times this means trade unions must ensure that their members get a fair share of the wealth they create; in the bad times it means trade unions must ensure that their members are not left carrying an unfair burden, particularly where the burden has been created by the misconduct and irresponsibility of others, who still insist on paying themselves huge bonuses, in a two fingered salute to the rest of us.

In the absence of any meaningful engagement with trade unions or alternative ways of dealing with conflict, what else are workers to do but take industrial action in defence of their interests? Is the Guardian advocating not passive resistance but passive obedience? Trade unionists may be forgiven for thinking about a different response, particularly as some of them will have absolutely nothing to lose, given the bleak future that awaits them and their communities.

It could of course be very different. History again. In 1938, Ernest Brown, the Minister of Labour in the then Tory-led government, announced in the Commons that it was the policy of the government to promote collective bargaining and with it the trade union voice. Radical and revolutionary? Tories taking leave of their senses? Not really. Just a simple attempt by a thoughtful man to increase wages, equalise incomes, stimulate the circulation of money, increase demand, and promote job growth, for the good of the country and the benefit of everyone.

Anyone listening?

Keith Ewing is Professor of Public Law, Kings College London. This article originally appeared on [opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/keith-ewing/just-what-does-guardian-think-trade-unions-are-for), 20 December 2010 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/keith-ewing/just-what-does-guardian-think-trade-unions-are-for>

Comment on Keith Ewing

John Stuttle, openDemocracy

So, the Guardian leader claims that Len McCluskey has learned nothing and forgotten nothing since 1979. Keith, I can assure you that, speaking as Father of the Unite chapel at Guardian News and Media Ltd, I am not alone amongst my colleagues, both in Unite and the NUJ, in disowning the sentiments expressed in that leader column.

We are witnessing an outpouring of anger from students and working people up and down the country at swingeing cuts which are unquestionably ideological in origin. We see a new generation of students being encumbered with enormous debt and our public sector trashed. We witness tax avoidance on a colossal scale while tax collectors are sent to the dole queue. We are told it is all Labour's fault there is no money, but somehow billions are found for more bankers in Ireland, and doubtless soon elsewhere, when they demand it.

The anger we feel is fuelled by the realisation that many were duped by the lies of the Liberal Democrats during the election campaign and by the knowledge that the economic crisis we are now being forced to pay for is the result, not of reckless Labour spending but the avaricious folly of the bankers and their friends in international finance (Labour's failure to regulate was a contributory factor but I don't recall the Tories or Liberals calling for more regulation at any point either).

Trade unionists are certainly not helped by the abject failure of the Labour Party to do anything to remove the Tory anti-union legislation built up under Thatcher and

Major, as repeated injunctions from the likes of Willie Walsh have amply demonstrated this year.

Let us not forget that all these things have been described well, and often with passion, by Guardian journalists. But what exactly does today's leader writer (Julian or whoever it might be) want us to do? Wait five years for the next general election? So much for innovation. If Ed Miliband were to lend his voice to Len McCluskey's call to action we could build a movement that would ensure this millionaires' cabinet with no mandate collapsed in short order. Whether he does or not, we must make it happen. Do I sound old fashioned? Maybe so, but bonuses and bailouts on the one hand and baton charges on the other have a distinctly old fashioned feel to them too.

I for one can certainly remember back to May of this year. The Guardian called for a vote for the Liberal Democrats. The leader writers were badly wrong then. But, as they say of Len, maybe they have simply learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

John Stuttle is Father of the Unite Chapel at GNM (Kings Place) – writing in a personal capacity on openDemocracy.net.

THE AESTHETICS

Sound and vision in the protest movement

Protest in the era of mass culture is nothing without its aesthetics – the wit, imagery, sonics and imagination of the protesters provide an outlet for their creativity, and the tools for their rebellion. As Adam Harper notes, aesthetics are both the means and the manifestation of protest. This is true of the hilarious, cutting home-made protest signs photographed by Jesse Darling, and in the zeitgeist-capturing music of the EMA kids, for whom rebellion means the right to celebrate their culture by dancing in Parliament Square – while they are denied the same right closer to home in ‘the banlieues of London’. Ultimately, as Harper argues, protest aesthetics mean forging the right to construct a new vision of reality – and it’s exciting, it’s creative, and above all, it’s subversive.

On [Protest] Signs & the Signified

Jesse Darling, Brave New What

There's been a lot of talk - on both sides of the argument - about who's behind the protests. Is it violent anarchists, bourgeois intellectuals, kids from the banlieues who listen to dubstep? Or people just like you? Or all of the above?



Well, I was there too. I was angry about the cuts, as we all should be, because they affect us all, students or not; they reinstate the outdated feudal protocol of class privilege at jurisdictional level and stand in opposition to what we have come to understand as our basic human rights as residents and citizens of this country. In universal terms education is

both a right and a privilege, but access to education was one of the last great things about Britain, and absolutely worth fighting for.



And yet this anger is transformed into something like pride at the moment you find yourself marching to the beat of a hundred disparate voices and sound systems united - not by a complex ideology, but by an immediate and intuitive sense of rightness. In the spirit of non-violent resistance, and in the spirit of this feeling - something like pride, a little celebratory and a little inflammatory - I began collecting signs; for signs are signifiers, and signifiers are incantations. The signs are testament to the wit, charm, smarts and diversity of the protesters, which is the reason I am proud to stand among them. Who is leading the protests? Let the signs speak for themselves.





























To paraphrase an old anarchist rallying cry:

The brain is an organ twice the size of your fist.

Keep thinking; keep feeling; keep fighting.



JD, London, December 2010

This originally appeared on bravenewwhat.blogspot.com, 9 December 2010.
<http://bravenewwhat.blogspot.com/2010/12/on-protest-signs-signified.html>

This is our riot: POW!

Dan Hancox

Newsnight is very lucky to have Paul Mason as its Economics Editor: he's consistently swum against the news media tide when covering the protests, by actually bothering to find out what's going on, rather than making smug, reactionary assumptions grounded in total ignorance. "Rich kids on Cenotaph-why should taxpayers pay for them to go to uni? Oh for days when decent students protested abt wars not £", tweeted the New Statesman's James MacIntyre from the comfort of his desk, in a prime example of how the title 'Political Reporter' has long since ceased to have a relationship with the reporting of politics.

If fewer reporters were like James MacIntyre, and more were like Paul Mason, daring to leave the comfort of the bars of the Palace of Westminster, they'd realise that while some posh nob's car was being scuffed on Regent's Street, across central London teenagers trying to defend their rights to an affordable education were being bludgeoned by truncheon-wielding riot police. I saw a lot of young blood yesterday, and a lot of defiance. I also spent seven hours in a police kettle, 90 minutes of which was on Westminster Bridge, after the Metropolitan Police repeatedly lied to us that we were finally about to be released. The key thing about actual kettles, of course, is that they are designed to bring things to a boil – which is exactly what happened in Parliament Square, the green space framed by Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Cathedral, the Supreme Court, and the Treasury.

Surrounded by these august institutions, and overseen by statues of the likes of Mandela, Churchill and Lincoln,

protesters trapped in the kettle had little else to do but chant, make new friends, smash windows, and make their own entertainment. Early in the afternoon, as we stood beneath an imposing statue of Edward Smith-Stanley, the 14th Earl of Derby, wondering what might happen next, the music arrived. A battered portable sound-system, no more than a speaker in a trolley, was wheeled up alongside us by a man in his 40s or 50s, a veteran compared to most in the square. He initially played what he described as "politically right-on reggae"; it was rootsy, 'conscious' (i.e. directly, earnestly political), but relaxed; people milled about chatting, probably enjoying the music, but didn't really engage with it. You hear a lot of this music at protests, you always have done – but what veteran protesters often don't realise (with the best will in the world), is that the most powerful political music is frequently music that isn't explicitly, lyrically political: "It's not about the content, it's about the energy and aura", as grime MC Tempz put it, when I told him his songs were becoming the soundtrack to the protests.

Suddenly, the music changed. A teenager negotiated control of the jack into the amplifier, connected it to his Blackberry, and within minutes, there was a spontaneous rave going on in Parliament Square, a tightly packed mosh-pit/dance-floor of over a hundred young protesters. Paul Mason could not believe what he was seeing:

"Young men, mainly black, grabbed each other around the head and formed a surging dance to the digital beat, lit, as the light failed, by the distinctly analogue light of a bench they had set on fire. Any idea that you are dealing with Lacan-reading hipsters from Spitalfields on this demo is mistaken. While a good half of the march was undergraduates from the most militant college occupations – UCL, SOAS, Leeds, Sussex – the really stunning phenomenon, politically, was the presence of youth:

bainlieue-style youth from Croydon, Peckam, the council estates of Islington.”

We were with this crowd for hours yesterday, just as we had been the week before, on the snowy, equally apocalyptic #dayx2 protest. Paul Mason is – alas, alack – one of the few journalists to have noticed that this isn't a movement populated solely by undergraduate students, but by 'the EMA kids', a multi-racial bunch of 14-19 year olds from the poorer parts of London – and they've brought their music with them. With the caveat that various other types of music were playing yesterday in parts of Parliament Square (trance, samba, indie, even abstract ambient techno apparently) – this was the protest's main soundsystem, and the only one controlled by this hugely significant group of first-time protesters.

In a neat microcosm of urban Britain's multi-cultural music culture, the kids danced, moshed, and gleefully threw themselves around to dancehall from Jamaica (Elephant Man's 'Bun Bad Mind', Vybz Kartel's 'Ramping Shop'), big-name pop from the US (Rihanna's 'Rude Boy', 50 Cent 'Just A Lil Bit'), and a variety of club hits from the UK, US and Jamaica (Sean Paul – 'Like Glue', Major Lazer – 'Pon Di Floor', Princess Nyah – 'Frontline', Donaeo – 'Patry Hard') – the carnivalesque spirit a subversion of the authorities attempt to suffocate the spirit of protest. At 5.41pm the fees bill was passed, clashes with the riot police keeping the lid on the kettle intensified, bricks were thrown through windows, and still the music kept playing.

The hip-hop and dancehall went down tremendously well, with singalongs, hands in the air, and Caribbean-style, knees-bent 'skanking' adding an upbeat tonic to the increasingly violent mood elsewhere – but it was the uniquely London-born sound of underground 'grime' that saw the young protesters erupt with excitement. Coined for the warped, 'dirty' UK garage basslines being made on London's housing

estates in 2003 by the likes of Dizzee Rascal, Wiley, and Roll Deep, grime has a frenetic rapping style twice as fast as hip-hop, with strong influences from Jamaican sound-system culture. At its best, it's the most explosive, exhilarating form of music Britain has produced since punk rock: and the repeated playing of two songs at several of the student protests – Tempa T's 'Next Hype' and Lethal Bizzle's 'Pow! (Forward)' – encapsulate that energy. Both songs are litanies of violence, sonically and lyrically – but they're enjoyed with something approaching delight by fans, provoking the same delirious adrenaline rush that drew an earlier generation of disaffected British youth to punk.

Grime is perfect as a chorus of this oppressed generation, and perfect as a soundtrack to a riot – and to see it celebrated in the iconic home of the establishment, hemmed in by the police, was a bittersweet victory: the music has been de facto banned from London clubs by the very same police force, who over several years lobbied club owners to shun the genre, and frequently shut down events in advance, citing 'intelligence about an incident'. After a sustained campaign to let "banlieue-style youth" have the same rights to enjoy their music as fans of rock, pop, or dance music, even the Conservative MP appointed to investigate the persecution of black music in 2009 announced the police's tactics had been "draconian" and "absurd". But by then it was too late, and the live grime scene had wilted.

'Pow! (Forward)' is so raucous that it really was banned, albeit in a more piecemeal way: "Please do not play Pow!", pleaded the signs fixed behind DJ booths in a number of night clubs in and around London in 2004. This time around, with the authorities too busy trying to stop a Bastille-style storming of the Treasury, the song was allowed to play out to a crowd of hundreds. As 'Pow!'s blitzkrieg of opening beats rang out in the dark, and despite the icy temperatures, two young men of about 18 removed their shirts and jumped onto

two dustbins facing one another – suddenly there was a dance-off happening, and the crowd around them exploded. “You’re barking up the wrong tree / the spotlight’s on me” they chorused, as a press camera flash briefly strobed the two guys’ dancing. It was too much; the song was skipped back to the beginning and played from the start. And then, a third time; each time the energy rising with the young protestors’ arms, illuminated only by distant fires in another corner of Parliament Square, and the night-lights on Big Ben.

Pow. See you at the next one.

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Images of Reality and Student Surrealism

Adam Harper, Rouges Foam



The student protest movement that rose to sudden visibility a month ago with a 50,000-strong march through central London, culminating in an occupation of the buildings on Millbank housing the Conservative Party HQ, has not only persisted but dramatically diversified. The next major day of action, 'Day X', took place across the country on the 24th of November and saw dozens of university occupations as well as the first example of a large-scale police response, with police containing or 'kettling' protestors (whose ranks now included thousands of teenagers) in freezing conditions on London's Whitehall for over nine hours, forced to remain within police lines without knowing when crossing them would be possible. Day X2 was on the 30th of November and this time protestors largely managed to avoid being kettled by splitting into groups and moving at high speed through

London in the snow, getting as far east as Bank and as far west as Hyde Park Corner. Thursday's Day X₃ was in many ways a climax of the movement, coinciding with a vote in parliament on tripling the cap on tuition fees and ending with more kettling and new heights of violence from both police and protestors. The vote was won by a relatively slim majority, but with further cuts to higher education and to the public sector in general to follow in the coming months the groups and networks that swiftly emerged in the past month have vowed to continue the fight.

I was out demonstrating on each of these occasions and on Day X₃ I was caught in a police kettle that enclosed thousands of protestors in London's Parliament Square. Upon attempting to leave at around 3pm, I was caught in a tightly-packed crowd that was battling against police lines and subsequently charged by police on horseback. It was at around this point that Alfie Meadows, a 20-year-old philosophy student, was struck in the head by a police baton, causing bleeding in his brain that required emergency surgery that evening. When this struggle died down we waited in Parliament Square for five hours with no more food or water than we'd thought to bring, and no more warmth than from the dodgy smoke of makeshift fires. In the dark after the vote many protestors, their anger concentrated by the continued kettling, turned on the surrounding government buildings (including the Treasury), causing riot police to further enclose us and once more using batons to do so. Just after Big Ben struck 9pm, the police lines surged forward with a roar, clearing us out of Parliament Square and shepherding us onto Westminster Bridge. We assumed – and police officers had implied – that we were finally walking to our freedom, but instead we were kettled once again right there on the bridge for ninety minutes, this time out in the open and with very little room to move. I regained my liberty at 11pm.

The internet has enabled an unprecedented proliferation of pictures and video from the protests. Some of these images have appeared in the media and attained iconic status, such as the photo of a masked youth high-kicking the ground floor windows of the Millbank buildings. The latest example is the photo of Prince Charles and his wife Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, panicking behind car windows as protestors who'd moved to Regent Street attacked their Rolls Royce. The picture appeared on the front of all but one of yesterday's major national newspapers. Naturally it distracted the media from the rioting elsewhere – not to mention the cause of the protestors, which is apparently expunged at the slightest hint of criminal or irreverent activity – but it did give the day's events a surprisingly old-school revolutionary flavour.



I can't help but reiterate my slight nervousness about doing aesthetics – about aestheticising – during a time like this. Aestheticising a cause and its symbols so as to appreciate it on a somewhat artistic level can publicise and galvanise it, but wallowing in pathos and rhetoric becomes complacent

and inflammatory, colouring a representation leads to misrepresentation, and celebrating the thrill of conflict is outright dangerous. Yes, everything is aestheticised, life – that is, ‘real’ life – may not be entirely separable from art and artistic perception, but it isn’t a nineteenth-century Romantic painting (Delacroix’s ‘Liberty Leading the People’, celebrating the 1830 July Revolution in France, being the famous example), however the fors or againsts portray it.

A key problem in the relationship between aesthetics and political struggle, then, is that of realism: to what extent does what we have experienced during the struggle – emotion included – reflect reality? In art as in any form of perception, realism and ‘reality’ are relative, selective and ideologically constituted. Because it’s tied to the necessity of some form of consequential action (be it financial cuts or demonstration), reality is a political battleground, and ideas or images of it set down horizons beyond which an ability to imagine social, economic or structural alternatives can become difficult and discouraged. Few have articulated this better than Mark ‘K-Punk’ Fisher, whose recent book *Capitalist Realism* has described the rise after Thatcher of the eponymous capitalist construction of reality, and the social and institutional imperatives that go with it, which become unquestionable because they are ‘realistic’. The concept has become a valuable shorthand in challenging the similarly ‘realistic’ (i.e. ideologically motivated) necessities of cuts to institutions such as universities.



For me, the photograph above sharply stands out from the rest of the images to come out of Day X3 not just for its brutal presentation of evidence of violence, of police brutality (the word brutal often suggests ‘unadorned’, ‘naïve’, ‘raw’, think red raw), but for its equally brutal presentation of this problem of realism in political struggle itself. It was taken in the Jeremy Bentham Room at University College London (which since Day X had housed one of the most successful and famous of the student occupations) and uploaded to Twitter by New Statesman columnist and student protest reporter Laurie Penny. It shows a student who’d managed to escape the police kettle with several bruises on her/his back and arms, but several extra dimensions of meaning are added to this disturbing image by the presence of that day’s copy of London’s free newspaper, the Evening Standard.

Perhaps it’s there to attest to the date the photo was taken, as if the subject had been kidnapped, but it’s the headline that launches the image’s commentary on realism. Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the

Liberal Democrat party (formerly popular with students and the junior partner in the coalition government), is a particular focus of student anger, as he'd promised (signed a pledge, in fact) prior to the election not to raise the cap on tuition fees. Now on the day of the vote, he announces that those opposing raising the cap are 'dreamers', living not in the real world, but in a 'dream world'. In the article Clegg says he backs the plans because he's dealing with 'the way the world is'. Obviously, this begs the question as to what world, what reality he thought he was living in earlier this year, before the election when he signed the pledge. Clegg's partnership with the Conservative Party has evidently woken him from that dream.

The paper's headline opposes capitalist realism with a student surrealism. Similarly, it was Salvador Dali's paradoxical goal to produce 'hand-painted dream photographs', bringing photography's ability to record objectively into the realm of the abstract. But of course, what could be more brutally real than the naked body marked by signs of material rupture, the painful physical embodiment of struggle. The body is the first fact of human reality, after all. The universe of the image is differentiated into the newspaper on the right – a world of relative abstraction, discourse, ideology, language, symbolism, thought, opinion, representation – and the flesh on the left – a world of relative corporeality, of bodily reality. At this point our understanding of the political context helps create a story. Perhaps the students are struck because they're in this dream world, punished for their bad, defective education and forcefully woken by Clegg's establishment, brought back to reality by the discouraging pain of the police batons. But at the same time it's the student who attacks Clegg by revealing her/his wounds, implying 'no, I live in a world of brutally real physical injury committed to my body, look, here it is, this is its most basic sign'. We can no longer tell

which side has the monopoly on reality and which side is really dreaming.

This student surrealism projected onto the protestors by the ‘realist’ government has been playfully adopted and subverted by the student movement in a number of ways. One famous slogan from a Day X₃ placard had been taken from the Situationists: ‘Be Realistic: Demand the Impossible’, which I later saw scrawled on a wall in Parliament Square. This easily misunderstood sentence simply suggests that the borders of ruling class-sponsored ‘reality’ shouldn’t be considered absolute and final, or that political struggle is ever over. At the entrance to the UCL Occupation, placed in front of banners reading ‘Art Against Cuts’, stood a post-cubist humanoid figure assembled from found objects and painted silver, almost like something from the studios of sculptors Max Ernst, Eduardo Paolozzi or Bill Woodrow. Most interestingly, in front of it was placed a sign announcing ‘THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING’, affirming the reality despite the surrealism.



One group of students dubbed the ‘book bloc’ (a protest tradition originating with students in Italy) carried thick

polystyrene shields covered in cardboard and painted up to look like famous, over-sized books of philosophy, sociology and literature. The image below, which could have been part of a Neo Rauch painting, will appeal to fans of the recently popular art and music whose epithet 'hauntology' is borrowed from Derrida. Also out in force were such thuggish texts as 'Negative Dialectics', 'Brave New World', 'Down and Out in Paris and London', 'Society of the Spectacle', 'One-dimensional Man', 'Phenomenology of Spirit', 'Being and Event' and 'Just William', the latter ironically understating the ensuing conflict between the civil disobedience of the young and the full weight of the Metropolitan police. When the two sides clashed on Whitehall, the book bloc's attempts to counter police force with ideas themselves created images that were both powerfully symbolic and disarmingly tongue-in-cheek (even in footage released by the police). Such images suggest a reverse of the beaten student above, with dream and abstraction made material and now striking back. They certainly give the lie to the popular conception that those involved in police violence are mindless thugs.

The battle is for reality and for a new reality. Aesthetics must necessarily be a weapon in that battle, but like violence itself it is a dangerous weapon – readily abused. And most frighteningly in this case, nothing prepares people to see the tension between aesthetics and reality like higher education itself.

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THE GENERATIONS

Old politics and new movements

The spectre of the 68ers looms large over the current protests – partly because of the schematic similarities to that movement, and perhaps more so, because the veterans of that era are of exactly the right age to be passing comment on the current wave of youth uprisings; as politicians, academics and journalists. Yet what has been striking about this student movement has been its eagerness to shed such comparisons with 1968, despite its romance, and to learn from the lessons of its predecessors. The relationship between this generation and those who hold the reins of power (mainstream or otherwise) remains part of an ongoing debate. The left-wing parties, with their more traditional hierarchies and decision-making processes, have been the subject of hostility from some of the student protesters, who fear they will seek to ‘take over’ what remains a strikingly leaderless movement, and do so for their own ends. As long as this debate remains comradely, and the broad goals the same, it is one that will continue to be voiced in public. As Anthony Barnett concludes, the tens has every possibility to trump the sixties – not least because “what is on offer from the political system today seems exhausted, its institutions corrupted, its constitution a shambles, and reinvention essential”.

Will the 'Tens' trump the 'Sixties'?

Anthony Barnett, New Statesman

At the start of John le Carré's novel *Our Kind of Traitor*, published in September this year, the 30-year-old hero, educated at a state school and now lecturing in Oxford, suffers a crisis: "Would Orwell have believed it possible that the same overfed voices which had haunted him in the 1930s, the same crippling incompetence, addiction to foreign wars and assumptions of entitlement, were happily in place in 2009? Receiving no response from the blank student faces staring up at him, he had supplied it for himself: no. Orwell would emphatically not have believed it. Or if he had, he would have taken to the streets. He would have smashed some serious glass."

It can't be often that an autumn novel so catches a national mood that its fictional projection becomes reality even before it has achieved its Christmas sales. Student faces are blank no longer and the image of a young man, hooded, aiming a balletic kick into the serious glass front of the lobby of the Tory party's headquarters in Millbank on 10 November, was on all the front pages the next day.

Whatever the media might prefer, most voters did not see the students and their supporters as either troublemakers or privileged beneficiaries demanding special treatment from the taxpayer.

The students seem to be learning fast, too. On the day of the third big demonstration, on 30 November, a "19-year-old student" told the BBC: "Smashing up windows was necessary in the beginning to get the demonstrations on the front pages, but now any violence would be counterproductive."

Across Britain there has been a swell of student activism, occupations and demands, with a focus on higher education but reaching out for public support against cuts. Only once before has there been anything like this level of student action – at the end of the Sixties, starting in 1968. Will the 'tens' do better than the 'sixties'?

The Sixties changed our society and our culture. But here in Britain, unlike the rest of western Europe, the political rebellion of the left was marginalised; it arrived late, and was narrow by comparison with its counterparts on the Continent. The true political impact of the Sixties in Britain took another course.

In October 1968, a then unknown Margaret Thatcher gave a speech at a fringe meeting of the Conservative party conference. She caught the anti-statism of the new zeitgeist, and it was the political right that eventually captured the legacy of Sixties anti-authoritarianism.

Neoliberalism and the free market were the main beneficiaries of the movement against state power and paternalism. Ironically, it is Thatcher's successors against whom the students are now mobilising.

David Cameron told this year's Conservative conference that the general election meant that "statism lost... society won... it's a revolution... We are the radicals now, breaking apart the old system with a massive transfer of power, from the state to citizens, politicians to people, government to society." He was taking the words of the student activists of the Sixties and stuffing them into the mouths of today's.

Understandably, the students are refusing to swallow. It is not just the huge hike in fees they are being asked to absorb, but the simultaneous withdrawal of four-fifths of all direct grants to universities. As the government will back the loans that are supposed to replace this, there will be no immediate difference to the deficit. The coalition is using the fiscal

emergency as an excuse to abolish support for all humanities research and scholarship. Apparently, students will be expected to pay for this (at a time when, as the blogger and businessman Chris Goodall has calculated, they get at most £4,500 worth of teaching a year). No other advanced country has abandoned public support for the heart of its intellectual civilisation in this way. The very idea of a university is being guillotined.

While student resistance to this fate combines self-interest with a fight for the country's future as a whole, it is also being driven by a new generational divide. Once more, though this time thanks to "digitalisation", protest is underpinned by an epochal shift.

The Sixties announced the start of the great cycle of capitalist expansion. It was the opposite of now: jobs were plentiful, rent was cheap. We had our own music; there were miniskirts and Mini cars. It was "Americanisation", but we, too, influenced the States as London swung. Accompanying this heady sense of emancipation was the belief that our parents were from a different planet. They had grown up without TV, sex before marriage, drugs and rock 'n' roll; and often without university education, as we were part of the first expansion of mass higher education. It was a generation gulf, not a gap. Ridiculous rules, hypocrisy and authoritarian teaching methods became a target for students, as did secrecy. (Students demanded that universities "open the files", and a number of occupations broke into the administration offices to do just that.)

While the student movement was strongly international, in each country it had its own national characteristics. The revolution in France was against the culture of "Oui, Papa", the formality of which was much stiffer than here, and their President, de Gaulle, was a figure from 1945. In Germany, which had much the deepest and best Sixties, the "anti-

authoritarian movement" involved a generation that had to deal with the fact that their parents had been Nazis.

Then there was Vietnam. The Sixties were fundamentally violent as well as joyous, and America expressed both. Hundreds of thousands of their troops were occupying another country, thousands of Vietnamese were dying each month, and torture by the Americans was routine: this was the deadly backdrop to the arrival of drugs, which then fed its stream of victims into the maelstrom.

This atmosphere of violence fed into the students' responses – extremist terrorist groups such as the Red Army Faction in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy and, in Britain, the Angry Brigade, mistook fantasy for strategy. Pauline Melville's Dionysian novel *Eating Air*, which draws directly on events of the period, the pitch-perfect archaeology of Hari Kunzru's *My Revolutions* and *le Carré's* *Absolute Friends* all catch the earnest and well-meaning initial impulse of the '68 movement – hippie, ultra-tolerant and impatient. And all three recall how the sectarians, the authorities and their agents were waiting in the wings.

Class conscious

Today it feels to me, as it did 40 years ago, that the protests connect to something larger. Perhaps they are now heralding the end of a long consumer boom, as opposed to its beginning. Certainly the crash of the Anglo-Saxon finance led model looks like the end of an era even if India and Brazil are taking off (and China awaits the bursting of its bubble).

I am not saying today's students are a repetition or mere followers. On the contrary, all that today's students need to learn from the Sixties is how not to become marginalised and defeated.

The differences between now and then may make this possible. We are a much more equal and open society. But the new generation faces debt and insecurity, and economic

injustice in Britain has increased astronomically. After the crash of 2008 exposed bankers as robbers who skim off unearned capital, we discovered that we have to pay for their disaster. Belief in the fundamental legitimacy of the system has been shaken, in a way that did not happen under Harold Wilson.

This means that, in contrast to the late Sixties, when student protest was ridiculed and pilloried, today it can make a credible claim to voice the anger and concerns of a wider public. And it is significant that the demonstrations have been joined by children protesting about the abolition of the Education Maintenance Assistance (EMA), which pays those from hard-up families to stay in school or further education.

Another important difference between then and now is that the student militancy of 1968 in Britain was largely confined to universities and art schools. There was a dramatic confrontation at Hornsey College of Art in north London in May 1968. But very few of what were then called "polytechnics" were involved. University students were mostly middle-class people on three-year courses on campuses away from home. Polytechnic students were mostly local and working-class. In 2010, the social composition of what were polytechnics and are now universities remains local and working-class, but many student occupations are taking place in them. Today "students" connotes a much broader, less privileged sector.

The web reinforces this cross-class generational relationship. Young people today communicate with and relate to each other in ways which mean that their lives, decisions and networks are much more spontaneous and flexible. Many who would otherwise not be involved will follow and, in a certain way, experience the new levels of activism. They may be stirred from passivity. Their capacity to learn what is really happening is much less mediated by

the mainstream media, whose regular readership and viewing has collapsed among the under-25s.

The web reshapes, but is not a substitute for, power and organisation. Life remains, happily, a face-to-face affair. Nonetheless, the kind of society the new generation looks forward to will be unlike any that has gone before. It is easy to exaggerate this and then puncture the inflated projection. It's a generation gap, not a gulf as humanly painful as that experienced by their Sixties predecessors. Yet, in the short term, the new technology is sure to increase mobilisation sharply; and in the long term, the resources the internet provides may help this generation to succeed in its challenge to hierarchy with direct democracy, deliberation and openness – and to create a political culture that is not disabled by the routines of "representation" now largely appropriated by corporate influence.

The roles of race and gender are also different this time round. Back then, there weren't significant numbers of black and ethnic-minority students to make their participation an issue. But as I watched videos of the current protests, it struck me that there seem to be many more black pupils among the school protesters than among the university students.

The student occupations of the late Sixties preceded the feminist movement. The basic attitude to women was set by the Rolling Stones. Women were "chicks": attachments with closed mouths and short skirts. This was not seen as being imposed, however; individual women could insist on being treated as equals, and then they were. It was a culture of experimentation for everyone, of both sexes (and as with drugs, experiments can go badly wrong).

But the energy also fed into the feminist movement, which is the greatest political legacy of the Sixties. Today, after the heyday of that movement has passed, women's participation

in the student movement, as in the economy and politics, is no longer in itself regarded as an "issue". However, the boys have yet to learn to desire equality as a mutual benefit. It is unspoken, but there is a casual "Of course you can be equal if you want to be" attitude, which somehow leaves open the possibility of benefiting from inequality, "if that's what they want". It is disappointing to me that this is still the culture among young men in the movement. Perhaps this time one of its effects will be to make feminism mainstream.

Tough choices all round

Besides feminism, the other great political legacy of the Sixties was the idea that protesting is a right. This belief clearly animates the student protests today. But the movement is still trying to establish what kinds of protest are acceptable: quiet, peaceful, non-violent demonstrations, or civil disobedience, or property damage? Violence against people seems to be wholly rejected, as shown by the spontaneous revulsion of the demonstrators against the protester who threw a fire extinguisher from the roof at Millbank tower – a welcome change.

The Sixties, too, started with the slogan "Love and peace". It wasn't serious and there seems a better understanding now of the need for no willed violence against people. Doubtless, provocateurs will try to undo this. But today's students are unlikely to go on to spawn bands of terrorists, not least because they have been preceded by a decade of fundamentalist terrorism. And everyone can see how that kind of "propaganda of the deed" simply feeds reaction and empowers the security state.

One of the reasons that the student movement in Britain in the Sixties – unlike those in France and Germany – was marginalised, was the influence of the Labour Party, which was in office and played its role as pillar of the establishment. It was a smart move on Ed Miliband's part, therefore, to say

that he had thought of going to talk to the students protesting outside parliament. He was never going to come out in support of the demonstrators, as his father, Ralph, did in 1968, but he must see that the country needs a politics built outside conventional party, parliamentary and careerist routines. Should he and his party colleagues fail to grasp this, one clear lesson from the Sixties is that, somehow or other, the Tories will.

In 1968, the occupations and protests in British universities were an attempt to catch up with Paris, Berlin and campuses across America; 2010 feels very different. Perhaps the principal contrast between this decade and the Sixties is the sense that, this time around, the students are ahead of the game.

In the general election campaign in May, the party that pitched most energetically for student votes against the two old party machines was the Liberal Democrats. The National Union of Students got the Lib Dem candidates to pledge in writing that they would, individually and jointly, oppose any extension of university tuition fees. The meaning of the gesture was clear: in any deals that might be forthcoming in the event of a hung parliament – which was the whole point of voting Lib Dem – they might compromise on other policies, but not on this.

In an editorial comment written after the Millbank riot, the Mail on Sunday declared:

“Nowhere on earth can a young man or woman lead such a privileged life as that available in the colleges of our ancient universities. Surrounded by the glories of English architecture, tended by obsequious servants, feasted in shadowed, candlelit halls, taught face-to-face by the greatest minds of their generation, Oxbridge undergraduates are introduced at an early age to a way of life that most cannot begin to dream of.”

“Nobody in Britain has any justification for rioting. This is a free country with the rule of law and democratic government – rare possessions in a world of corrupt and authoritarian slums.”

This neatly illustrates the difficulty for those who oppose the students. It is an absurdly idealised caricature of Oxbridge, where many may search for great minds but few are found. The 50,000 students who marched last month experience quite different educational conditions. The giveaway in the Mail's argument is the leap from its mouth-watering description of the good life enjoyed by a few to the claim that "nobody in Britain has any justification for rioting". What? Not even against the existence of such privilege?

Who's radical now?

Apparently not, because we have the rule of law and democratic government, unlike benighted lands elsewhere. But the failure of our democracy is symbolised by the Lib Dems' betrayal of their special pledge, while there seems to be no law for the bankers. Could it be that it is the Mail on Sunday which is still living in 1968?

Banners saying "F**k fees" play its game, however. They repel people, in a way that demands for higher education to be open to all who strive for it do not. So it is entirely possible that today's student protesters will be marginalised, like their predecessors in the Sixties.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to suppose that this might not happen. First, the ghastly consequences of terrorism and indiscriminate violence against other human beings are widely understood. Second, thanks to the internet, the capacity of students to organise themselves, to network and to stay informed is by several magnitudes greater than it was four decades ago, creating the possibility of a politics that is open-minded, not fundamentalist. Third, the young

are less repressed and healthier people. And fourth, what is on offer from the political system today seems exhausted, its institutions corrupted, its constitution a shambles and reinvention essential.

On the economy, should the coalition's approach succeed, who thinks it will deliver the "fairness" that the government insists is its lodestone? And if it fails? The Prime Minister boasts that he is leading a revolution and that he and his government are the radicals now. It is a claim he may come to regret.

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The New Sound of the Streets

Gerry Hassan, The Scotsman

Protest and rebellion are in the air. Those well-known songs of radical chic, 'Revolution' and 'Power to the People', have been regularly played on radio and TV; at the same time, red flags, anarchist slogans and student occupations have suddenly appeared on streets and university campuses.

The first marked the 30th anniversary of John Lennon's assassination, which happened this Wednesday past; the second saw the emergence of a mass student protest movement against tuition fees. Some of this may evoke John Lennon and 1968, but the more relevant comparison is with those other mass protests against Conservative Governments: the 1979-81 discontent against mass unemployment, and 1990 opposition to the poll tax.

Something significant is changing in British politics which goes beyond tuition fees; there is the campaign of the UK Uncut movement against tax avoidance by leading UK companies such as Vodafone and Sir Philip Green's Arcadia Group. This touches on how young people are seen in our political system, issues and tensions between the generations, and how our politics understands this.

The mainstream political view emphasises the democratic disconnection of young people, and in particular 18-24-year-olds who have low turnout levels at UK general elections.

Yet our politics and political system systematically stigmatises and demonises large numbers of young people. It increasingly focuses on older people who vote more and issues of concern to them such as council tax levels and care

for the elderly. The Lib Dems' pledge to oppose any increase in tuition fees at the last election was the only major youth-orientated policy by any of the major parties. In a sea of grey-haired policies, that is one reason why it stood out so much.

The political debate on tuition fees has focused on both sides on 'fairness', but what is underneath this is the issue of inter-generational fairness and responsibility.

Many of the young people protesting are showing a sense of wider citizenship and responsibility and concern for the fate of future generations which should shame our politicians. They are taking a stand which isn't just about themselves, but the compact which is meant to exist across the generations, and against the commercialisation of higher education.

Our political class and the baby boomer generation don't understand this with their short-term, selfish thinking. Strangely enough the most coherent critique of this baby boomer entitlement culture has come from David Willetts' 'The Pinch', published just before the general election.

This is a thoughtful, studious book which makes the case that the baby boomer generation – those born between 1945 and 1965 – have in Willetts' words 'stolen their children's future' and built a cultural, demographic and political dominance which disfigures our society. The narcissistic, self-obsessed, sophistic attitude of this generation – personified by the personal politics of aggrandisement of people such as Tony Blair – works against younger people. Willetts is now Minister for Universities and Science, and strangely now silent on these huge issues.

Much of this springs from how we do our politics. Our political system increasingly excludes young people, while politicians more and more articulate a political language, values and philosophy which focuses on older voters.

The consequences of this for all the Conservative-Lib Dem Government warm talk of caring about pre-school years, tackling inter-generational poverty, and social mobility, is a widening generational and social divide which goes to the very heart of what kind of society we live in.

Increasingly the direction of politics across the Western world points to young people becoming less and less optimistic about the future. Research by Richard Eckersley funded by the Australian Government showed that there is a direct relationship between the way politicians and institutional opinion talk about globalisation and young people's hopes and fears.

The constant talk of globalisation as inevitable and an over-powering leviathan increasingly leads to young people feeling hopeless, powerless, and believing they have no say in their future. And this has a direct effect on young people's self-esteem, confidence and mental health.

Fortunately, large numbers of young people increasingly question and challenge this state of affairs. They more and more see a version of the world and the future being presented to them which is increasingly remote, economic determinist, and focused on a narrow slither of elites and winners.

It is true that there have been some violent elements in the student protest movement, but most of it is peaceful. Much more of it is characterised by being spontaneous, self-organised and fluid, using social media such as flashmob. This is a very different kind of politics from the traditional left form of protest – last seen during the anti-Iraq war movement – which entailed marching the troops along the same route week in week out to the same designation and a concluding rally involving the usual suspects.

There is as serious a set of issues facing the Metropolitan Police and how they manage and deal with protest. This is a

force which has at crucial points got things fundamentally wrong: as in the tragic deaths of Jean Charles De Menezes and Ian Tomlinson. The police have to work with protestors and recognise the right to dissent.

Beyond the coalition and fate of the Lib Dems and even tuition fees, the new protest movements mark a watershed for our politics.

Can a political system which has narrowed and become arrogant and insular, learn that it is part of the problem? Unless we can embrace a wholesale transformation of our tarnished democracy, changing it to one which listens and understands young people, we are heading for trouble.

The British political system once worked in the middle of the last century when we had two political parties giving voice and representation to two classes. This can no longer be said. It has become fixated in a fragmented, divided, insecure society on those who have the most status, assets and inheritance – and made their self-interests into a worldview and ideology. And it has come to disregard those who don't fit into it or challenge this perspective.

This is a generational and social chasm and divide which British politics and society needs to urgently face. We need to listen to the voices of the young people on our streets. The alternative is an increasingly harsh, nasty future, and one shaped by a new era of politics which becomes more and more aggressive, confrontational, and shaped by even more heavy handed action by the police and state.

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The Morning After The Fight Before

Nick Pearce, IPPR

In the paparazzi photo of Charles and Camilla we now have the image that will define this age of retrenchment and rebellion, splashed across all the frontpages this morning. Even Grosvenor Square '68 can't compete with that kind of iconography. But the real images of the night were not of the violent black-flag brigade, nor of the middle class heirs to the '68ers, but of London's black teenage youth. Newsnight's Paul Mason had it spot on:

“Young men, mainly black, grabbed each other around the head and formed a surging dance to the digital beat lit, as the light failed, by the distinctly analog light of a bench they had set on fire. Any idea that you are dealing with Lacan-reading hipsters from Spitalfields on this demo is mistaken.

“While a good half of the march was undergraduates from the most militant college occupations – UCL, SOAS, Leeds, Sussex – the really stunning phenomenon, politically, was the presence of youth: bainlieue-style [sic] youth from Croydon, Peckam, the council estates of Islington.

“Having been very close to the front line of the fighting, on the protesters side, I would say that at its height – again – it broke the media stereotype of being organised by "political groups": there was an anarchist black bloc contingent, there were the socialist left groups – but above all, again, I would say the main offensive actions taken to break through police lines were done by small groups of young men who dressed a lot more like the older brothers of the dubsteppers.”

Paul's film for *Newsnight* – if a little breathless and romantic at times – captured brilliantly the arrival on our political scene of working class, predominantly minority ethnic, youth. 'We are from the slums of London,' one declared. '£30 a week is what keeps us in college and stops us selling drugs.' Their moves would have done Guy Debord proud: the streets taking to the streets.

Two things explain their politicisation: the abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and mass youth unemployment. The EMA led to a rise in participation in fulltime education of 6.1 percentage points among eligible 16 and 17-year-olds, with a particularly strong effect among young men, who saw an increase in participation of 8.6 percentage points. It has been critical to the life chances of these young men and women, and it is not surprising that young black people in London in particular value it so highly: the youth unemployment rate for 16-24-year-olds in this group is almost 50 per cent.

Their protests didn't stop MPs voting for the rise in tuition fees and doubtless few believed they would. But what about the longer term consequences of yesterday's events?

Most people now expect the Liberal Democrats' youth vote to collapse, particularly in the university towns. Even those Liberal Democrat MPs who voted against their government will get punished by association at the polls; the closer they get to the election, the more rebellious they will become. Meanwhile, as the Coalition starts to develop an agenda for the second half of the Parliament – by which time much of the original Coalition agreement will have already been delivered – both the Liberal Democrat left and the Conservative right will want to assert their identities, putting pressure on the centrist middle ground that currently holds the Coalition parties together. That centre bloc is unlikely to break, but it will face more strains: last night's vote may have

been the most severe test the Liberal Democrats will face, but it won't be the last.

This year's youth protests could also turn out to be the vanguard for a different kind of rebellion next year: that of working families in low to middle-income groups, squeezed by rising taxes, increased charges for services and cuts to tax credits. They will not be mobilised by left-wing trade union leaders, if at all. But their anger will find its way onto the political agenda, even if it takes a focus group to mediate it.

The longer term legacy is less clear. The generation of 1968 thought it was leading the way to a broader working class mobilisation and an assault on US imperialism. Neither came to pass, and in the end its most profound legacy was in the new social movements – feminism, environmentalism and gay liberation – that gradually made their way into the mainstream of political and public life in the 1980s and 1990s. That we have two metropolitan liberals governing our country is a testament to their success.

Whether the 2010 generation produces anything similar will hinge on whether their activism endures and is able to connect to deeper sources of socio-economic change, gathering political momentum in the process. After all, the eruptions of the Parisian banlieues have remained just that: eruptions.

Nick Pearce is Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research – this piece was originally posted on his blog on the IPPR website, 10 December 2010.
[http://www.ippr.org/Blogs/NickPearce/
TheMorningAfterTheFightBeforeWhatNextForGen2010.aspx](http://www.ippr.org/Blogs/NickPearce/TheMorningAfterTheFightBeforeWhatNextForGen2010.aspx)

Out with the old politics

Laurie Penny, The Guardian

Democracy is going cheap. Just in time for the January sales, the party responsible for introducing tuition fees has decided that it wants to jump on the youth protest bandwagon. "Join the party for one penny, and we will be your voice," writes Ed Miliband in a rather desperate Christmas message to under-25s.

Labour is making a fundamental error, however, in assuming that these young protesters want or need anybody to "be our voice". Parliamentary politics has sold the young out, and whatever bargain-basement price tag mainstream parties slap on their membership, they aren't buying it any more.

The young people of Britain do not need leaders, and the new wave of activists has no interest in the ideological bureaucracy of the old left. Their energy and creativity is disseminated via networks rather than organisations, and many young people have neither the time nor the inclination to wait for any political party to decide what direction they should take. The Liberal Democrats represented the last hope that parliamentary democracy might have something to offer the young, and that hope has been exquisitely betrayed – no wonder, then, that the new movements have responded by rejecting the old order entirely.

What we are seeing here is no less than a fundamental reimagining of the British left: an organic reworking which rejects the old deferential structures of union-led action and interminable infighting among indistinguishable splinter parties for something far more inclusive and fast-moving. These new groups are principled and theoretically well-

versed, but have no truck with the narcissism of small differences that used to corrupt even the most well-meaning of leftwing movements.

At the student meetings I have attended in recent weeks, ideological bickering is routinely sidelined in favour of practical planning. Anarchists and social democrats are obliged to work together alongside school pupils who don't care what flag you march under as long as you're on the side that puts people before profit. When the Unite leader, Len McCluskey, wrote in these pages this week encouraging union members to lend their support to the "magnificent student movement", he hit precisely the right note – one that respects the energy of these new networks of resistance without seeking to hijack it. The unions have begun to realise what the Labour party is still too arrogant to consider – that the nature of the fight against bigotry and greed has evolved beyond the traditional hierarchies of the left.

It is highly significant that one of the first things this hydra-headed youth movement set out to achieve was the decapitation of its own official leadership. When Aaron Porter of the National Union of Students was seen to be "dithering" over whether or not to support the protests, there were immediate calls for his resignation – and in subsequent weeks the NUS has proved itself worse than irrelevant as an organising force for demonstrations.

Of course, the old left is not about to disappear completely. It is highly likely that even after a nuclear attack, the only remaining life-forms will be cockroaches and sour-faced vendors of the *Socialist Worker*. Stunningly, the paper is still being peddled at every demonstration to young cyber-activists for whom the very concept of a newspaper is almost as outdated as the notion of ideological unity as a basis for action.

For these young protesters, the strategic factionalism of the old left is irrelevant. Creative, courageous and inspired by situationism and guerrilla tactics, they have a principled understanding of solidarity. For example, assembling fancy-dress flash mobs in Topshop to protest against corporate tax avoidance may seem frivolous, but this movement is daring – to do what no union or political party has yet contemplated – directly challenging the banks and business owners who caused this crisis.

The young people of Britain are no longer prepared to take orders, and are unlikely to pay even a penny for a vacillating, pro-business party to be "our voice". We have never spoken in just one voice. We speak in hundreds of thousands of voices – voices that are being raised across Europe, not in unison but in harmony. The writing on the wall of the Treasury earlier this month may yet prove prescient: this is just the beginning.

This article originally appeared in *The Guardian*, 24 December 2010.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/dec/24/student-protests-young-politics-voices>

Is the students' conflict intergenerational?

Maeve McKeown, UCL Occupation Blog

In December, I took part in a Guardian podcast where I said that students are furious at our parents. They've taken our jobs, our homes, our environment and now they're trying to take away our right to an education. However, many members of the movement in occupations and in blogs have made forceful arguments against the idea of an intergenerational conflict. Here I want to think through the arguments for and against, and consider which approach I think we should adopt.

The Theory

At the UCL Occupation the Daily Mail and Guardian journalist Suzanne Moore, gave a talk on how to present ourselves in the media. She said the best strategy is to push the idea of an intergenerational conflict. People of her generation feel extremely guilty, she said, and exploiting this guilt is the best way to get them on our side.

I believe the reason for the guilt complex currently engulfing the middle-aged middle-classes is due to the fact we live in a liberal society. The idea of intergenerational justice is built in to liberalism.

One of the earliest liberals, John Locke, argued that if people want to acquire property, they must leave "enough and as good for others". The twentieth century liberal, John Rawls, includes an inter-generational proviso in *A Theory of Justice* called the "just savings principle"; whereby the current generation must save enough to maintain the fundamental institutions of society into the future. Since the

environmental crisis has emerged, the liberal literature on intergenerational justice has gone ballistic. It is a matter of growing concern and enquiry within liberal political philosophy and, so it seems, in the practice of liberal democracies.

Many occupiers and bloggers have rejected this line of argument, however, because they are situated somewhere on the Left. In far Left Marxist philosophy, the idea of intergenerational justice doesn't hold much currency. The struggle belongs to the proletariat; it is based on class. The proletariat takes no account of age or generational membership; it consists of anyone who is exploited by the capitalist class. The detractors from the idea of intergenerational conflict are concerned with unity. What we want, according to this line of argument, is to foster ties with the working class, the unions and public sector workers. Talking about intergenerational conflict obstructs unity and creates divisions where there should be none.

I want to propose an intermediary position, based on the insights of Critical Theory. Critical theorists are influenced by Marxism, but instead of accepting the Marxist thesis of historical materialism, they assess actual social movements and theorise their claims in order to advance their normative, emancipatory arguments.

One of the insights of Critical Theory and other continental philosophical traditions, such as postmodernism and poststructuralism, has been to highlight that class constitutes only one kind of social division. Society is also stratified along the lines of sex, race, ethnicity and status. Our movement seems to be highlighting another division – the division between generations.

The calls for Left unity are obviously extremely important. The Left historically has had a tendency to factionalise and fracture, destroying itself from within. This is a trend the

student movement rightly wants to avoid. However, there is some truth in the intergenerational argument. On the early demonstrations the vast majority of protesters were young, under the age of about 26; the presence of lecturers and workers was minimal. The student movement is a youth movement. Moreover, the cuts we are facing now are a direct result of economic policies and ideologies that have been handed down from the previous generation.

Some of the baby boomers have had an amazing time. They've presided over an unprecedented era of economic, intellectual and technological growth. But with this has come unprecedented environmental damage, a growing inequality gap between the world's rich and poor, neo-colonial war and the current economic recession, caused by the voracious appetite for property. The inequality gap has meant that many people of that generation actually lost out on a phenomenal scale – witness the decline of England's industrial North.

The baby boomers that did hugely benefit (or the governments they elected) acted with an astonishing degree of irresponsibility. They ignored intergenerational responsibilities and responsibilities to the poor (hence the corresponding sense of guilt). This irresponsibility derives from the wholesale adoption of neoliberal economics.

The Practice

We as a movement can and should (I think) be stressing this point. As the youth wing of a larger struggle, we can come together with other groups, like the unions, whilst highlighting our frustration with decisions taken in the past. We can say that the generation before us acted irresponsibly and failed to take our interests into account by adopting neoliberal policies.

The advantage of this approach is that by highlighting the need for intergenerational justice, we are not just fighting for

ourselves, but also for future generations. By focusing on the irresponsibility of the previous generation and how this is now undermining our life chances, we are saying that this mustn't happen again; future generations must be taken into account.

Another advantage is that by rejecting the politics of the past twenty years, we are asserting that we want something new. We want things to change, we want to live in a different world, and if the politicians aren't going to do this we will do it for ourselves. Our youth and our desire for a break with the past is a strength: it is exciting, challenging and invigorating.

This standpoint can also foster unity. Everyone on the Left is against neoliberalism. We can unite around this common enemy while also maintaining our particular position. Rather than causing division, it highlights the fact that those of the older generations who campaigned and fought against the policies were right all along. We can come together in renewed struggle to stop another generation making the same mistakes. We can unite cross-generationally in a rejection of the Right and a desire to reinvigorate the Left.

This unification, however, does not require us to give up our rightful place of finger-pointing at the generation that preceded us, critiquing their unabashed irresponsibility, telling them to pay for it rather than lumping it all on us and future generations, and insisting that we want change. Now. We don't want unmitigated economic growth; we want a new left politics based on equality and responsibility, environmental protection and solidarity. We want a different world to the one we have inherited.

One final point... Unity is vital to any social movement. However, within any movement there are different groups, differences of opinion and different reasons for being

involved. We have to acknowledge and respect this. A blind adoption of “unity” does the Left no favours. Repressing dissent and subsuming all groups under one common front is what leads to rupture. We have to accept difference while focusing on our common goals.

In sum, we can call this an intergenerational struggle by drawing out the reason behind it. By making neoliberalism the target, we can assert our unique position, as those bearing the brunt of its mistakes, while uniting with other groups who also oppose it.

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<http://blog.ucloccupation.com/2011/01/06/is-the-students'-conflict-intergenerational/>

AFTERWORDS

Why we shouldn't centralise the student movement: protest, tactics and ways forward

Markus Malarkey, Ceasefire



In the respite from meetings, demonstrations and other acts of resistance to the Con-Dem government provided by the Christmas break, it seems wise to reflect on the recent developments of the student movement against fees and cuts. Reflection on the successes and failures of the movement, which has grown out of the recent wave of university occupations, will allow students and others to learn lessons about how to move forward in the struggle against government policy and police violence. The blogosphere is already swarming with recounts and reflections of occupations and protests. National meetings have been organised for January and inevitably the question

of 'where now?' is being raised. How should students move forward in their efforts to resist government policies and the actions of the state?

Two key areas of discussion have arisen from this reflection: the form that future protests and mass actions should take, and the possibility of greater organisation and co-ordination across the movement.

Pot vs. kettle

The tactic of kettling protesters has until recently been extremely successful for the police. On the one hand, the kettle confines protesters, limiting the amount of disruption they can cause and their ability to voice opposition. On the other hand, it provokes protesters into violent attempts to 'break' and escape the kettle. The violent reaction of protesters is used to create a negative image of resistance. This image subsequently permeates throughout the media's account of the protest. The police use the violence of protesters, which the kettle itself provokes, to justify future kettles.

Additionally it appears that in pitched battles between police and protesters, such as those which recently erupted around Parliament Square, the police have a clear advantage. Besides their body armour, shields and batons, the discipline and training of officers combined with the rigid hierarchy under which they work allows the police to operate as a cohesive unit in a way that protesters are unable to. When protesters confront police lines in attempts to break out of the kettle, a lack of coordination often makes their attempts chaotic and unsuccessful. Those protesters who want to be at the front often find it hard to push through the crowd. Similarly those who unwittingly find themselves at the front often find themselves pushed into the range of police batons by those behind them and cannot push back through the press. When a police line looks weak it is always difficult to

encourage a large enough group to move en masse and break through. Communication at a protest is difficult at the best of times and whilst the spontaneity of the crowd can often catch the police unawares, it is rarely enough to allow protesters to escape containment.

Protests are most effective when they are not kettled. Containment debilitates resistance by restricting protesters' movement and possible courses of action. In avoiding containment, protesters first prevent the creation of a negative image of resistance, and second enjoy greater freedom in the forms their acts of resistance can take. It appears that the form of future protests should enable protesters to avoid containment and thus effectively protest. If protests which take the form of a concentration of people are too easy to contain and debilitate, what form should protests and mass actions take?

Some have suggested that protesters occupy the space inside the kettle, turning it into a camp where protesters can resist attempts by police to incite violence. Such protests would apparently allow protesters to turn containment against the police by creating a positive image of resistance within the kettle. However, given that the effectiveness of containment is partly due to the violent response it provokes from protesters, prompting clashes with police that subsequently dominate the headlines, it seems unlikely that the police would allow protesters to become too comfortable in the kettle. Indeed, at the G20 Summit when Climate Camp set up a camp in the City, scores of riot police moved in and forcibly removed the camp. More recently, the experience of those protesters who were contained in such a tight kettle on Westminster Bridge that some were treated for injuries caused by crushing illustrates that the police wish to make kettled protesters as uncomfortable as possible. By making containment uncomfortable, the police both punish protesters and provoke them to react violently.

Others have called for protests in which groups of protesters are more dispersed and act independently to express their opposition. 'A new geography of opposition' has been called for, in which concentrations of protesters are dissolved and dispersed across a much larger area. By dispersing, protesters can take advantage of their capability for spontaneous and unpredictable action. The apparent inability of the police to respond rapidly to unfolding events allows for dispersed groups of protesters to outmanoeuvre the police and avoid containment.

The inability of the police to react quickly to unfolding events results from the decision-making structures in place within their organisation. Decision-making is confined to a handful of senior officers. Their ability to rapidly make decisions about how to react to events is restrained by both the small number of officers responsible for decision-making and their limited access to information. When there is a development that needs to be addressed – say some protesters have occupied Top Shop – there is first a delay in the transmission of information to those at the top of the hierarchy. Second, the small number of senior officers limits the speed with which they can respond to the new information. Those at the top find it even harder to respond rapidly when there are multiple events/protests going on simultaneously.

Consider the small group of protesters who laid siege to Top Shop on Oxford Street and effectively closed down the busiest shopping street in the country. After breaking through police lines at the Victoria Street entrance to Parliament Square, the group managed to evade attempts to contain them by remaining mobile. Whilst the police were busy kettling a few thousand students in Parliament Square, this small group managed to extend the protest to the West End and divert substantial police resources.

The police cannot be everywhere; they cannot react as quickly as the mass of protesters can. Groups can and do act autonomously in a way that police officers are completely unable to. If fifty protesters realise that a bank, stock exchange, oil depot, university campus, government office or corporate headquarters is vulnerable to occupation or blockade, they don't have to wait for the go-ahead from the rest of the protest. They just go. Milbank is a case in point – the police were very slow to respond to the occupation of the building that housed the Conservative Headquarters. Press releases explained that the police had not expected the spontaneous occupation and destruction of Milbank Tower and as such they had been unable to respond rapidly.

The closest example of the type of protest envisaged is that which took place in London on November 30. Instead of marching straight down Whitehall as they had done at the previous demonstration, the crowd splintered into several groups that proceeded to march through central London, playing 'cat-and-mouse' with the police. It was the crowd's spontaneous decision to start marching an hour before the announced time that caught the police off guard. Only when the separate groups had met up again at Trafalgar Square was the protest kettled. It appears that the most successful protests have often been spontaneous and have always taken the police by surprise. The tactics developed by the police to manage protests that are concentrated in a specific area are largely effective at debilitating such protests but completely ineffective when attempting to tackle protests composed of numerous coordinated acts of resistance which are dispersed across a much larger area. Future protests and mass actions should take the form of an insurgency in order to render the efforts of the police to contain and manage resistance completely ineffective.

Organised autonomy, not centralised control

In order for dispersed protests to be really effective at avoiding containment and actively expressing opposition to government policies through resistance, they must be coordinated to a certain degree. Communication between protesters is vital. The question then arises, how should the movement organize itself in order to best achieve the desired level of coordination? And how much should be decided at the national meetings that have been planned for January?

In trying to address these questions, it might be wise to first examine the role that national organisations have had in the movement up until now. The National Campaign against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) has so far called two days of national action against government policy, days X1 and X2, and one mass demonstration in London. Unlike the NUS, the NCAFC has tried to facilitate student protests rather than direct them toward specific actions. It was enough for student groups and others to know when protests were to take place, the how was left up to them. Similarly, the recent success of UK Uncut actions is largely a result of the freedom local groups have had to organize their own autonomous actions based on their capabilities and specific aims.

Freedom to act autonomously empowers individuals and groups. Attempts to manage and control this movement will lead to disillusion and abandonment. "We've been doing fine up until now," people will say, "why start telling us what to do now?" And they would have a point. As it stands, this movement is arguably the most successful in a generation; it would be unwise to ignore the reasons for this success. One factor in the recent success of students protests has been the refusal of national organisations to attempt to manage the actions of protesters – regardless of whether they would have been able to had they tried. It is enough that they provide support to student groups. This support comes in many

forms including the provision of information, practical and legal support and, crucially, a forum to meet and coordinate with other groups and individuals.

There is a balance to be found between complete disorganisation resulting in an inability to coordinate actions at all and the imposition of an organisational structure that rigidifies and centralises decision-making within the movement. As soon as national or local organisations attempt to control the actions of student groups and protesters, the movement will begin to weaken. Reflections on the events that took place within the occupation of the Michael Sadler building at Leeds University make this clear. It was decided at a 'general assembly' that no action that endangers the occupation should take place. In other words, only actions approved by the general assembly in the occupation should be taken. This declaration, which branded any action taken without the approval of the general assembly as illegitimate and counter-productive, was made as a direct response to the brief occupation of the Arnold Ziff building, which houses the office of the Leeds University Vice-Chancellor. Many outside and inside the Sadler occupation regarded the spontaneous occupation of one of the key administrative buildings in Leeds University as a successful action of opposition and resistance. However, the organisational structure within the occupation allowed those who felt threatened by the spontaneous actions of others to condemn them and cause divisions within the occupation and the broader movement.

As has already been discussed, the strength of the student movement lies in its capacity for dispersal and for spontaneous, creative and autonomous actions that catch the police unprepared and avoid containment. Different groups and individuals are willing and able to act in different ways; to attempt to direct or restrict their actions will only lead to division. The time set aside for national meetings should not

be used to formulate a 'national strategy' and subsequently impose it across the movement. This movement is still learning and growing; to impose rigid organisational structures on it at this moment will stifle its growth and make the seemingly impossible actually impossible.

National meetings provide an excellent forum for the exchange of information, discussion and networking between groups. However, they are not the place where decisions regarding the direction and objectives of the student movement should be made. Such decisions do not need to be made at all; the 'direction' of the movement is determined by the culmination of actions taken by autonomous groups. Whilst national organisations such as NCAFC and UK Uncut are crucial in providing coordination and support for autonomous groups, this is where their productive role ends. The attempts made by the NUS to pacify student anger, and certain groups in occupations such as Leeds University to restrict the actions of protesters, have shown that attempts to control and manage a movement such as this are completely counter-productive in the struggle against government policy and state actions.

Moving forward, protesters should improve communication and coordination during and across separate actions. National meetings will provide individuals and groups with opportunities to make links with others and begin to coordinate actions independently of centralised organisation. Dispersal rather than concentration as a form of protest takes advantage of the movement's strengths whilst exposing the weaknesses of the police. Coordination of action is necessary to avoid chaotic ineffectiveness but at the same time imposition of a rigid organisational structure, which restricts the growth and creativity of the movement, will significantly handicap efforts to resist government-imposed austerity measures and other state actions. It is precisely because groups are not highly organised that

dispersed protests can and have been so successful. Concentration of power and centralisation of decision-making will play right into the hands of the police, making containment of protest and resistance easier rather than harder.

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<http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/features/why-centralising-the-student-movement-is-dangerous/>

What next for the UK's student movement?

Guy Aitchison, openDemocracy

The volcanic eruption of student anger and militancy in Britain over the last few months has blown the political space wide open, making a broad-based movement against austerity thinkable where previously there was only rumbling discontent. It has certainly been an exhilarating experience to be part of, but whether future historians look back on the heady period leading up to the parliamentary vote on tuition fees as the beginning of the fightback against the neoliberal juggernaut or the last desperate gasp of social democracy, will depend on the next steps the movement takes.

An extraordinary opportunity has been presented to us. Len McCluskey, general secretary of the biggest trade union, Unite, has called for an alliance between trade unions and the "magnificent students' movement". This call, from the leader of the country's biggest trade union, which echoes the countless personal messages of support delivered by unionists at the university occupations, is without parallel in the history of social activism in this country. With over seven million members, the labour movement represents by far the largest organised force in this country, and through the power of co-ordinated action, from strikes to occupations, to political mobilisation and education, is capable of putting serious pressure on the legitimacy and functioning of the state. The key question now is how to turn rhetorical expressions of solidarity into concrete relationships of support and co-operation, not only with trade unions, but with the full diversity of campaign groups

that are springing up at a local and national level to fight the cuts.

One important theoretical debate concerns whether the movement should strive to retain its hitherto organic and decentralised nature or whether this is merely a temporary phase before the inevitable discipline of central organisation and leadership. Here I will confine myself to ten practical suggestions on the way forward. They are in no particular order of priority and come from a student perspective:

1. Convene nationwide meetings of the occupations, and then broaden these out to other groups. We need forums to strategise on the way ahead. Online networks have proven their efficacy, but the occupations also demonstrated the importance of a shared space and face-to-face interactions in fostering the strong bonds needed for concerted political campaigning and direct action. One of the most impressive political meetings I've taken part in was the Cambridge University occupation general assembly – a genuine "big society" get together of over 300 people from all backgrounds and walks of life, brought together to discuss how to oppose the cuts. There is no reason why these kinds of meetings can't become a regular occurrence.

2. Educate each other, disseminate skills. The occupations served as fast-track apprenticeships in political activism. Thanks to them, hundreds of young people now have the skills and confidence to run democratic meetings, deal with the press, engage in non-violent resistance to bailiffs, and so on. We need to disseminate these skills further through workshops and informal instruction, across sectors as well as within them. At the UCL occupation we were given a lesson in the community organising techniques of "power mapping" by a unionist from the TSSA. Students, in return, could offer their own knowledge and skills, such as how to organise through social media.

3. Build and strengthen links with school students. They have been the most radical and militant, leading from the front at the days of action. University students need to be forging links with students at local schools, giving talks to their societies, and encouraging them to get involved in activism. They are the ones who will suffer the brunt of cuts to EMA and university funding and many are keen to get involved. I expected ten pupils at a talk I gave to Camden School for Girls, with Jo Casserly, on the eve of their occupation – instead there were at least 100.

4. Keep it adventurous and creative. Think flashmobs, culture jamming, political art, the techniques of the Yes Men and the Situationist International. A group of Goldsmiths graduates have formed the University for Strategic Optimism, a nomadic institution which pitches up and holds lectures in capitalist spaces such as Lloyds TSB and Tesco. As we saw in Parliament Square, even a calculated technique of state repression, such as the kettle, can be subverted and turned into a mini festival. We need more of this; anything satirical and subversive the authorities find difficult to handle.

5. Convince the wider student body. When you're caught up in deliberative enclaves of the like-minded it can be easy to ignore the opinions of the wider student body. This is a mistake. Their support, even if only passive, is critical. Public talks, workshops, and informal persuasion can help bring them in. This is an attractive moment of political persuasion by example, but also argument; it needs to face outwards not be totally absorbed by itself.

6. Call for co-ordinated strike action. This will be a vital tool in defeating the government's austerity programmes. Students should be making the political case for strikes in defence of jobs and the welfare state, as well as providing support for workers who withdraw their labour. At UCL

occupation we organised delegations to attend the pickets of striking tube workers – this should become a regular activity.

7. Improve legal knowledge and anti-surveillance practices. We can expect a furious backlash from the police and the wider political and judicial establishment. The repression of student activists has already begun with police raids on suspected leaders. The Met are demanding ever more draconian powers and tools to deal with protesters, whilst Lib Dem politicians urge intrusive "intelligence" gathering operations designed to suppress legitimate dissent. We need more people trained in legal observation attending demos, and wider awareness of the techniques needed to foil police intelligence gathering, both online and off.

8. Beware sectarianism. As a political theory Phd student, I enjoy robust theoretical debate as much as the next activist, but one of the wonderful things about the occupations (at least the ones I witnessed) was how they prioritised practice over ideology. It would be a great shame to now descend into ideological fetishism or for different factions to move in and try and appropriate the anger and energy to grow themselves at the expense of the wider movement. This movement's openness and pluralism is a political strength; without it, it won't succeed in bringing in the larger public.

9. Become a networked participant. There has been something of a backlash against "clicktivism" of late (largely from those with little experience of digital activism) but it's no coincidence that the most successful anti-cuts actions to date – the student protests and UK Uncut – are those that have harnessed the power of online networks. Join Twitter, join Flickr, work Facebook, set up a blog – and use online platforms such as False Economy to link up with other campaigners in your area and pool knowledge and resources. Start open mixed group websites for exchanging information, ideas and video reports and images. Participate in non-

partisan websites such as OurKingdom or start your own.

Ultimately, activists should consider moving their online operations from private social media conglomerates, inherently vulnerable to corporate and governmental pressure, to self-hosted, open source networks. The scandal of corporate connivance in the attack on Wikileaks and the recent "disappearance" of UK Uncut's Facebook group underlines the urgency of such a switch.

10. Support the motion of No confidence in Aaron Porter, but don't let it distract from the core task of building the movement. It would be nice to have a combative NUS President prepared to mobilise the organisation's resources on behalf of students, but the real lesson of the last few weeks has been how ineffectual "leaders", desperate to appear responsible and safeguard their own careers, can be bypassed by taking autonomous action.

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<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/guy-aitchison/what-next-for-uks-student-movement>

APPENDICES

Campaigns and Resources

There are of course countless resources on the web related to the protest movement, and the issues underlying it – this is just a small selection.

Arts Against Cuts

An umbrella space for students, artists and cultural workers to display and align their ideas and actions against the cuts in arts.

<http://artsagainstcuts.wordpress.com/>

Coalition of Resistance

A national campaign against cuts and privatisation in workplaces, community and welfare services.

<http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk/>

Earth First

Advice for activists on how to be safe and effective in public order situations.

<https://earthfirst.org.uk/publicorderguide.htm>

Educational Activist Network

An alliance of student activists and trade unionists fighting against tuition fees and funding cuts and for another vision of education.

<http://educationactivistnetwork.wordpress.com/>

False Economy

Online platform which gathers and maps information and testimony about the cuts, sets out alternatives to austerity,

and puts you in touch with campaigns and events in your area.

<http://falseeconomy.org.uk/>

Green and Black Cross

Grassroots project set up in November 2010 to provide practical for those engaged in social struggles within the UK.

<http://greenandblackcross.org/>

Hacktivist

Tech Tools for Activists is a 32 page booklet available to download for free here. It has been designed for activists who are not techies.

http://hacktivist.net/hacktionlab/index.php/Tech_tools_for_activists

Indymedia occupation archive

Thorough, inspiring list of over 40 universities who went into occupation in November and December, with links to occupation blogs and other reports.

<http://london.indymedia.org/articles/6115>

Indymedia

Up-to the minute grassroots reporting of the student movement and the wider anti-cuts campaign.

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/>

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

A network of student and education worker activists set up to help activists organise radical direct action against tuition fees, education cuts and wider cuts to public services.

<http://anticuts.com>

Network X

A network of decentralised, non-hierarchical groups engaged in anti-capitalist resistance to the cuts.

<http://networkxuk.wordpress.com/>

REEL News

An activist video collective, set up to publicise and share information on inspirational campaigns and struggles.

<http://www.reelnews.co.uk/>

Right to Resist

Right To Resist is a campaign statement against police violence and kitting initiated by activists involved in the student movement

<http://righttoresist.wordpress.com/>

RiseUp

Secure online communication tools for people and groups working on liberatory social change.

<https://riseup.net/>

Save EMA

Campaign to save the Educational Maintenance Allowance

<http://saveema.co.uk/>

UK Uncut

Nationwide campaign using direct action to target tax dodging high street corporations.

<http://www.ukuncut.org.uk/>

University for Strategic Optimism

A nomadic university based on the principle of free and open education, a return of politics to the public, and the politicisation of public space.

<http://universityforstrategicoptimism.wordpress.com/>

Discussion

The Great Unrest

Group blog discussing student politics and activism.

<http://thegreatunrest.wordpress.com/>

LibCom

Libertarian Communist news site and discussion forum.

<http://libcom.org/>

Liberal Conspiracy

Group blog providing news and opinion on the student protests.

<http://www.liberalconspiracy.org/>

London Review of Books

Partly closed website of fortnightly print magazine with outstanding coverage of the conflict over the universities, including the first trenchant review of the Browne Report by Stefan Collini.

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/>

New Left Project

Political analysis and discussion of the student movement.

<http://www.newleftproject.org/>

New Statesman

Left wing weekly with coverage of the anti-cuts protests as well as traditional politics.

<http://www.newstatesman.com/>

OurKingdom

openDemocracy's UK section discussing power and liberty in the UK.

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom>

The Student Journals

Discussion, blogs and news about issues affecting students, written entirely by students.

<http://www.thestudentjournals.co.uk/index.php>

The Third Estate

Group blog on politics and activism with a focus on various aspects of the student movement.

<http://thethirdestate.net/>

Twitter

Follow the @fightbackUK team on Twitter here, and use the #fightback hashtag:

@aaronjohnpeters

@anthonybarnett

@danhancox

@felix_cohen

@guyaitchison

@jessedarling

@nikiourkingdom

@paul_sagar

@pennyred

@sirajdatoo

Sixty Second Legal Check List

Third Estate

Before the action

- 1) Have a bust card.
- 2) Read the bust card.
- 3) Have the arrestee support number written on you in marker pen, e.g. on your arm.
- 4) Have a buddy who looks out for you and knows who they should and shouldn't contact if you get arrested (e.g. please tell my girlfriend, don't tell my mum).

If you get arrested

- 1) If you have a chance, ring arrestee support as it's happening, or if you think it's about to.
- 2) Have one phone call made on your behalf informing someone of your arrest. We recommend that you ask the custody sergeant to contact NCAFC Arrestee Support. Tell the police that you authorise them to talk to Arrestee Support about you and your welfare, so that we can monitor your welfare and hopefully arrange someone to meet you upon release. We can also then tell your buddy what's going on.
- 3) You have a right to a solicitor: don't just go for the duty solicitor (who tend to be unsympathetic to protesters). Tell the police to contact Bindmans or another solicitor named on the bust card.
- 5) Remain silent. We strongly recommend you answer 'no comment' to all questions and during interviews, for your own benefit and that of others. From the moment you are

stopped, everything you say is evidence – there is no such thing as a ‘friendly chat’. The police are trained to get information out of you, so stay strong. Do not sign any statements.

After you've been arrested

1) Hopefully arrestee support will have tried to arrange someone meeting you at the police station on your release.

2) But give arrestee support a ring anyway to let us know you're okay, and the outcome of your arrest, e.g. no charge, or released on bail.

If you witness someone being arrested

1) Call out to the person 'what name will you give at the station?' (this may or may not be their real name but it means we can keep track of them).

2) Make a detailed note of what happened as soon as you can. Include the time and date you made it.

3) Call arrestee support and let them know what happened.

4) If your buddy is arrested, ring arrestee support, and we can keep you up to date on what's happening to them.

Green and Black Bust Card

Third Estate

If you are arrested, you are entitled to:

- REMAIN SILENT We strongly recommend you answer 'no comment' to all questions and during interviews, for your own benefit and that of others. From the moment you are stopped, everything you say is evidence there is no such thing as a 'friendly chat'. The police are trained to get information out of you, so stay strong. Do not sign any statements.

- Be told what you have been arrested for.

- Not to give your name, address or DOB, but this will your release. However, your photo, prints and DNA be taken without your consent.

- Have one phone call made on your behalf informing someone of your arrest. We recommend that you the custody sergeant to contact GBC Arrestee Support. Tell the police you authorise them to talk Arrestee Support about you and your welfare, so can monitor your welfare and hopefully arrange someone to meet you upon release.

- You are entitled to free legal advice.

- A translator if English is not your first language.

- Vegan or vegetarian food.

- Request a copy of PACE codes to read (then you know all your rights in custody). Do ask.

- A medical examination if you feel unwell or hurt. (Inform the custody officer if you are on medication.)

If you are under 17:

- You will be required to have an appropriate adult to be present if you are arrested during an interview
- The police will ideally want a parent/ legal guardian, but if they are unavailable you can either have a social worker (which we do not recommend), or another responsible adult. This can be any adult, but the police might not agree to someone with a criminal record or on the action.

TO ACCESS FREE LEGAL ADVICE

- If you are arrested for a non-imprisonable offence for which the police do not intend to interview you, you can either speak on the telephone to a solicitor of your choice (for which they may charge – our recommended solicitors have agreed not to) or you will be given the opportunity to get free advice from a legal adviser at a call centre known as CDS Direct (these advisers are probably less good at advising activists)
- If you are arrested for or a more serious offence, or one for which you are to be interviewed, you will be able to access a solicitor of your choice for free (our recommendation is below), provided that they can be contacted within two hours. If not, you will be given a duty solicitor. It may be better to ‘no comment’ until release and then get good quality legal advice tailored to activists.

The police may tell you that it will be quicker without legal advice – we strongly recommend that you always ask for legal advice and use our recommended solicitors:

BINDMANS 020 7833 4433

When the police act they should be carrying out a lawful duty, so ask them what they are doing and why. Make a note of what was said, when, by whom, as soon afterwards as possible.

What to do...

...If arrested:

- On the day let GBC legal team know and keep in touch with gbclegal@riseup.net so we can track outcomes.

If you saw/experienced inappropriate police behavior:

- Note the officers' numbers, find other witnesses – Make a detailed note of what happened as soon as you can. Include the time and date you made it – Complete a witness form asap especially if you saw an incident that led to an arrest, or injury

- Consider complaining about the police officer. If you have a serious injury, consult a solicitor first.

www.ipcc.gov.uk

- Consider writing to your MP www.writetothem.com

- Tell everyone you know!

GBC LEGAL TEAM: 07946 541 511 BINDMANS

SOLICITORS: 020 7833 4433

Please note: Legal Observers are not acting as solicitors, their name is not intended to imply they are legally qualified or recognised to act as a solicitor.

Occupation Cheat Sheet

Third Estate

So, you want to have an occupation?

Occupation has been a traditional mode of student protest for the last 40 years. Occupations are a highly effective means of protest. They can put pressure on university management, who can in turn put pressure on the Government, and they can act as a space of education and resistance.

In response to the upcoming white paper on higher education we have compiled this short checklist of things to think about when planning and running an occupation.

Choosing a location

In going into occupation you will be dealing with the politics of space. It is important to choose targets for political effect, but other considerations such as access, visibility, and security come into play.

1. It is important to choose a location carefully. Disrupt management where possible. Get in the way of what they do. If you don't, you might as well not be there.
2. Do not occupy a place with no access to running water. You will regret it.
3. It's good to have access to food (i.e. you can get it into the building). Food that you bring with you should be practical: fruit and nuts will keep you alert and happy much more than crisps and sweets! Go skipping the night before for free supplies.
4. Make sure there is access to toilets, unless you're planning a dirty protest.
5. Make sure there is either a quiet space or turn off all music when people need sleep. Also, bring blankets and sleeping bags if possible. Lecture theatres can be uncomfortable.

6. Bring laptops! Choose somewhere with Internet access (easier now in these days of wifi), or make sure you bring internet dongles that you've checked work.
7. Also, check the space has phone reception (particularly if it's a basement).
8. Make sure there are windows! Lots of lecture theatres lack these, and they are useful for fresh air and banner-drops.
9. Think about whether your space is wheelchair accessible: this is far more likely to be the case in new builds than old builds. This is both a practical and political concern, in terms of how inclusive your protest is of the whole student community.
10. Do not announce the location of your occupation publicly before it happens!

Formulating Demands

Occupations should make demands. It is important that your opening meeting decides on these, that they are published on the Internet, and sent to the university.

1. At least a few demands should be easy to meet. There is nothing more disheartening than being defeated on everything, and being ignored for being a “dreamer.” These might be things like demanding a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor.
2. You should have a demand for “no victimization of students, and no punishment for those involved in protest.” (Reassure everyone by saying that you will occupy again if any student is victimised).
3. Demands should be the sort of thing a university can do, not the sort of thing a government can do. However, they can be things the university can say to the government.
4. Make it clear that your occupation intends no physical harm to people.
5. Often a university will want to go into negotiations with occupiers. If they do, then take them up on this. If possible, record all discussions and make sure they are fully relayed to the whole group. Definitely keep documents of EVERYTHING.
6. Do not get bogged down in negotiations. If you feel they are going nowhere, they probably aren't, and they may be used by management to sap your energy.

Starting the occupation

There is no set way to start your occupation, and what happens will depend on a range of factors, such as what type of institution you are occupying, how many occupiers you have, and the politics of the student union. Here are just a few considerations:

1. At the beginning, try to get as many people there as possible. Starting an occupation from a big meeting or a demo can be a good way to get lots of people there from the start.
2. Be sensitive to other students' politics: the last thing you want is people feeling like they've been tricked into an action they didn't agree to.
3. If you think you can win, organise an extraordinary general meeting of your Students' Union and pass a motion to occupy. Alternatively, an agreement from an unofficial anti-cuts group can also help gather support.
4. If you know where you are going, get a few people in before you announce it to everyone. This will help stop security guards keeping you out.
5. When you assemble people to go into occupation do NOT assemble at the place you are going to occupy (unless it is essential to your plan, e.g. staying in a room you've previously booked legitimately).

Internal Politics

It is also important that occupations are run in a democratic and accessible manner, but quite what this means should be decided internally.

1. Many occupations have been run on the basis of "consensus decision-making".
2. Consensus decision-making can help to avoid fracturing the group, but can sometimes stop decisions actually being made, or slow them down considerably.
3. If there's a mix of political backgrounds in the room, then have a mix of decision making systems: some votes, some wavy hands. Just don't wear yourselves out arguing with each other.

4. It's probably a bad idea to have a leader. Leaders tend to be dicks, and also make people far more culpable to the authorities.
5. For the same reasons, do not set up a "steering committee". Instead appoint working groups for specific tasks that are then dissolved once the task is complete.
6. Make sure that student union sabbatical officers don't take over the occupation.
7. Occupations should be "safe-spaces", in which any discrimination based on gender, sexuality, disability, race, and ethnicity are actively combated.
8. It is sensible to have a general meeting at least once daily at a set time, so that developments can be discussed. Let these meetings run the occupation, and decide when to leave.
9. Meetings should not be allowed to go on for hours and hours. If something complex needs doing it may be good to set up a working group, who then report back.

Media

Media is massively important for any occupation. Doing good media work will allow you to get your story heard, gain support and solidarity, and exert far greater pressure. Here are a few things you need to create:

1. Facebook Group (Perhaps set up Facebook account so that this is anonymous)
2. Twitter Account.
3. Email address – Gmail gives you a lot of space for free.
4. All occupations should have a website, where people can get quick access to information about location, demands, updates and news, photographs, and have links to your facebook, email, twitter etc. Most occupations so far have used wordpress and run websites in a blog format as it's free and easy to use.
5. Someone should have a decent camera to take print-quality photographs as newspapers will avoid sending photographers if they can. That also means bringing the connector cable for your camera!
6. It's important to put out press releases at the beginning and throughout the occupation. These should be sent to local

- and national press, posted on your website, and on Indymedia.
7. Set up an email list for people who want to get updates on what has been happening in the occupation.
 8. If possible, have a phone where you can be contacted. A new sim card with a number just for this means that you can share round the responsibility.
 9. Assign people in a rota to respond to incoming communications. You will be bombarded, but all journalists must be responded to, and all incoming emails must be read. It is a hard job, but you must keep on top of it.
 10. For how to write press releases and technique on speaking to journalists, there's a really good guide by the Climate Camp media team here: <http://climatecamp.org.uk/press/neighbourhood-media-pack>

Wellbeing

1. Occupations should be drug-free. The last thing you want is to get done for smoking a doobie when you're making serious political points. Eat fruit instead.
2. Although hopefully not used, it's sensible for someone to have a first aid kit.
3. Security is important but people should not lock doors from the inside. Rather it's good to have a rota of people on "security" duty at doors 24 hours a day. It's tiresome, yes, but necessary for the occupation to keep going.
4. Where possible, at the end of the occupation leave buildings as you found them. You do not want to get arrested for criminal damage. Photograph all rooms before you leave them as evidence in case you are accused of damage.
5. Have fun! We've seen everything from Ceilidhs in the Law Faculty at Cambridge, to socialist magic at the Mansion House at Middlesex. Do everything you can conceive of. Make trouble.
6. That said, be aware of where CCTV cameras are.
7. And if you are going to do something illegal, cover your face.

Occupation as an open space

1. Having your occupation as an open space can be great. If possible, put on public meetings and events. This will help people understand that you are properly non-violent, and may even attract sympathetic students to join your cause.

2. Some people may also want to offer donations to the occupation (this happened at the Middlesex occupation in May 2010.) While it can be complicated to set up a paypal account, it may be useful to say on your website if there's anything you need.
3. Flyer the local area with information about the occupation. Say on the flyers what it is and what it's about. Getting local support and support from students who don't personally want to occupy can be crucial to keeping an occupation going.

Supporting other occupations

We hope that there will be a whole load of occupations going on at once, We also know that management of universities will talk to each other. Here are some tips on what you can do to support each other, and keep this movement going.

1. When you hear of another occupation starting, email them or phone them to send your support. Everyone loves this shit.
2. If you can, send a speaker to other newer occupations to tell them about your experiences and offer support and guidance.
3. Keep other occupations up-to-date with concrete changes in your conditions (i.e. what management and the courts are doing, how you have responded.)
4. When your occupation finishes, go and visit other occupations and help them out.

Ending the occupation

1. Decide together when to leave. Organise a rally, have a demonstration, make a whole lot of noise. Contact all your supporters and ask them to greet you outside the building when the time comes.
2. If you are being threatened with disciplinary or legal actions people must be allowed to make their own choices on whether they want to stay or leave, but remember: united we stand; divided we fall.
3. If management take out injunctions on occupiers, do not panic! Contact a good lawyer (see legal briefing sheet and bust card.) Often even sympathetic solicitors will be over-

cautious (it's their job.) There is often no need to leave until the police arrive in significant numbers.

4. Do everything you can to avoid arrest. If people do want to get arrested, then this is a personal decision that they must judge themselves.

Resources

The Occupation Cookbook – This is a document that came out of a set of occupations in Croatia. It has very useful information on direct democracy:

<http://slobodnifilozofski.org/?p=1915/>

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) – A student-based organization working on protests around HE policy. Useful for resources and support: <http://anticuts.com/>

Education Activists Network (EAN) – Similar to NCAFC but also with members of staff involved: <http://educationactivistnetwork.wordpress.com/>

Seeds for Change – Good information about consensus decision-making and direct action training: <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/>

ULU – University of London Union has good policy on the issues, and may be able to offer support to students in occupations in the University of London <http://www.ulucol.ac.uk/>

Climate Camp – Experienced green activists with a good document on how to deal with press: <http://climatecamp.org.uk/press/neighbourhood-media-pack>

Indymedia – Independent media server. A good place to spread information about what is happening in your occupation: <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/>

NUS is really useful if you want to look up how not to run a campaign against fees: www.bureaucraticanduseless.org.uk

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From a 15-year-old UK Uncut activist to a rebel Lib Dem peer, via kettled students and forward-thinking commentary, **FIGHT BACK!** features all the best reports, analysis, images, reflections and overviews on the UK's explosive winter of protest, and the start of a movement against fees and cuts.

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THE DEMONSTRATIONS, THE OCCUPATIONS, THE FLAB-MOBS

THE UNIVERSITIES THE UNDER-19S THE ESTABLISHMENT

THE TRADE UNIONS THE AESTHETICS THE GENERATIONS

AND OVERVIEWS

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an OurKingdom book

