

The Educator

no. 1

A Bulletin for militant Workers and Students produced by Colleagues and Communist Students

Spending Review; Attacks on all fronts!

With the spending review now finally out in the open – we have an indication of the what's in store for us in the period ahead. There is going to be £81 bn worth of cuts and a £30 bn increase in taxes for the next four years starting, in April 2011. This is on top of the already announced £8bn cuts for this year.

The Home Office is to reduce its spending by 23 percent and the Foreign Office by 24 percent. Local authorities will experience a 28 percent cut in the funding they receive from the central government. Universities face a 40 percent cut. The government will reduce the amount it pays per student by £9,000. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport will implement a 41 percent cut. The budget for social housing will be cut by 60 percent.

Housing is one of the worst hit sectors. New social housing tenants will have to pay much higher rents, which will rise to 80 percent of market levels. They will have only short-term tenancies rather than the security of tenure that current residents enjoy. Vulnerable low-income families in need of housing will be forced into the private rented sector or face homelessness. Cuts in housing benefit, which allows those with low incomes to rent accommodation, will threaten many tenants with eviction.

The disabled face savage cuts. The Employment and Support Allowance, which assists those

who are unable to work because of physical or mental disability, will now be limited to one year. After that, the disabled will be forced to accept work under the same terms as the able-bodied unemployed. Disabled people who currently receive help with mobility costs will lose this allowance if they are in residential care. Many will find themselves effectively imprisoned in their homes.

Senior citizens will be hit by changes in disability benefits and the increase in the pensionable age to 66 by 2020. Cuts in local authority spending will hit all disabled and elderly people who depend on council-run services such as transport, day centers, home-based and residential care. Schools have been promised a 0.1 percent increase in funding. But the increase will go only to some schools and will have to cover the cost of rising pupil numbers. Most of the so-called extra money will come from savings made elsewhere in the education budget. An estimated 40,000 teachers are expected to lose their jobs, according to official figures. Funding for 16 to 19-year-olds will be cut. They will lose the Education Maintenance Allowance, which was designed to encourage them to stay in school or vocational training. Both young people and children will suffer from cuts to local authority-funded youth clubs, play schemes, and psychological and social support.

resolve the current economic rut because what looks like seemingly never ending attacks on our standard of living merely reflects the fact that the government – whether it was initially Labour and now the coalition government are completely lost as to how to drag society out of this crisis. Their response has been more and more irrational – savage cuts in public expenditure severely damaging the public infrastructure (which shock horror the private sector depends on as much of the rest of us for its existence) and the trend toward currency wars – governments across the world manipulating their currencies in a process referred to as 'competitive devaluation' in an effort to help their national economies.

A Common Struggle Against A Common Enemy

It is clear that the situation is dire. It is going to affect all of us, so it is of utmost importance that we realise that we are all actually in this together – that is ordinary people in Britain, France, Greece etc face the same prospect of cuts in benefit, wage freezes, unemployment. In these circumstances it is understandable that many people will look to the past and romanticise what life used to be like – but in real terms, for the past three to four decades our living standards have declined through Tory and Labour governments alike. After all, it was only six months ago that Labour went into the general election on the basis of the cuts consensus with all the other parties – promising us cuts deeper in the public sector than those of the previous Tory government. Are really expected to believe that Labour controlled councils will not be implemented cuts? Therefore it is necessary to resist the fast-and-deep Tory cuts, but reject the slower-and-shallower cuts Labour have in mind for us.

In the struggle against these attacks we should not limit ourselves to the outlook of Labour and the Trade Unions. We should put forward an alternative vision for society, one in which we supersede the gap between what our basic needs, wants and desires on the one hand are and society's incapacity to fulfil them due to its blind alien logic that demands profit maximisation at every turn.

About this Bulletin

This bulletin was produced by members of Manchester Communist Students and students and colleagues at Manchester Universities. But this is not "our" bulletin, it is yours too. Do you have information you think other members of the university should know, such as cuts to courses, staffing or services? We'd appreciate any feedback or comments - You can help us to produce and distribute the bulletin. So get in touch with us! Reports can be published anonymously.

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'Roaming like a mad-man in the dark'

The current levels of debt have put the government under pressure from what the Financial Times dubs "bond vigilantes"—major investors who sell treasury bonds to force governments to slash public spending. Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain have all come under this type of market discipline and have responded with harsh austerity programmes of the kind that the government has just embarked on, Britain's austerity package is proportionately tougher than any of these, but the Finance markets still only held stable.

The reality is that these cuts will not

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Looking back to look forwards; Reflections on last year's struggle

Last month saw members of UNISON at MMU vote by 62% in their branch to reject the National Employer's pay offer, which in real terms amounted to a pay cut of nearly 4.5%. For those new to Manchester or those that have been politicised to an extent by the Browne Review, it could be useful to look back at the response of the trade unions to the cuts of 'the 127' last year.

When cuts to 127 members of MMU's 'support' and IT staff were announced this time last year, it seemed to some of us that strike action was on the cards. The branch secretary of the UNISON trade union who represents non-academic staff at MMU responded by talking tough. He attacked Vice Chancellor John Brooks' £250,000 annual salary and the 7% increase to his pay packet, whilst pointing out a £1.3 million budget surplus for the 2009-10 financial year and the development of new sites by the university. He called for a vote of no confidence in the VC and condemned a growth in the number of highly paid bureaucrats at the university and "years of mismanagement".

This was followed by a trade union protest attended by hundreds of angry workers and students outside the board of governments meeting a month later, smaller protests took place in the Crewe and Alsager campuses.

By the 20th of January the executive of the MMU UNISON branch agreed unanimously 'to enter into dispute with management'.

Following a '90 day consultative period', during which UNISON was forbidden from meeting on university property, resulting in another demonstration, the union called for a general meeting in order to vote for a 'consultative ballot'.

This was the first step in what the union called "a number of legal hurdles to jump over". This consultative ballot, would eventually lead to a second ballot on whether or not to take industrial action.

Following an affirmative vote in the general meeting, the consultative ballot was carried out, taking almost a month's time (as specified in the union rule book).

A decent YES vote was returned and the union proceeded to undergo proceedings for a vote to strike action. However ManMet management decided to follow the precedent set by Willie Walsh of British Airways and threatened to take the union to the High Court on voting

'irregularities'. This succeeded in slowing down the union apparatus further as they were required to spend almost another whole month preparing to re-ballot their membership.

This undoubtedly affected work place morale. It had been five months between the date of the announced redundancies and the final ballot, which could lead to strike action. Nevertheless, the ballot returned a positive reaction. 53% of those who voted cast their ballot for industrial action, on a 50% turn out. Some may see this is a small majority but I would argue that the current government had less of a mandate handed to them than in this case.

The final nail in the coffin came when union regional full timers decided to abandon this mandate and forbid Manchester Metropolitan University staff from taking strike action, a thoroughly undemocratic move in my opinion.

On the positive side, through negotiations the union had managed to reduce the number of compulsory redundancies to around eight people. Unfortunately I suspect that this will have been complemented by many workers taking voluntary redundancy deals, due to demoralisation and the bullying culture which has been employed by management. Students have seen how these redundancies have affected us (for example the fiasco created by the replacement of the coursework receipting office) and I predict that management will make new attacks against a disheartened and broken workforce this year, these could be coming to fruition with the five 'reorganisations' currently taking place amongst support staff and the aforementioned attempt at a hefty pay cut.

In face of these new attacks it is worth reflecting. Despite the best efforts of the militant trade union reps and shop stewards at our university, workers failed to take effective action to defend our interest.

This begs the question if it is possible for workers to control struggles themselves.

In March 2009, workers at the Visteon

factory in Belfast which was majority owned by the Ford Motor Company were told that all 610 of them would be sacked without redundancy pay, only minutes before the end of their shift. This triggered the workers to occupy their factory in demand of the compensation that they deserved, despite the reactionary role played by the trade union Unite that represented them, they were able to extract reparations.

In January of the same year, approximately 800 workers at the Lindsey Oil Refinery walked out of work following the announcement by the Italian construction contractor IREM that Italian and Portuguese workers were hired to work on the site, rather than local workers. This led to 700 workers walking out in solidarity at the Grangemouth Oil Refinery in Scotland followed by similar displays of solidarity at four other sites around the country. Despite the appearance of this movement being trapped in nationalism, the main demand of the strikers ratified at mass meetings was that all workers would be covered by 'The National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry'. 200 foreign workers even came out in support of the strike!

Even in countries without the same amount of freedom as ours, such as Bangladesh and Turkey where the trade unions actively break strikes and attack strikers, workers effectively organise themselves outside and against the unions.

Hopefully this serves to demonstrate that industrial action outside of the unions is not a utopian idea.



A general meeting of MMU Unison Branch votes overwhelmingly to proceed to a consultative ballot.

Education for whom?

When we talk about how to fight cuts in higher education, we don't see it as an end to itself. Sure, we don't want to pay for this education ourselves because that leads to less and less people form working class backgrounds getting into higher education. However, that is only the first step in a broader struggle. Higher education as we know it today is today is nothing like the communist vision of education. Therefore we don't stop by defending what we have today, but we also criticise the existing system and try to show a way forward.

We understand this system as one in which two classes are diametrically opposed. The ruling capitalist class and the exploited working class which lives by selling its labour power to the capitalists. These classes are directly opposed as their interests what lead to what we call class struggle. There are no higher morals guiding the capitalists, they are by the very nature of this system only interested in higher profits. We have to consider this very important fact while looking at education.

So, why do the capitalists provide education for the working class? In previous class societies, for example in the feudal society during the Middle Ages, only clergymen and the aristocracy were provided with real education. The broad mass of peasants were illiterate and their only education was the church, where they were mainly taught about the bad things which would happen to them if they didn't obey the rules of God – which were in fact the rules of the clergy and the aristocracy. The function of education for the oppressed classes was therefore mainly an “ideological” one.

This ideological function of education is still important today. A lot of things contained in our curriculum are far from being a neutral “truth”. In some subjects, such as natural sciences this isn't very obvious, although even there structures of ideology exist. It is more obvious when we turn to social sciences. For example in history, much of what we are taught about communism is simply a lie, this is because it is not in the interest of the system to tell us the truth. It is the same with economics, in which we are basically told that we are living in a system that actually works.

Moreover, not telling you the truth in classes is just one factor. Another aspect is the general way education is structured. Even today only a minority (albeit a large one) of the British society attends university. Is this because the

broad majority is too “stupid” to attend university? Or is it simply because the system has no need to have everyone go to University? Most of the working class doesn't need a University education, because their job will be only a manual one. They will work at a factory, as bricklayers or as cashiers in supermarkets. That is the way they produce profit for the capitalists. They don't need a degree in sociology to do that, on the contrary, a long education would unnecessarily heighten the price of their labour power.

Furthermore, capitalism needs more than that. Today's high tech capitalism needs specialists, engineers, lawyers and people doing research; not to speak of all the people needed for marketing and market research. These people need a better qualification to do their job. The need to have workers able to do these tasks is what forces the capitalists to provide higher education to the working class, not to the whole, but to substantial strata of it.

Higher education is therefore a product of this very system, capitalism, dividing mental and manual labour and reproducing capitalist ideology. We do not think this is what education should be about. Education should be about improving ourselves, learning about the stuff that we are interested in, critical thinking and then using these new abilities to improve society as a whole. The guy who struggles to get a degree in sociology and then ends up doing market research demonstrates the exact opposite of what education should be about. Studying and work should not be divided; nor should they be united in the way where you have to work for McDonalds or some other crappy

employer, gaining a minimal wage just to pay your course fees either. Productive participation in society should be a human need itself.

There is no need for higher education to be the way it is now. We have all the ability to make it better, accessible to everybody and not isolated from manual work anymore. There is the possibility for the development of a real, critical science and not just learning off by heart what is in your books in order to pass exams. Such an education is not compatible with capitalism, which sees humans only as surplus-increasers. Such an education goes beyond the limits of capitalism and beyond the limits of the capitalist universities. But it is possible and we are determined to struggle for such an education.

Revolutionary French poster
proclaiming a people's university
(1968)



How the cuts affect us!

- No Books! Most of us know that books at the library are mysteriously 'missing', fat chance of the library getting new ones! We should all understand the implications of this, we need books so that we can learn, develop ourselves and get a degree!
- No librarians! Did you know there used to be librarians in the library?! Now the only way we can get assistance in the library is by using a telephone. The writers of this bulletin are often asked by freshers to give them assistance with the Dewey Decimal system, first years sometimes leave the library in confusion, professional assistance could be appreciated in these circumstances.
- No food! Discussions with staff have revealed that the Vice Chancellor seems to have made it his mission to drive canteen facilities out of the university (demonstrated by the removal of the canteen at Didsbury and the sandwich bar from the Students Union). He likes his own canteen facilities of course, and tries to keep them a secret at the higher reaches of the All Saints' Building.
- Lost coursework! Management stealthily replaced the 'coursework receiving office' over the summer with a cheap and unreliable system. Students have already had their coursework lost, this could effect your final grade!
- No cameras! The 30-odd students on the Contemporary Film and Video 3rd year course

only have a single 'Red Rock' kit to fight over, which is essential for their final project and only 6 'HD' cameras. Furthermore priority for the 'Red Rock' kit is given to MA students external to this class.

- No choices! Management's 'EQAL' proposals will cut the amount of modules students are allowed to choose, narrowing the learning scope. Cutting contact hours and leading to staff cuts.
- No contact hours! Students on the Illustration with Animation course only have 1 and a half hours contact time per week.
- No technicians! The number of technicians in the Interactive Arts Dept has been cut over the past 9 months. This has lead to hours of wasted time as students do not have the qualifications to properly operate certain printers. Less technicians also means longer waiting times to learn skills needed for the darkroom. Prices of materials have also increased over the past two years. The sole technician on the



Contemporary Film and Video course was sacked a few years ago, he used to help with 'set design'. This also leads to hours of wasted time as there is no one qualified to help with such technical issues.

- Future of dissertation archive uncertain. Old dissertations currently sit unsorted on the ground floor of the library, plans are to get rid of them by the end of the year. Any student trying to write their dissertation will understand how important completed examples can be to help stimulate their creative juices.

Public Meeting

Class struggle in France and the lessons for Britain

Wednesday November 17th, 6 PM

@ MMU Students Union

With reports from the situation in France and discussion afterwards.