

We Will March... and then what?



Wednesday the 6th of April saw Queen's Students Union *finally* mobilise the student body against the imminent hike in university fees. (The police estimated 600 people on the march, while the NUS-USI estimated 4,500...) This comes after months of QUBSU denouncing marches and occupations by student groups, such as Free Education for Everyone (FEE), giving the impression that QUBSU have been embarrassed into this action. There were, however, some essential differences between this march and the more direct protests of previous months.

The QUBSU sanctioned placards read:

- 'Education makes a nation, don't kill it with cuts.'

- 'Invest in us, we are your future.'
- 'If you don't freeze the fees, I'll go overseas.'
- 'Want my vote? Keep the cap.'

So this march actually *asked* the Stormont assembly to continue to extort £3,000+ a year from students for their education, with the ultimate threat that the 'student bloc' *might* vote for someone else, or even go to England – where fees are even higher! A scary prospect for the assembly, indeed.

It got worse. The march was shepherded from Botanic Gardens, down University Road, through Bradbury Place, to Great Victoria

Street by a squad of armed police and surveillance equipped meat-wagons. The final destination was City Hall where the politicians were ready on the hustings. QUBSU president Gerard McGreevy blew his whistle and 'rallied' the crowd with pathetic chants such as:

- 'Let's hear it for education. Hooray!'
- 'Keep, keep, keep the cap, I said keep, keep, keep the cap.'
- '1 – 2 – 3, keep H. E.! 1 – 2 – 3, keep F.E.!''
- (Thankfully, this was duly subverted into '1 – 2 – 3, FUCK THE FEES!')

At present, McGreevy's management

cannot confirm a date for release of his debut rap album...

The politicians took it in turns to emphasise the need for 'growth' and make pitifully hollow promises in the hope of securing a few extra votes next month. It is worth remembering that after New Labour were *voted* in, in 1997, they used their mandate to introduce fees for higher education – and when the Tories were *voted* in last year they tripled the cost of fees. From this trend it appears that any further voting can only be detrimental to education. Representatives from all the main parties were on message, singing from the same hymn sheet, as usual. Even the SP and SWP representatives seemed afraid to speak out with any vehemence, perhaps understandable when one is trying to appeal to 'the voters'.

Some of the crowd vented their frustration and anger with a chant of:

'*insert name here* we know you, you're a fucking Tory too!'

This incensed some older march attendees, who reprimanded the rabble for being so rowdy, asking 'Do you even know what a Tory is!?' closing their snide comments with 'mere child'. An invitation was extended to the older attendees to continue the discussion in the dole queue in the near future. We await their RSVP.

There were many disenchanted faces on this march. Students who felt that, at last, they had the opportunity to make a united stand against fees were just railroaded into the politicians canvassing session. It's the same old story of genuine anger and desire for real change being co-opted, rendered impotent, and subsumed into the hegemonic political framework. This particular march received next-to no media coverage – the QUBSU website barely even makes mention of it. When students took the task of protesting into their own hands on the 9th December last year, they were far more effective, and drew public attention sharply to the issue of education cuts.

The 6th of April 2011 will join the long list of marches ignored by arrogant and unrepresentative governments. 1,000,000 took to the streets in 2003 against the Iraq war – to no avail. 500,000 marched in London on the 26th March this year only to be dismissed by the Con-Dem coalition as unimportant.

Still, it was lovely weather for a walk, wasn't it?

