

# Education Worker News

Four page education workers supplement produced by the Organise! Education Workers Branch

## Students Union Propose Graduate Tax



The fight the National Union of Students have abandoned

Despite protests from students against fees and rising economic pressures, the National Union of Students (NUS) is proposing a tax on graduates. Having already abandoned the call for abolition of tuition fees for higher education as 'unfeasible', the NUS has now suggested a 'tax' on graduates to 'generate income'. The proposed tax marks a shift from decades of opposition to charging for higher education.

NUS president Wes Streeting paid lip-service to the anti-fees lobby,

while asserting that income would be generated further down the line by taxing graduates. With regards the NUS's proposed 'graduate tax', Streeting, said:

*"Students from across the country will be telling MPs why we need to abolish the disastrous top-up fees system. We are putting forward a radical proposal for an alternative system that is fairer for students, but still generates the kind of income the sector so badly needs".*

In March, a BBC survey of UK university vice-chancellors

revealed that many favour pushing for higher fees, with some suggesting an annual fee on up to £20,000, and more than half looking to impose a minimum annual fee of £5000.

In February, students marched in London in defiance at NUS's abandonment of the 'no fees' demand. While the introduction of fees hasn't caused a drop in student numbers, it has changed the landscape of higher education. More and more students are pursuing flexible or part-time degrees, and because many students can't afford to go through university subsisting solely on loans, record numbers now supplement this with part-time work. Part-time work has been shown to affect the classification of degree that undergraduate students leave university with - those who work 15hrs per week or more are one-third less-likely to get a 2:1 degree or better.

The February marches, despite the NUS position that 'no fees' demands are 'unfeasible', were supported by the student unions of

over 20 universities, including Goldsmiths, Bradford, and Cambridge. Many students feel the introduction of fees, and attempts to increase them by universities result in an increase in exclusivity in higher education, growing economic stress on students, and a greater marketisation of education generally.

Jack, a recent graduate, remembering his own time as a student, said of NUS's abandonment of the campaign for free university education, 'They used to at least pretend to care!'

To anarchists, the NUS's floundering on this most basic demand is no surprise at all - the union is viewed by many students as being nothing but a platform for careerists and wannabe politicians. University isn't the 'privilege' that it once was - it's a basic requirement for a growing number of jobs, and with a push toward 50% university education it'll be no more a privilege than being able to drive. The more we're expected to have a degree that equips us with 'skills' the bosses can exploit, the more we're expected to pay.

Many anarchists will admit in the past to not feeling particularly sympathetic to 'student politics', often ridiculing the stereotypical 'middle-class student', but it should be clear - the issue of fees IS a class issue, access to higher education IS a class issue, and the basic demand for a free education, is something worth fighting for.

We had free education, it was taken from us. We want it back.

## Organise! Education Workers Branch

This Education Workers News supplement of the Leveller is produced by the Organise! Education Workers Branch. Set up in August last year the Education Workers Branch is made up of Organise! members who work in education - from admin and support to research, teaching, lecturing and community education.

While the branch is specifically for education workers who are members of

Organise! we want to promote militancy and solidarity across the education industry. We are seeking to build a network of militant education workers that can begin to take effective action in defence of workers and students across the industry and in defence of education itself. If you are interested in getting involved in such a network, one that aims at active involvement in the day to day struggles of education workers while promoting solidarity with others in struggle then get in touch.

We believe that in order to successfully counter the attacks being carried out against workers that we need to organise industrially - such an industrial strategy is not simply for education workers though, such a strategy can and must be applied to every industry.