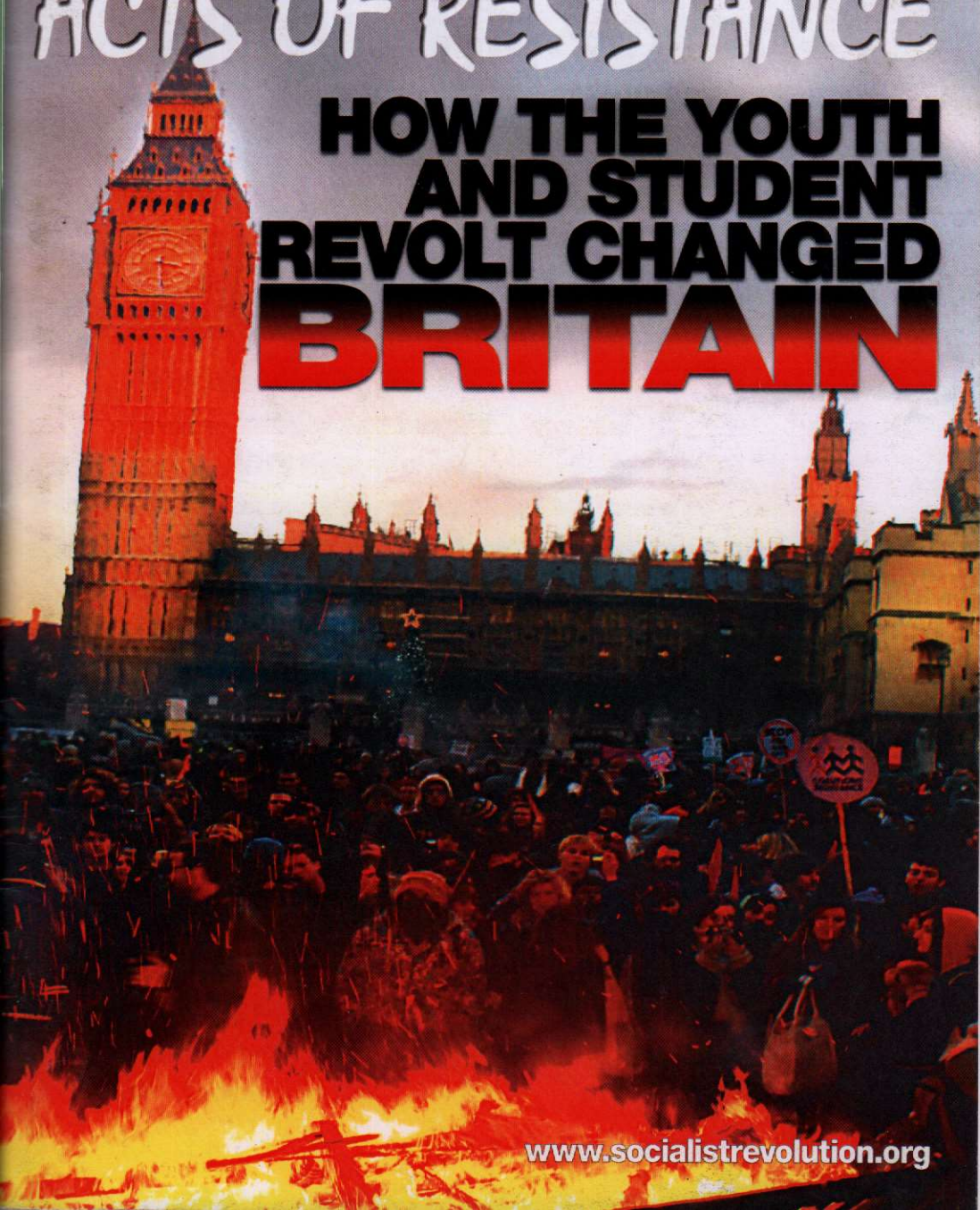


**REVOLUTION**  
socialist youth movement

# ACTS OF RESISTANCE

## HOW THE YOUTH AND STUDENT REVOLT CHANGED **BRITAIN**



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# **ACTS OF RESISTANCE**

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# An explosion of anger

A radical new movement exploded onto the streets in the close of 2010.

We are use to associating scenes of mass protest, vicious police violence, and determined resistance with France, Italy, or Greece – but not any longer. It was here in Britain, students and young people stood up to be counted, determined to fight a tripling in university fees, the abolition of EMA, and to reclaim a future that was increasingly denied to us.

Labelled the jilted generation, iPod listening, Nike wearing, too consumerist to care, allegedly apathetic, too disengaged to bother: the youth rebellion broke a million empty stereotypes.

It was a political education made at breakneck speed. We were facing the most anti-working class government British workers had known in a generation. But for the vast majority on the streets Margaret Thatcher's government was not even a distant memory. Yet within a matter of weeks, the age old battle cry of "Tory scum" was again echoing around Westminster.

It was after all a cabinet with 18 millionaires – carrying out a policy serving the interests of no one but a tiny minority at the very top of British society. We had already seen two years of bitter recession, leaving one in five young people, a million of us, on the dole. Now we had a Con-Dem government whose agenda was to deepen the pain with historic cuts to our public services.

Education was one target amid an avalanche of cuts and privatisation, but it struck at the very core of any notion of justice and fairness – the language with which Nick Clegg and David Cameron were so keen to disguise their rotten political agenda.

Why should young working class people leave university with tens of thousands of pounds in debt? When the bankers ran up debts they couldn't pay, the state was so quick to cover their losses – it was a different story altogether for working people.

Britain wasn't in debt due to years of over generous spending by the Labour Party. We didn't fall for that one. The government had just given £1 trillion to the banks for the bailout in 2008 and tax revenues had been hit by the biggest recession in post-war history.

This had all the ingredients of classic capitalist crisis. The system wasn't working in the way that it should – it wasn't churning out profits for the rich – so, as in all crises like this, it was working class people who were asked to pay, through an enormous attack on our living conditions.

Time and again the Con-Dems made it clear who they represented. They wrote off Vodafone's £6 billion unpaid tax bill. They employed retail tycoon and infamous tax avoider, Philip Green, as a government "cost cutting" advisor. This was reality of 'Coalition politics' in Britain. Billions lost in tax avoidance and fraud was ignored whilst working class college students had their meagre, totally insufficient, but vital £30 a week life-line taken out their pockets.

They couldn't even claim a mandate for these attacks. Under David Cameron the Tories had spent years trying to convince us of their liberal credentials. In the election campaign they said nothing about the 20 per cent VAT hike, they pledged to protect 'frontline services' and even promised outright that they would not abolish EMA.

Despite all these empty promises and lies, even then a clear majority didn't vote for them. Some voted Labour to keep out the Tories. Some voted Liberal Democrat, who promised to abolish tuition fees and not go along with vicious spending cuts. But the Liberal Democrats were prepared to junk all their promises for the trappings of power.

The 'Coalition Agreement', the new manifesto the Tories and Liberals drew up after we had all voted, was true blue in every respect – it was a programme for a Tory government and the Liberal Democrats were to play the role of convincing us all it was something else.

Over the last decade the Liberals tried to put themselves to the left of Labour on many issues, but they were now exposed in the eyes of millions. Students in our tens of thousands labelled them as no better than the Tories, just as much a pawn of the banks and corporations, and just as willing to tear up their election promises like every other capitalist politician.

Most of all students felt betrayed because many had voted for the Liberal Democrats as the apparently only pro-student party, one that had promised in the words of Nick Clegg to "Vote, campaign and protest" against any attempt to raise tuition fees beyond their current level of £3150 a year. They even drew up a plan to scrap them altogether within five years.

Once they were in government though the Lib-Dems committed themselves to trebling the tuition fees to as much as £9,000. Even the National Union of Students (NUS) was outraged and spurred into action, having got Liberal Democrat candidates to sign a pledge that committed them to vote against any fees increase.

The Lib-Dems had lied to get into power. But in the end this wasn't just a lesson in the treachery of one party. It exposed massive fault lines in the parliamentary system itself. There was no way to recall these MPs, no way to remove them from power for breaking their pledges. Our MPs had already been exposed as corrupt in the expenses scandal, now they had betrayed their promises too. The 'democratic deficit', the failure of the existing political system to respond to the needs and wishes of the vast majority of ordinary people, was there for all to see.

And so in their hundreds of thousands, young people took to the streets, occupied buildings in a ferocious movement to beat back against this injustice.

We quickly came up against the armed wing of the ConDem government – violent police forces determined to quell the youth uprising.

What happened between 10 November and 9 December is a story worth telling because the events of those weeks taught thousands of young people tremendous lessons about social movements, about political protest and about how we can fight for a better world.



# Fees: to infinity and beyond

Released on 12 October, the Browne Review into higher education sent shockwaves across Britain. Higher fees had always been on the agenda for this parliament – the Browne review itself was actually commissioned by the last Labour government.

The fact they appointed, Lord Browne, an out and out bosses' man, the former CEO of BP – says it all about what they wanted the conclusions of the review to be.

Few people in the know were surprised when Browne proposed a massive fee hike. But across Britain the proposals sent shockwaves.

No one except the Liberal Democrats had even made an issue out of higher education fees in the election, but even then the big parties were secretly planning a massive hike. Time and again, Clegg himself pointed this out in the campaign, complaining that neither the "Labour Party or the Conservatives want to talk about higher education fees".

Announced at a secret location early in the morning, it proposed completely removing the cap on tuition fees, creating a market between universities and slashing funding for all subjects.

There was little flinching or attempts to soften the blow.

Browne talked openly about how universities would compete for students in a market place and as a result closures and mergers of entire higher education institutions, were inevitable, and would help create "efficiencies" (read: "cuts") in the system.

Arts and humanities subjects were to be hit particularly hard. Labelled as not "economic priorities" government funding was to be withdrawn completely, with all the course costs now falling on the students.

Browne argued government funding should be focused on subjects that had strategic importance for the economy, while students would be turned into consumers and compelled to see higher education as an economic choice, balancing their interests with what a degree might mean for their future earnings. No longer would education be about learning.

Students would be saddled with huge debts in the region of £40 – 50,000 upon graduating and universities would be turned into businesses, competing in a bitter struggle with other institutions to cut costs, and boost student numbers.

The cap was completely abolished, by government provided loans would be capped at between £6,000 and £9,000 per year – effectively limiting the amount universities could charge.

This was a total marketisation of higher education. It is not exaggeration to say that it abolished in a stroke the basic principle of publicly funded, universal

higher education for all.

A few weeks later the government released its Comprehensive Spending Review which proposed wholesale cuts across every government department, with massive cuts to education, as well as welfare and the public sector, especially local councils. Higher education took a huge hit – with 7 per cuts next year and a massive 80 per slashing once fees were introduced.

For education workers a long dark cloud suddenly fell over the entire sector. With the market now set to determine the future, the question that no one knows the answer to is how such astronomical costs will affect student numbers. If students stay away in ever greater numbers, then a jobs massacre across higher education would be inevitable.

The bitter irony was that the bosses of the top universities, who had campaigned for years to be allowed to charge higher fees, weren't happy. The Browne review talked endlessly about investment in education, but was proposing massive cuts. Chancellors from the Russell Group unis even complained that there were strings attached to charging the top rate, as institutions who charged this rate had to contribute out of this revenue to the costs of the loans.

Meanwhile the tentacles of private money would find ever greater avenues to exploit. With funds for research and tuition from the state dwindling, the research and teaching agenda will become more and more tailored to the interests of large donors and big business backers.

Gone forever would be the idea of education for education's sake, of critical research seeking to discover new things about human society and our relationship to nature without having to answer to the straight jacket of the capitalist profit-loss balance sheet.

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## **The Con-Dem's War on The Public Sector: What's at Stake?**

- 500,00 public sector jobs
- 25 per cent cuts to most government departments
- Thousands of libraries facing closure
- Social care budgets slashed
- Refuse services threatened
- Environmental commitments shelved
- EMA gone
- Sure start centres facing closure – child care schemes threatened
- School and hospital budgets starved of extra funds
- Wholesale privatisation of the NHS
- Massive privatisation in local government
- City academies everywhere – businessman taking over our schools
- Legal aid budget slashed



## The Alternative To Cuts

- Take over the banks – create a single state bank without compensation to the rich
  - Wipe the debts clear – make the super rich creditors pay the costs of their crisis
  - For a super-tax on the rich, for a land tax on the huge estates
  - Cancel trident – slash defence spending to zero, stop funding imperial wars
  - For public ownership – take over the big corporations, industry run for workers
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The attacks on education are part of a wider programme of vicious cuts in the public sector. With a massive programme of service cuts, students and young people were being faced with a scissor crisis: paying more money for a worse, more market-driven education, with a public service jobs massacre on the horizon, to deepen the woes of huge unemployment.

• The reality of the Coalition's austerity Britain hit home hard.

Left wing student activists were faced with a tremendous challenge and opportunity.

The scale of attacks were enormous, and no doubt would have led to mass occupations and demonstrations of hundreds of thousands had they been announced by the French, Greek or Italian governments. But the British student movement didn't appear to be at the stage where it could launch a huge fightback to challenge the Con-Dems.

The anger was definitely there – but how to mobilise it?

We weren't entirely starting from nothing; earlier in the year 200 activists had come together at UCL in London to form the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. Now we had to turn this nucleus of activists outwards to lead a mass movement against austerity.

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## In Defence of Public Ownership – For Need not Greed

The Con-Dems aren't just planning a slash and burn of our services. They are also letting privatisation rip across the public sector. Their aim is to turn the welfare state into a body that just writes cheques to private companies that profit from our schools and hospitals. They say this is more "efficient" but it's a lie. It creates waste as different companies compete with one another, driving down costs to boost profits at the expense of our services. For the workforce it means a constant battle with profit hungry bosses to defend conditions and pay. If we don't fight against this now, one day they will turn around and do the same to our schools and hospitals as they have done to universities; they'll say, "we can't afford the amounts the private sector are demanding, so it's only fair you pay to see a doctor, or go to school". We need to stand up now and defend the principle of public ownership – for human need, not private profit.

## Nick Clegg – then

“This is a complex and very difficult issue. But everybody wants the same thing - not only sustainable funding for universities in the decades ahead but also a system where the teaching you receive at universities, there’s no up front cost for it, it’s free at the point of use, that we encourage more students from poorer backgrounds into university than is presently the case.” Clegg’s comment on the Browne Review, 12 October 2010

## and now ...

“We will campaign against any lifting of the cap on tuition fees. Both Labour and the Conservative parties are clearly intending to come together after this election to raise the cap from £3,000 to maybe several thousand more, as demanded by a number of universities. We think that’s wrong...

We want to see tuition fees completely removed. It’s fair, it’s right. I don’t think young people should be saddled with so much debt before they’ve even take the first step in the adult world of work.” Nick Clegg just over a week before the election, 27 April 2010.

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# Making NUS fight

By totalling lifting the cap on fees, Browne had shaken up the whole student movement. But it wasn't totally unexpected. The movement had already been preparing for the Browne review.

Even the bureaucrats at the top of the NUS had launched the pledge for MPs to vote against higher fees around election time, in the knowledge a fee hike was coming.

The left within the NUS had also been pushing for Britain's highly bureaucratic, semi-state, semi-commercial student union, to turn back to the streets in the autumn and campaign actively against the swingeing cuts ripping through higher and further education.

The push and pull between the left and right in the union was played out over the summer months. The NUS even called an open anti-cuts conference under pressure then went back on the pledge, trying to restrict it to two representatives of each student union – prompting nearly 100 student activists to write an open letter of protest to NUS president Aaron Porter.

There was a danger that the NUS would roll back on the anti-cuts stance and commitment to a national demonstration that the left had won at the 2010 annual conference.

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## Summer 2010: Pressure Grows on NUS Bureaucrats

**“We believe that a demonstration should be called... in the first term of 2010-11, to highlight to new students the dangers facing our education and the need to get involved in the campaign to save it... Campaigns to stop education cuts have had enormous success when students, staff and communities have worked together. We believe a national demonstration to save all aspects of the education system from cuts and fees should be called jointly by all the education campaigning groups, student unions, trade unions and organisations that oppose what is happening to schools, further and higher education.” Let's work together to build a national demonstration, National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, 16 June 2010**

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It was only under this intense pressure from the grassroots student movement that the NUS decided to act and called a national demonstration against fees and cuts on 10 November.

For the NUS this wasn't intended as the start of a militant campaign to win, but a big mobilisation to lay the basis for a campaign... of polite lobbying and letter writing.

It was only grassroots activists in the movement that saw the potential for a mass uprising. Though we were few in number, we realised with a clear call for protests, walkouts and occupations, we could light up a spark of mass resistance.

Building for the NUS and UCU national demonstration was an obvious first step. But knowing how the NUS had sat on its hands for years, we knew that we

had to organise another action– to make sure the campaign we needed didn't start and finish with one protest on 10 November.

REVOLUTION members in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts put forward an emergency 'battle plan', to a small meeting of activists in London. It called for a national day of action and walkouts from schools, colleges and universities on the 24 November.

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## **Voices from The Resistance:**

### **John Bowman – Why We Called 24/11**

**"The attack was so horrendous – a fight back was certain. We already had a national demonstration which was to be huge. We also knew that the NUS wanted to make that demonstration the beginning and the end of the fight against fees and cuts. We couldn't afford to wait another year for the next NUS demonstration. If we gave a lead and called the next series of actions, tens of thousands would respond. Schools and colleges were crucial – it was their future at stake. Walkouts were the best way to unite uni and college students."**

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College and school students needed to play a key role in the movement. They were going to suffer the most from the cuts and fee rises, it was this generation older students were fighting for. We decided to call for walkouts as the best form of action to unite FE and HE students together. Walkouts were a key form of resistance for students during the anti-war movement of 2003. Thousands walked out on Day X when war was declared and we were sure thousands more would walkout to defend their education. The resolution was passed by the meeting, and we watched a facebook event for the walkouts grow very quickly – within days signing up 5,000.

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## **National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts Issues Call to Arms**

**"The Browne review will have angered millions of students – those already burdened with debt at the universities – and those in FE colleges and school who want to go to university. It will further radicalise university teachers, outraged at the wider damage to education and culture. In this environment, a mass movement can take place – so the action we now take has to be swift and radical."** National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts calls for a day of walkouts and protests in November, 13 October 2010 (day after publication of Browne Review).

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That number was to grow and grow as 24 November approached – as the day came closer tens of thousands would sign up.

Support for the 24/11 soon grew in the grassroots movement with the Education Activist Network (EAN) and a number of other campaigns backing the call.



# Tory HQ occupied – magnificent Millbank

It was clear that the NUS-UCU demonstration would reach mass proportions. But there was a feeling in the movement that more radical action was needed on the day as well.

We had to challenge the government – really push home the message we were determined to win, and do whatever was necessary.

In the two weeks prior to 10 November a series of NCAFC meetings discussed taking direct action. Sean Rillo Raczka, executive officer at Birkbeck Student Union and NUS NEC member, summed up the mood, arguing we needed to prevent the energy of the protest being dissipated into nothing more than a passive rally far away from the seat of power in Whitehall. “This can’t be just another NUS ‘A’ to ‘B’ march – it’s our job to make this a day to remember.”

Occupations of various government buildings along the route of the march were discussed – we knew it would be chaotic, but the spontaneous mood of the crowd would be radical.

On the day tens of thousands poured into London – it was the biggest workday demonstration in many years, with over 50,000 taking to the streets.

EAN, NCAFC, and the University of London (UL) agreed a “Free Education” feeder march to take place from the ULU building on Malet street. This was a political move – to put the question of free education at the centre, even though NUS had long ago abandoned the policy.

Several thousand people onto the free education feeder march, but the NUS had worked overtime to try and split people away. They directed coaches full of students from outside London away from ULU to the official march rally point on Whitehall instead.

The Free Education bloc still brought together thousands of students. It set off and marched past LSE and Kings College to meet up with the main demo on Whitehall.

The bloc was soon submerged in the huge strong demonstration.

Hundreds of coaches arrived and students from across the country spilled out onto the streets. From Aberdeen to Exeter, students across Britain had finally risen up to defend their education.

The mood on the demonstration was incredible. The fight back was under way – we were not just going to passively stand by and tolerate this offensive on education.

As the march made its way past the Millbank Tower, the crowd were alerted to it being Tory HQ and within minutes it was occupied. Security was caught largely unawares as several dozen students got inside quickly. There were no police

around the building. The Tories and the police had not anticipated the huge numbers and the potential for direct action.

Hundreds of students followed the initial group who ran inside, and the courtyard filled up with several thousands students, dancing, chanting and burning effigies of Nick Clegg and David Cameron. It was a carnival atmosphere.

One or two NUS stewards stood tried to stop people from the march joining the Millbank protest, while stewards from NCAFC helped directed students towards the Tower..

The Millbank occupation actually had little to do with the ULU feeder march or the plans that had been made prior to the protest. It was a largely spontaneous act of anger and resistance brought on by the ConDems' savage attacks. The students didn't touch the various charities in the building – instead they headed straight for the Tory offices.

A sound-system played dubstep and drum 'n' bass to thousands of school, college and university students below the occupied offices. One student on the roof threw a fire extinguisher down which nearly hit the police. It was a stupid thing to do – and a terrible mistake. The crowd in the courtyard began to boo and chanted “stop throwing shit” at some of the people on the roof. The fire extinguisher was a low point in an otherwise tremendous political action.

The Millbank occupation was no conspiracy by shadowy groups of left wingers. It was a relatively spontaneous action – it expressed the enormous anger and rage with the government.

The right wing press decided to launch a witch-hunt, and tried to divide the movement by blaming the occupation on a “rogue minority” of anarchists and socialists who had ruined what had been a largely uneventful protest by a “peaceful majority”.

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## **Voices of Resistance: Millbank Occupier on What Really Happened**

“The lobby of Millbank was peacefully occupied by about 30 students for some time, with most of the building staff and security leaving pretty quickly but there was no trouble. It was only when the police arrived that the trouble started. We were attacked by police in the building, getting repeatedly batoned and thrown around the lobby. It was then that the crowd outside started to break the windows, I'm sure their aim was to get into help. People focus on the property damage from the protesters, but that's not the only story. When a policeman went for a protester at one point with the baton, the protester ducked, and the widescreen tv felt the full force of the baton. Soon though the numbers overwhelmed the cops and hundreds of protesters raced to the roof of the building. We unfurled the REVOLUTION banner, hung it from the room, and the rest is history.” A REVOLUTION member who was on the roof of Millbank



On the 11 November, every national newspaper carried the same front page photograph: a hooded youth kicking in the window of Millbank Tower.

Every newspaper condemned the actions of the students, claiming the protests had been hijacked, when the opposite was the case.

The occupation of Tory HQ expressed the anger of thousands of working-class students and young people who were having their futures vandalised by the Con-Dem government.

The media demanded student activists condemn the “violence” of a few smashed windows – but we weren’t going to succumb to this pressure. No one advocated or planned property damage, but it’s also wrong to describe it as violence as it doesn’t hurt anyone. In the building of mass movements such things happen – few now remember the militant side to the battle the suffragettes waged for women to win though vote, who regularly smashed windows.

The right wing media and political establishment had fundamentally miscalculated the mood. They thought by honing in on “violent protesters”, they would split the movement – dividing its radicals from its moderates, and alienating it from the rest of society.

They couldn’t have been more wrong. The protest at Millbank was an inspiration to millions suffering unemployment, redundancy and savage cuts to welfare and services.

They were more than happy to see the Tory HQ take a hit. They were glad to see the coalition of millionaire bullies have their nose bloodied for once.

The press, trying the age-old trick of turning young people into villains or ‘folk devils’ had inadvertently given them the publicity to turn the next action on 24th November walkouts into a mass protest of historic proportions and turn the students into heroes who dared to fight.

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## **Voices of Resistance: Goldsmiths Lecturers’ Defend Millbank Occupation**

We the undersigned wish to congratulate staff and students on the magnificent anti-cuts demonstration this afternoon. At least 50,000 people took to the streets to oppose the coalition government’s devastating proposals for education. We also wish to condemn and distance ourselves from the divisive and, in our view, counterproductive statements issued by the UCU and NUS leadership concerning the occupation of the Conservative Party HQ. The real violence in this situation relates not to a smashed window but to the destructive impact of the cuts and privatisation that will follow if tuition fees are increased and if massive reductions in HE funding are implemented. Today’s events demonstrate the deep hostility in the UK towards the cuts proposed in the Comprehensive Spending Review. We hope that this marks the beginning of a sustained defence of public services and welfare provision as well as higher education.

John Wadsworth, President Goldsmiths UCU

Des Freedman, Secretary Goldsmiths UCU

# **Voices of Resistance: Student Leaders Back Millbank and Appeal for Unity**

Wednesday's national NUS/UCU 50,000-strong national demonstration was a magnificent show of strength against the Con-Dems' savage attacks on education. The Tories want to make swingeing cuts, introduce £9,000 tuition fees and cut EMA. These attacks will close the doors to higher education and further education for a generation of young people.

During the demonstration over 5,000 students showed their determination to defend the future of education by occupying the Tory party HQ and its courtyards for several hours. The mood was good-spirited, with chants, singing and flares.

Yet at least 32 people have now been arrested, and the police and media appear to be launching a witch-hunt condemning peaceful protesters as "criminals" and violent.

A great deal is being made of a few windows smashed during the protest, but the real vandals are those waging a war on our education system.

We reject any attempt to characterise the Millbank protest as small, "extremist" or unrepresentative of our movement.

We celebrate the fact that thousands of students were willing to send a message to the Tories that we will fight to win. Occupations are a long established tradition in the student movement that should be defended. It is this kind of action in France and Greece that has been an inspiration to many workers and students in Britain faced with such a huge assault on jobs, benefits, housing and the public sector. We stand with the protesters, and anyone who is victimised as a result of the protest.

**Mark Bergfeld, NUS NEC**

**Ashok Kumar, Vice-President Education LSE**

**Vicki Baars, NUS LGBT Officer women's place**

**Sean Rillo Raczka, Birkbeck SU Chair and NUS NEC (Mature Students' Rep)**

**Nathan Bolton, Campaigns Officer Essex SU**

**James Haywood, Campaigns Officer Goldsmiths College SU**

**Steve Hedley, London regional organiser RMT**

**Wanda Canton, Women's Officer QMUL**

**Michael Chessum, Education and Campaigns Officer UCL SU**

**Simon Hardy, National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts**

**Jade Baker, Education Officer Westminster Uni SU**

**Dan Swain, Essex Uni SU Postgrad Officer**



# New movement, new leaders

A new movement was being born and a whole new layer of grassroots activists were propelled into the glare of the media. The case for direct action became routinely made in the Guardian's Comment is Free. While student activists refused to condemn the violence of protesters – insisting time and again, that the real criminals were those wielding the axe to our education.

Website and social media hits soared, mainstream media attention grew and put the NCAFC in a powerful position to challenge the official leaders of the NUS.

But the same wasn't true of the official leaders. Aaron Porter, president of the NUS, condemned the violence as "despicable". "This was not part of our plan," he said. "This action was by others who have come out and used this opportunity to hijack a peaceful protest."

Porter thought that the Millbank protest would signal the end of the movement. With the same mindset as the right-wing press, he showed how cut off he was from the undercurrent of radicalism that was sweeping schools, colleges and universities across Britain.

But Porter's mistake would soon be exposed. By denouncing the movement, he ceded the leadership of it to the grassroots. Thousands of school and college students in particular had seen Millbank and were about to take up the call for the 24 November.

Grassroots activists never had any faith in Porter's leadership. But now thousands upon thousands saw him denounce his own people. This changed the situation.

It's always difficult to know how to relate to the official leaders of the movement when you yourself are well aware they will always sell the battle short and seek the line of least resistance, but when wider layers of the movement have not yet drawn the same conclusions.

So, what's the principle?

What NCAFC was able to do so well in the build up to the 10 November and after was apply the principle "with the official leaderships where possible, but without them wherever necessary".

The NUS and Aaron Porter were roundly condemned across the student movement. The NUS' actions opened the eyes of thousands of students to the nature of the NUS leadership.

They were exposed as careerist right-wingers unwilling to stand up for the interests of students in case it jeopardise their future chances of making it into government.

# Finding new ways of organising

Protest leaders stepped into the void the NUS had left, given a voice to a new movement that was spontaneously coming into being across the country.

New media was certainly central to how the movement spread and organised. The Facebook event originally set up by Ncafc for the 24 November walkouts grew to an astonishing 28,000 people. But there were numerous other events set up – the protest went ‘viral’ across the e-networks. It was taken up spontaneously by school and college students, who had seen the Millbank protest, and wanted to make their voice heard too. The response was electric.

But the role of new technology has often been over stated in the wider movement. There was plenty of ‘old fashioned’ activism involved. Activists at universities across Britain turned on the schools and colleges, organising mass leafleting to spread the word about the demonstration. But they often found they already knew about it and had organised themselves.

Informal groups of activists formed in schools and colleges – preparing to what was to become a huge day of protest. The challenge was finding a way to organise this into a national movement.

The movement needed greater co-ordination – the grassroots left had too often been divided, but now we were together leading a mass movement. We started to form student assemblies to bring together the movement and plan and co-ordinate actions.

There were inevitable difficulties. We were in a situation where even individuals could call protests and rally thousands. But we needed united, genuinely democratic co-ordination.

In Europe, during periods of mass struggle, assemblies would often form ‘from below’ to co-ordinate the action; Revolution took this idea into the movement in Britain and it was taken up.

The student assemblies, which later opened up to education workers too, were, though often more than chaotic, a success as they brought together the movement to democratically debate and decide on how we would take the battle forward. Though they were never as big as the movement itself, they set an important precedent about how to strike unity in action.

The assemblies organised and supported a range of actions with almost all participants agreeing to implement the decisions made. The model was implemented successfully in other cities too.

As Simon Hardy said to the first LSA “Every movement needs a brain and a heartbeat; our brain is the student assembly, our heartbeats are the days of action”.



Future days of action were planned, on the 30 November, and then after that we knew that the day of the vote in Parliament would be another major mobilisation too.

In the run-up to 24 November, activists had been frantically leafleting schools and colleges all over the country to. The call out from Ncafc was simple, "make it happen".

Mass school and college student walkouts in Britain had not been seen for many years – yet the NCAFC, soon followed by other organisations, took a gamble by making the call to "walk out" of schools, colleges and universities the cornerstone of the publicity for the demo.

The question was – would it work?

## **We never knew the power we had – 24/11 shakes Britain**

The answer was a resounding "yes". But on a scale that made this far larger and far more coordinated than even than the walkouts seen in 2003 against the war on Iraq. It was arguably even more radical too – the young people who mobilised were incredibly conscious of the politics and there was a real conviction you could feel across all the mobilisations.

On the day, 24/11, Britain was truly shaken by mass protest. Thousands upon thousands walked out of class rooms and lecture theatres across the country.

Mobilisations took place in practically every major town and city. From Edinburgh to Exeter, Cardiff to Cambridge, and Bournemouth to Brighton, the determination of young people to stand up and be counted in the fight to defend our education was clear for all to see.

The Guardian estimated that 130,000 people took part in the day of protest.

Some of the mobilisations were vast, in the small city of Brighton huge walkouts of school and college students brought 4,000 on to the streets. In Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, and London, 5,000 all walked out, while in Scotland, Glasgow saw 1,000, Edinburgh, 300. But a series of smaller actions, also took place up and down the country. The small town of Truro saw 300 students protest. In Bury, in the north-west, a mass walkout of sixth formers numbered 1,000, in Kingston it was 500, Milton Keynes, 300, Worthing, 300. The list goes on and on. Many actions were the biggest (and definitely the youngest) protests these towns had seen for decades.

To chants of "Nick Clegg, shame on you, shame on you for turning blue" the hatred of this fragile coalition government was palpable.

Neither were the students an isolated minority.

The mass protest in Brighton was greeted by loud hoots from car drivers, office workers waving and cheering from their windows. This kind of support was a powerful illustration that the students stood for the majority of working people.

Indeed, by the 24 November it was becoming clearer and clearer, that to every public sector worker, to every ordinary person who depends on welfare and services, the actions of school, college and university students were an inspiration.

Simon Hardy, of REVOLUTION and a leading activist in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, speaking on the BBC News from Trafalgar Square struck the note of the day. "People hate the Tories, they remember what they did in the 1980s" he said. "The Liberal Democrats are traitors – they have betrayed millions of young voters. Today a new generation has found its political voice. We demand the withdrawal of the entire cuts programme – or we will bring down this government."

This was truly a mass movement, largely disconnected, even at times fragmented and chaotic, but increasingly conscious of its role in a wider resistance to austerity. The 24 November was the turning point – the moment at which we confirmed our status as a new mass movement.

Across the country new young leaders emerged who wanted to fight. They walked into class after class at FE colleges and schools to get students out. But what was remarkable was how, again and again, they made it clear this wasn't a single issue campaign – but it was a battle over what kind of society we want to live in. That's what in the end made it so radical; it was the spontaneous linking up of the issues in a determined fight for all our futures.

The day of action had a remarkable effect. They dominated the newsrooms that evening and put the ruling coalition under enormous pressure. It wasn't yet clear how the vote would go as the Liberal Democrats scrambled to try and re-establish party unity, while their back benchers were in open revolt, saying they had no choice but to vote against the proposals.

## **London kettle and police violence**

On 24/11 most of the protests nationally were peaceful, but in London the Met police had other ideas. Still angry after their humiliation at the Millbank Towers occupation, they responded by "kettling" over 5,000 student protesters on Whitehall for up to twelve hours.

The police had 'accidentally' left a police van in the middle of the kettle, which was set upon by angry protesters and trashed. It was an obviously a deliberate provocation. The media swarmed about it, happy to get photos of 'anarchists' smashing things up. They got the photos they wanted and hoped they would help



de-legitimise our movement.

The kettle was a form of cruel collective punishment. In freezing temperatures protesters were deprived of food, water, lavatories and shelter, with those as young as 14 unable to get out. The aim was clearly to demoralise us, put people off joining future protests.

The parents of some of the younger students pleaded with police to allow their children to come out, to no avail, whilst a protest outside the area of the kettle, which included trade unionists from local anti-cuts groups was charged by police on horseback.

Public sector workers from Lambeth who attended the protest had to jump over a wall to avoid being crushed by horses. Police later denied the events, but a video was leaked on Youtube showing the police horses charging protestors.

Again there was a fast paced political education underway.

The brutality of the police, from the actual violence they inflicted, through to the simple and obvious disdain they had for ordinary protesters, revealed in the eyes of thousands their role: as the first line of defence of the state against radical social movements.

Some people tried to plead with them that because the police were also facing cuts they should join us in protesting. But the police do not work like that – they are not normal public sector workers but they are part of the repressive state apparatus, trained to carry out brutalising violence on radical protest movements. They treated us with contempt – but they did not scare people away from the movement. In fact they began to radicalise us even further. More revolutionaries were being made in that kettle than a hundred left-wing meetings could create.

## **Return of the mass occupation**

Every movement finds new ways of working and organising. That's part of the creative, dynamism and energy that comes from the struggle. Countless people have emphasised this aspect – the media has hit upon the “twitter” revolt and many see the use of new creative forms of networking, as epitomising the coming together of a new left. No doubt there's a lot of truth in this – but it has been exaggerated by the media and some activists alike. Indeed this can be seen by the way the student movement has also rediscovered age old methods; the mass walkout was one, but so too was the occupation.

The electric feeling around the 24 November mobilisation was amplified further by the wave of occupations in unis across the UK. Some achieved quite a scale drawing in hundreds of students on campus. Some of the occupations were small symbolic acts by a few committed students, but the bigger, most effective ones created organising centres for the struggle. Bloomsbury in London, for



example, was visibly transformed into a centre of radical protest – as banners draped across campus buildings, leading to numerous and inevitable comparisons with the radicalism of 1968.

At Leeds University 500 occupied the Rupert Beckett Lecture theatre on the evening of 24/11. At UCL hundreds of students occupied the famous Jeremy Bentham room on the morning as the protests were just getting underway. The UCL occupation developed a highly effective media team, putting their occupation at the centre of the national movement, and ran an extraordinary number of workshops and socials throughout the three weeks. In a great example of what can be achieved, students from Camden School for Girls, after going to the UCL occupation, launched their own 24 hour sit in. It was just this kind of organisation and outreach that the occupations became a centre for – from organising flash mobs to direct action, they were training centre for a new generation of radical activists.

Some occupations were tolerated by management. At Sussex University, where an occupation the previous year against cuts suffered heavy repression which succeeded only in amplifying its support and militancy, the university bosses went out of their way to re-arrange lectures to avoid the backlash of the previous year. Others were dragged through the law courts by the bosses trying to get us out, at huge cost to the universities. At one point UCL management threatened to attempt to recover £40,000 in legal costs from two activists who represented the occupation in the court room. All the occupations put demands on management, often succeeding in getting managers to issue public statements against fees and cuts. At South Bank, the occupation turned around heavy management attacks on the right to organise which had at one point seen every single student society associated with the anti-fees, anti-cuts movement banned from campus.

The general meeting was at the centre of occupation organisation. The forum not only for debating out the political strategy facing the movement, but the practical day-to-day business of life in occupation, establishing the rules and principles by which an activist community could work together. When the movement tried to theorise this experience, it led to much talk of leaderlessness and new forms of organising. Yet as Jo Casserly from REVOLUTION pointed out in the debate on the future of the movement this was a far cry from reality, “for those who praised its leaderlessness, were often leaders themselves”. The question the movement has yet to confront is how to develop more effective structures, more accountable leaders, to go forward to new and bigger heights.

Some occupations were more effective than others. In student assembly meetings the tactic was discussed at length and ways of bringing more students into the action were brainstormed. The occupations had to be representative in some way, they had to reach out beyond the usual activists and bring in more students. The best occupations came out of or involved the creation of student union general assembly meetings; mass meetings which drew in students from across campus to debate whether to launch an occupation. These meetings were essential forums where revolutionary and radical students could make the argument to masses of people about the necessity of radical action, occupations, walkouts and strikes. They helped to win over hundreds and thousands more to the cause and led to mass occupations which transformed the campuses.



# Occupied Universities, Schools and Colleges

- |                      |                    |                                |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. UCL               | 19. Durham         | 37. Slade                      |
| 2. Warwick           | 20. Newcastle      | 38. LSE                        |
| 3. UWE               | 21. Bradford       | 39. Goldsmiths                 |
| 4. Oxford            | 22. Leominster     | 40. UEA                        |
| 5. Essex             | 23. Dursley        | 41. Camberwell Arts<br>College |
| 6. Edinburgh         | 24. Winchester     | 42. Camden School for<br>Girls |
| 7. Soas              | 25. Hastings       | 43. Exeter                     |
| 8. Cambridge         | 26. Strathclyde    | 44. Bristol                    |
| 9. Southampton       | 27. Loughborough   | 45. York                       |
| 10. Lancaster        | 28. Kent           | 46. Falmouth                   |
| 11. Nottingham       | 29. Leeds          | 47. Bath Spa                   |
| 12. Sheffield        | 30. Leeds Met      | 48. Hull                       |
| 13. Glasgow          | 31. Manchester     | 49. Aberystwyth                |
| 14. UEL              | 32. Manchester Met | 50. Birkbeck                   |
| 15. London Southbank | 33. Plymouth       | 51. Brighton                   |
| 16. Roehampton       | 34. Birmingham     |                                |
| 17. Royal Holloway   | 35. Sussex         |                                |
| 18. Cardiff          | 36. London Met     |                                |

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## Voices of Resistance: South Bank Occupation Wins Key Demands

"In November the management at LSBU banned the student led anticuts group from organising on campus. We were determined to fight this attack by launching an occupation. Using our contacts amongst the lecturers and other staff we were able to find a way to occupy the language centre, which the university was in the process of shutting down. Once into the room, we quickly called a meeting of all the occupiers to democratically set down occupation rules and how we were going to organise. After 51 hours and a lot of success in pulling in staff, students and unions in solidarity, the university gave in to our demands. Not only did we get the anticuts group reinstated, but also won other demands such as a public meeting with the VC, no repercussions for occupiers, and a consultation on the continued provision of language courses." Rix, REVOLUTION LSBU

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## Voices Of Resistance: Fatima, Camden School For Girls

"150 us in the sixth form were involved in the original protest, but when half the group went to fetch supplies the school locked the gates and would not let students back in. We were quite angry about it. We said, 'we're staying the night, and we're not budging at all!' It's really important that our action happened in the sixth forms. University students are protesting against fees, but we'll be the people who

are affected first. It's only the beginning. We have to carry on protesting and campaigning. Just because they vote for something, it doesn't make it final. Look what happened to the Poll tax – people kept on fighting.”

Fatima, from REVOLUTION at Camden School for Girls

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## Crisis in the Coalition

For most of 2010 the Coalition seemed to be containing the opposition of the population against the coming cuts, submerging their anger at coming austerity under a sea of ideology. There was a systematic campaign within the press and media to shift attention away from the bankers and financial crisis that had led to the huge global recession, and consequently the crisis in the public finances, towards the idea that somehow we had “spent beyond our means”.

Phrases like “we're all in this together” were constantly repeated by government ministers, and regularly echoed in the media by commentators and ideologues.

This constant repetition of such phrases was intended to drum into the working class that the cuts were necessary and inevitable. The BBC even ran vox pops exercises on day time TV, asking members of the public “what would you cut?”

We urgently needed to challenge this emerging ‘consensus’ – but unfortunately, the official leaderships of the working class movement often succumbed to the idea we had to accept cuts.

The Labour Party stood in the elections on a promise to halve the deficit in four years with a focus on cuts, not tax rises.

Even under new leader Ed Miliband, who stood to the left of other candidates in the campaign and only won on the back of workers' votes with little support in parliamentary party, Labour still held to the line that the cuts were not wrong just “too soon and too deep”.

Most of the trade unions leaders too largely parroted this line. They went out of their way to say they were “not opposed to all cuts” and even conceded that “some cuts were inevitable”.

An emerging movement of protest and direct action was only slowly coming into being. Local anti-cuts committees formed in town and cities across Britain, but they hadn't yet become mass campaigns of resistance by the working class communities.

On the day of Comprehensive Spending Review, 5,000 marched in London and smaller actions took place across the country. This was a good start, but the numbers involved also showed we hadn't yet reached out to the masses.

The student movement changed all that.

After Millbank and the huge march on 10 November, there was suddenly a mass movement prepared to challenge the cuts consensus and fight a determined struggle to win.



The protests shifted public opinion massively. Nick Clegg, who during the election had enjoyed popularity ratings of 72 per cent of the population, saw that shrink to 8 per cent.

Nick Clegg and Vince Cable became hate figures, whose effigies were being burnt alongside David Cameron on every protest. Cries of "Banks get bailed out, students get sold out!" sounded a crescendo across the mass demonstrations.

The role of the Liberals in the Coalition was to convince people this wasn't ordinary Tory government – but it was failing abysmally. It was becoming clear to hundreds of thousands of young people, that when you scratch a Liberal, you find a Tory.

Simon Hughes MP, Deputy Leader of the Lib Dems and the unofficial spokesperson for the left-wing of the party attempted to provide cover for the Lib Dems sell-out. On the 24 November he stated he was "undecided" on whether he would vote to increase fees. 40 students from the LSE occupied his constituency office demanding he honour his pledge and vote against.

The pressure on the Lib-Dems was immense.

With every one of their candidates having signed pledges to vote against higher fees, the reality of what they stood for, or didn't stand for was ever more apparent.

Following the second national walkout on the 30 November, even Vince Cable MP, the Business Secretary and former Lib Dem deputy leader, who proposed the tuition fee rise, began to buckle. On the 30 December he told BBC Radio 5 he might abstain if "we all abstain together". Two days later, he was telling his local radio station there was "no doubt" he would vote for it.

On the eve of the vote, Simon Hughes said on Newsnight, he had been planning to abstain but had been "asked by his constituency party to vote against, I feel I have to reflect on that tonight." In the end, he ignored the wishes of his local party and was one of a handful of Lib Dems to sit on the fence and abstain, "I would have liked to have voted against but I felt I had to honour the coalition agreement." With over 40 per cent of Lib Dem MPs voting against, it was in proportional terms the biggest back bench rebellion in British political history.

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## **Simon Hughes – Where are Your Principles?**

"You could even argue that the new system is not inconsistent with our principle, although there is a principle with which it is inconsistent, which is that we wanted to abolish [them]"

- The ridiculous Lib Dem, unofficial spokesperson of the party left, Simon Hughes ties himself in knots trying to claim that the government's raising of fees will increase access to universities

# “Spineless” NUS makes massive u-turn

Following the success of the 24 November, the NUS leadership were really put on the spot. They had not supported the day of action and had even turned their fire on protesters after the magnificent Millbank occupation of Tory party HQ.

A loose network of left-wing activists across Britain had triggered the biggest student protests for a generation in direct opposition to the leadership of NUS. This forced the bureaucrats leading the NUS to make a decision. Either they back the protests and support the militant action of thousands of students, or oppose them and alienate themselves from the movement.

It was at the UCL occupation on 28 November that Aaron Porter came to hear the demands that the occupation were putting on the NUS. These demands included:

- To publicly support all student occupations- on the frontpage of the NUS website and all available media.
- To call immediately for a new wave of occupations as a legitimate form of protest against fees and cuts.
- To organise financial, legal & political aid for all current and future occupations.
- To call a national day of action on the day of the parliamentary vote on tuition fees.
- To officially support any staff taking further industrial action on cuts in the education sector.

Astonishingly Aaron Porter agreed to all the demands. In a massive U-Turn he admitted that the NUS leadership had been dogged by “spineless” and “dithering” leadership over the past period and it had to change. He even said he too was “guilty of this, in the last weeks”.

Porter hadn’t done this because he gone through some kind of kind divine religious conversion to the cause. His u-turn was an expression of the strength and power of the movement.

It was a humiliating climb down that was captured for all time by the magic of youtube and will haunt Aaron Porter for the rest of political career.

But it was too soon to celebrate a rejuvenated, radical NUS. The age old problem of “words and deeds” quickly came up again as Porter... kept on “dithering”.

Occupations contacted the NUS asking for support in the face of legal challenges, only for Porter to say he was not really going to help with any direct legal advice or support.

His promises to support the 30 November protest saw very little practical help at all. The NUS ‘left turn’ was more of a spasm, a reaction to our victories, before the inertial weight of the bureaucracy began to pull it back to its comfort-zone in mainstream politics.



# Freezing but still fighting

The next day of action on 30/11 took place on the coldest day of the year, with around a quarter of schools and colleges already closed due to severe weather conditions as snow covered the country. Though they didn't reach the numbers of 24/11, still thousands upon thousands took part in the national day of action, in spite of many transport networks shutting down and the NUS failing to really back them in any kind of meaningful way.

This time the big story was finding new way to resist police violence and kettling. In London, where the largest protest took place with around 5,000 marching, the route which had been agreed with the police would go down Whitehall, but it was surrounded by cops.

As riot police with dogs, vans, horses and fences starting lining Whitehall, protesters were not about to risk getting kettled again, particularly given the sub-zero temperatures.

Spontaneously thousands of students marched down Pall Mall towards Buckingham palace, cut down Horseguards avenue and onto parliament. At the sight of hundreds of police, they ran into Westminster, kept moving and outmanoeuvring the police. Up round Victoria, to Hyde Park corner, to Piccadilly circus to Oxford Circus we moved, as the police lines slowly encroached around us. Occasional scuffles broke out as police violently pushed demonstrators or carried out aborted kettling attempts. Our momentum kept us going.

We ran eastward towards St Paul's cathedral, as riot police struggled to keep up. Every time the police tried to form a line, they were out-run by protesters or had their lines broken as we surged through to prevent containment. We had learnt the lessons of the 24 November and we were not going to accept being treated like that again.

When police complained that protesters had "deviated from the agreed route" Sophie Burge, a London sixth-former told the media "yes - but so did the Liberal Democrats."

Different groups of protesters ran all over London, from the banks of the City to the shops of Oxford Street, and rallied at Trafalgar Square with a sense of victory. Far from containing the protest, the threat of police kettling led to students taking over streets all over London.

Jubilant shouts of "One solution - Revolution!" came from all corners as speakers standing on Nelson's Column called for the bringing down of the government, and students waved red REVOLUTION flags. Despite the snow and the police intimidation the movement was strong and going forwards. The demo was incredibly radical. Certainly, people had spontaneously learnt from the experience of the police violence on 24/11, but the demo was also well stewarded, with people from the student assemblies keeping it moving and organising the end rally.

At the end rally speakers declared that when the tuition fee vote took place we would mobilise thousands to come to London and confront the government.

"You wanted Big Society, we are big society!"

# March on Parliament

Within a couple of days it was announced that Parliament would vote on the raising of tuition fees on 9 December. This did not give us long to organise, but we had enough momentum behind us to pull off a big demonstration.

Once again, Aaron Porter and the NUS were again getting cold feet. Along with Sally Hunt, General Secretary of the UCU, Porter decided that the NUS would not support a national march on Parliament, but a candlelit vigil (which had to be changed to glowsticks as candles were deemed a fire hazard) to mark the passing away of education – an admission of defeat.

They wanted 9,000 people to come and hold the glow sticks to represent the £9,000 a year tuition fees that students would have to pay.

Meanwhile, the student assembly, along with the London region of the UCU made the decision to organise a national protest without official NUS or national UCU support.

It was again a resounding success for students, and proof that nationally coordinated grassroots organisation was growing and developing quickly. Local student unions helped fund coaches to London, and where they refused, at Leeds University for example, general assemblies, and local anti-cuts groups asked trade union branches to fund coaches to help them attend.

In some places teachers marked college pupils present so that they could attend the protest without being disciplined or losing their entitlement to Education Maintenance Allowance.

The demonstration from ULU to Parliament was over 25,000 strong. We had arranged a route with the police past Parliament Square and down to Embankment to join the NUS event. But when the mass demonstration reached Parliament Square it was clear most people wanted to stay at parliament, demanding their right to be heard whilst the MPs inside destroyed our futures. Well-organised protesters made sure we got as close to Parliament as possible. Art students equipped the protest with shields that looked like books (inspired by the Italian students who had created similar shields the month previously) and we had been donated 250 hard hats which students took to protect themselves from police violence.

Protesters occupied Parliament Square and were subject to repeated police violence. Metal fences were pulled down from the centre of the square and passed to the front, in an attempt to protect the protest from baton charges by the police. Riot police with batons spared no prisoners, and despite impressive self-organisation, with students passing hardhats to those closest to Parliament, there were a number of casualties. The police acted brutally, beating protestors round the head and face, causing dozens of concussions.

The police then kettled the demonstration and used horses to drive back the crowds of students, and beating back with batons those who tried to push their way out of the kettle.



One protester, Alfie Meadows was beaten so badly that he suffered bleeding to the brain and required urgent life-saving surgery.

It was reported afterwards that he had been taken to the same hospital where the injured police were being treated and some of the cops had even tried to deny him treatment there.

Jody McIntyre, a disabled student activist well known in the pro-Palestine movement was twice pulled out of his wheelchair and dragged along the ground by police thugs "for his own safety".

After the protest Jody was interviewed by a hostile BBC journalist who accused him of "rolling towards the police" in some kind of menacing way.

The media again acted like prosecutors for the police and the government against the demonstrators. McIntyre said "we all have a right to fight against what the government is trying to do - they are trying to create a two tier education system so that only the rich will be available to afford a university education. That is something we should all be fighting against."

Inside Parliament the vote went in the governments favour. The Lib Dems were split down the middle on the issue, even some Tories voted against it, and it was passed by just 21 votes, even though the government had a majority of 80.

The vote might have passed, but in the eyes of millions of people, Westminster Village had completely lost its legitimacy to rule. This was no victory for the Con-Dem coalition.

Into the evening the protests continued, with groups spontaneously marching all over the west end. A small group came across a car which happened to be carrying Prince Charles and Lady Camilla Parker Bowles to the Royal Variety performance. The driver, thinking the protesters were fans, wound down the window, which resulted in Camilla being poked in the ribs with a stick. The car drove off and the Royal couple were not injured, but the next day every major national newspaper published the same photo of Camilla's shocked face - the usual headlines about "yobs" and "violent protesters" accompanied the photo.

The media constructed a particular spin on the entire story, it was not about the mass action of the thousands who were protesting against the government, it was not about the police violence that saw Alfie Meadows in hospital fighting for his life (Alfie's injuries were not even mentioned in most papers), the single image that the media used to portray the "battle of parliament square" was Camilla Parker Bowles. Apparently, an inconvenience to a couple of aristocrats, is more newsworthy than the mass movement opposing a vicious fees rise.

In the week afterwards the horrors of police violence were exposed to the whole country. In the age of smartphones, video sharing and social networking sites it might be harder for activists to protect their privacy, but it is certainly harder for the police to cover up their actions. And their actions - kettling, baton charges and cavalry charges were truly shocking.

## **Rachel Bergan, 17 Years Old, Speaks Out Against Police Violence**

"They [the police] saw us coming towards them, these teenage girls who wanted to go home...they didn't show any mercy whatsoever. They threw around my friends who were just 17 year old slim girls. They were beating my friends with batons. They didn't show any sympathy in their voice and I didn't see anything in their eyes. It was awful. I've never experienced anything like it.

"We were traumatised at this point. We were crying. We'd been hit by police for just wanting to go home. We were begging to, please, just let us go home. They showed no mercy whatsoever. Then we got pushed forward a second time and as we were going forward we were saying 'please don't hurt us, just don't hurt us, we want to go home'. I managed to break away. I was pushed into a ditch by a police officer and when I tried to get out of the ditch he pushed me back in. I turned around to see a group of my friends on the floor getting beaten by police officers.

"If you saw your daughter or your best friend on the floor, getting beaten by a man, twice her size who had armour on, wouldn't you get enraged? Even in the police, in the government, who has the right to do that to another human being?"

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts led the campaign condemning the violence, with Simon Hardy argue for the right of protesters to defend themselves – and against police cries for equipment like water cannons to beat back demonstrators. "These were not acts of violence", he said on the 31 November "these are acts of resistance."

Students have a right to protest, and a right to defend themselves from the repressive actions of the government and their hired thugs the police.

## **Organising our radical movement**

The failure of the NUS to back the protests has demonstrated to many its uselessness. But what is the alternative to NUS? Some people hope that on the back of a huge movement like the one we have just seen, the NUS could be reclaimed. Other parts of the student movement have argued that individual student unions should break away and form an alternative student union.

But both these positions misunderstand what's fundamentally wrong with the NUS. It's not just about changing the existing leaders or developing a new union which more democratic on the base of the same student union structure. We need to rethink the whole notion of what a student union should look like and get to heart of what's actually wrong with the NUS.



The root of the problem is the whole model of student union organisation that has developed in Britain historically. University student unions are institutionally incorporated into the structures of the university and dependent upon uni bosses for their block grant. They are intrinsically bureaucratic organisations that have a compulsory membership structure.

That makes them very different from most trade unions, who are dependent on their members' contributions to run their work and aren't, for all their faults, institutionally tied to the state.

Students unions have whole layer of managers with salaries in the region of £50,000. The students can elect their own representatives who have nominal power over the union, but they come and go and change each year, while the unelected managers remain.

Many student unions have had governance reviews implemented which has given final say on decisions affecting the union to unelected or partially elected trustee boards, usually made up of local business people and student union managers. At the same time these reviews have in many places abolished general meetings which were the only democratic structures which allowed students to determine student union policy.

Over the years they have become more and more commercially orientated and the NUS has reflected this with its focus on its commercial arm NUSSL.

The governance review that it passed restricted its campaigning and policy making parts, like its annual conference, down to their bare bones.

Socialists have always opposed state run or funded unions as they are either openly or covertly run in the interests of the bosses.

It's complicated issue, because no one would want to see us lose the democratic space within the university that the institutionalised student union still, to a certain degree, provides. Standing for sabbatical elections, using forums like the student union general meeting are all important. So too is contesting NUS elections, to show there is an alternative to Porter and co.

But the point is that this shouldn't be the principle focus of our campaigning work. And we shouldn't equate the development of a radical student movement simply with a more left wing NUS. Neither should we go down the road of building an NUS mark II with more radical politics but the same focus on the bureaucratic structures of local unions.

They answer is to develop a mass, radical student movement and make the case for a totally different model of student unionism. It needs to be organised nationally from the grassroots up. It should be run by and for members – and that's means in the end making the case for it to be funded by members' contributions too. On the continent, this is the normal model of student union organisation, which means they are much more responsive to the demands of their membership. Crucially, this gives them independence from university structures.

We need to be creative about how we go about developing this independent, grassroots movement. In the fight against the fees-hike mass assemblies became a popular form of organisation - they provide a model of how we can develop the movement in the future. That doesn't mean we shouldn't contest NUS or local



sabbatical elections, but we need to consciously think about how we develop militant fighting structures in parallel to the bureaucratic unions.

# System failure

The student movement in Britain wasn't an isolated flashpoint of radicalism globally. In fact it was part of a wave of international mobilisation we have seen in recent years. But what made Britain particularly significant, something that led to it capturing the attention of workers and student across Europe and even further afield, was that it happened... in Britain.

Britain is known for determined, militant street protests – for too long we have taken an onslaught of attacks on our rights that make workers and young people here some of the most exploited, with the least rights, and precarious employment in Europe. As Labour MP John McDonnell put it at the Coalition of Resistance conference in November, the student movement “taught my generation that we have been too long on our knees.”

Sometimes it takes an enormous crisis for us to wake up and become aware of the reality of the world in which we are living. Today we, along with millions of workers and young people globally are increasingly faced with a stark choice, either we can unite and fight against a vicious programme of attacks on our living standards or we stand to lose all the gains previous generations had won through militant, working class struggle.

The global financial crisis and economic slump underline very clearly how the system – capitalism – has failed. It can't deliver on peace in countries like Afghanistan and Palestine still suffering under brutal occupation, it can't deliver on prosperity for the vast majority of ordinary people, and as we have seen in the liberal world's reaction to the revolutionary crises in the Arab world, they won't put democracy before stability, order and national interest.

The uprisings of the people of Tunisia and Egypt against their dictators were inspired by the mass movements that had broken out this year in Europe, in Britain, France, and Italy. Just as workers in the rich world were facing an historic attack on our living standards, in Tunisia and Egypt spiralling food prices and mass unemployment, drove people onto the streets.

The fight for democratic rights and against social injustice is absolutely connected. The system crisis we see today shows how capitalism can't provide these things. Even in the most liberal and democratic countries, we only elect governments once every five years, who then sell out on all they have promised, without any fear of recall by the people. Whereas all over the world a tiny minority of rich people live the most exuberant lifestyles, whilst we are left impoverished.

That's why we need to link the day-to-day fight for our education and in defence of our public services, with the goal of getting rid of this rotten capitalist system once and for all.



# Where now – a new left?

The march on Parliament was the grand finale to a winter of struggle. Over the holidays, debates raged in the movement of what its goals and tactics should be.

Many argued for the idea of a new left – which perhaps wasn't focused on a vision of fundamental revolutionary change and rejected the 'hierarchies' of the 'old left'.

The journalist Laurie Penny and Socialist Workers Party's Alex Callinicos debated these issues out in the Guardian and the blogosphere. Penny in particular critiqued those who still sell papers on demos in an age where twitter and the blog were increasingly hegemonic.

But the undercurrent to this debate was the idea of socialism itself – the shock wasn't so much people selling papers, but selling a socialist newspaper was somehow not with the times.

The idea of socialism though is essential for our resistance today. We need an alternative to capitalism – not just because it's a failing system, but it also emboldens resistance, when you know that it doesn't have to be this way, we can organise society differently.

Instead of running production according to what's profitable and how much demand there is in the market for commodities priced at this or that level, instead we can determine what is produced according to what we need.

The simple idea we can run things not in the interests of markets and the rich is essential for our fightback today, but it's bitterly opposed by the rich who profit materially from capitalism every day. It won't be won through compromise, but revolution.

It's a nice idea to think we can organise ourselves in a non-hierarchical way, but that will just create unaccountable leaders, and won't build effective resistance to the crisis, let alone an organisation that can lead a struggle against capitalism itself.

Young people and students are essential to the fight back, but only because we can act as detonators for a wider resistance of the working class against this government.

We have a great opportunity because the student movement put the leaders of Britain's unions under pressure. Would they fight to win like the students did?

Len McCluskey, recently elected leader of the Unite trade union, has argued the Unions should, "get set for battle". He wrote that the student movement had "put the trade union movement on the spot" and spoke of the need for coordinated action by the unions. He received a harsh attack from The Guardian's editorial condemning his "dinosaur" politics of the past.

We need to strike this unity with the trade unions, whatever our criticisms of their leaderships or their bureaucratic way of organising.

The trade unions organise millions of working class people with the power to completely shut down the country and bring down the government in a way that students on their own cannot. Of course, the trade union leaders too have the power to negotiate shoddy deals for their members, and to call off actions and sell their members out at will. But the best way we can put them under pressure to fight and expose their failings to millions, is by uniting with them.

The same way as the student movement fought “with the NUS where possible, but without them where necessary”, so too must we fight with the trade union leaders where we can and without them, from the grassroots up, wherever we must.

We also shouldn't underestimate the power and influence of the bureaucracies of the old, social democratic left. The Labour Party is gaining in support as millions are angered with the Liberals.

But in the local councils, they are drawing up budget that pass on government cuts. This is an opportunity to open up divisions between their leaders and voters, but the way to do that is to put local Labour councils on the spot, demand they join us on the streets and don't pass on cuts.

Fusing the radicalism of the students with the power of the trade unions, challenging the leaders to take strike action, can be the start of bringing all our demands forward, transforming what is still a fragmented resistance into coordinated strike action and protests that can bring the Coalition down. We should be prepared to use every available means – from the flash mob, the occupation, to the indefinite strike, and even a general strike to bring down the Con-Dems.

## **A strategy to beat the cuts**

Students have ignited protest against the cuts all over the country. But we can't win on our own.

If we link up with millions of workers facing cuts to jobs and services, we can win. The Coalition has the backing of the whole capitalist class for its programme of cuts. They won't back down unless they are forced to.

That's why we need the maximum united action of workers and students – a general strike to break the cuts package and bring down the Coalition.

In France in 2010 there was a huge wave of strikes against the government's attack on pensions, but it failed because it didn't reach the level of a general strike where every section of workers stays out until they win.

There is no doubt that if the British trade union leaders organised a mass cam-



paigned up and down the country to prepare people for a general strike against the cuts there would be a huge response. But the union leaders, following the Labour Party's cue, have ruled it out.

So how can we go forward? The student protest shows the way. We need to organise a rank and file movement across the unions to call action anyway – just like we did when NUS leader Aaron Porter tried to block action after the Millbank protest.

The first step should be to build strong anticuts committees in every city, every borough, every town, uniting delegates from every workplace, every estate, every college and school, every campaigning group.

We need to push for united strikes and occupations of every service threatened with closure, every workplace facing job cuts, drawing in the community and the unemployed to support workers and students' action.

A united nationwide coordination of the anticuts committees, on the scale of the 14 million strong anti-Poll Tax movement that brought down Thatcher, could put huge pressure on the union leaders to call a general strike – or stand aside.

A general strike would pose the question: who rules in society? If we succeed in breaking the cuts and bringing down the Coalition, the immediate issue would be who should rule in their place?

Councils of action based on delegates elected from working class communities could be the basis for a new type of government – a workers' government. Delegates would be subject to recall by their working class people who elected them, so they couldn't break their promises like capitalist politicians.

A working class government would cancel the cuts, renounce the deficit, end the war in Afghanistan, tax the rich, confiscate the property of the banks and corporations, and set up a democratic plan of production and distribution to eradicate poverty and build a civilised society for all.

The capitalist state would not allow such a government to come to power without a fight. They would use brute force – the police, security service and at the end of the day even the army – to try to stop it.

That is why we need a revolutionary party of the working class: to fight for the formation of workers' councils, and to fight for them to seize the power, using the force of millions to overcome the force of the millionaires.

## Join **REVOLUTION!**

Ultimately, we need to challenge the crisis-ridden system of capitalism that is the cause of these attacks not just in Britain and Europe but across the world.

It is the rich, the capitalists, the corporations and big businesses who are slashing jobs, welfare and services to make ordinary people pay for the crisis of their system.

The way to defeat them is to build a party that fights to take political power away from the capitalists and into the hands of the working class by seizing their assets in a socialist revolution.

By seizing control of the immense wealth of the rich we can democratically plan our society to ensure that everyone has access to education, to work and recreation, culture, and a decent life.

That's why REVOLUTION is a socialist youth and student movement. We are against capitalism and the war, poverty and exploitation it creates. If you agree, you should join and get involved.

But we insist young people can't win alone. We need the power of organised labour. The working class needs new and better leaders. Instead of the reformist politics of compromise with the status quo, we need a revolutionary party, fighting for socialism.

Several hundred committed activists made 24 November happen. We intersected with a mass feeling and brought about a huge protest. Imagine what several thousand or tens of thousands could do. The crisis is throwing hundreds of thousands of people into struggle against the government and the capitalist system. The student protests were just the beginning, REVOLUTION is committed to building a revolutionary youth movement to continue the struggle and unite the radicalism and energy of young people with the might of the working-class.

**Join us!**

## A strategy to beat the cuts

That is why we need a revolutionary party of the working class to fight for the interests of workers, students and the poor against the forces of the right.

## Join REVOLUTION!

It is the duty of the capitalist class to provide jobs, pay for the costs of their



## **INTRODUCING REVOLUTION**

Revolution is an international socialist youth organisation. We are a group of young activists who are fed up with unemployment, war, poverty, cuts and capitalism. We want to bring down Cam and Clegg's millionaire coalition and replace it with socialism.

The rich and powerful clique responsible for breaking up our public services, slashing benefits and leaving millions of us on the dole will not give up their wealth and property by being voted out. They are launching a class war to make youth and workers pay the cost of capitalism's crisis. We want to seize their assets and abolish class society with a socialist revolution. This is what we are fighting for.

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