Quote Of The Month

THE NEW BRUTALISM

‘If anyone says to you that “staff morale is at an all-time low” you will know that you are doing something right’

Sir Michael Wilsher, hand-picked to be head of Ofsted by Michael Gove

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Fairness Fact 1
The VC of Sheffield Uni’s modest pay rise.
Page 2

Pensions Campaign
The latest on the Pensions Campaign ballot for action.
Page 2/3

Fairness Fact 2
Freelance Dell Boy in charge of Student Loan Company
Page 4

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In The Chair
UCU at BSU branch Chair John Newsinger reports on U.S. style for profit Universities.
Page 4/5

Professors & ‘Professors’
A UCU member vents about the new ‘Professors’ regime at BSU
Page 6

Book Review
Chavs: The demonization of the working class. By Owen Jones.
Page 7/8
**Fairness Fact No 1**

THE Vice Chancellor of Sheffield University, Professor Keith Burnett, was chair of the Universities and Colleges Employers Association when it imposed a 0.4% national pay rise in 2010-2011. That same year Professor Burnett accepted a bonus that increased his pay and pension package by nearly 6% to a miserly £311,000. And, at the same time, as the THE revealed, Sheffield University began the process of cutting the pensions of the lowest paid support staff. The Unison branch secretary described the situation as 'obscene'.

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**PENSIONS CAMPAIGN**

**The Great Pensions Heist**

The most immediate issue confronting us today is the fight to protect our pensions. The scale of the attack on our standard of living in retirement is just staggering and has led to even private schoolteachers and head teachers balloting for strike action. Our pension contributions are being increased, our retirement age is being raised and our pensions are being dramatically cut. We are not talking about small amounts of money here, but cuts that will over a 25 year retirement add up to £100,000+ for young and middle aged HE staff.

The savagery of the attack has backfired, however, and has succeeded in uniting the whole public sector in opposition. In education teachers, Head Teachers, FE lecturers and HE lecturers have joined together to fight the attack.

This is a battle we can win. The Coalition is weak and divided. Even the dimmest LibDem can see the writing on the wall as far as their prospects are concerned. Determined resistance will save our pensions.

**The UCU Consultative Ballot**

UCU’s consultative ballot on rejecting the government’s final offer on TPS pensions opened on 27 February. Your NEC recommends that you vote YES to support further industrial action. You can find lots more, including our new campaign materials at our new campaign site here:

UCU CONSULTATIVE BALLOT

STOP THE GREAT PENSIONS ROBBERY

Vote YES for ACTION

For more information visit http://tps.web.ucu.org.uk
**Fairness Fact No 2**

The decision to allow Ed Lester, the head of the Student Loans Company to receive his £182,000 salary through a personal services contract so that he pays corporation tax at 21% rather than the 50% rate paid by mere mortals is another Coalition blow for FAIRNESS. This arrangement was signed off by David Willetts and by Danny Alexander, although to be fair Dopey Danny claims not to have realised what he was signing. The deal will save Lester an estimated £40,000. This demonstration of FAIRNESS is particularly appropriate as he heads the Student Loan Company at a time when fees have been so dramatically increased. Lester lives in Buckinghamshire so he also receives £350 a week travel and living expenses.

Of course, over recent weeks it has become clear that many senior management throughout the public sector have similar arrangements to avoid paying tax at the same rate as the hoi polloi. Most surprising perhaps was the revelation in Private Eye that this scam is even being used by senior staff in the Inland Revenue. It is only a matter of time (if it has not happened already) before some Vice Chancellors are being paid this way as well.

Another related Fairness Fact is that the rich and super rich have found a convenient way around paying Stamp Duty on the sale of their multi-million homes. Their homes are owned by private companies and they sell the companies. Brilliant! No wonder they are rich.

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**In The Chair**

Branch Chair John Newsinger outlines his thoughts on U.S. for profit universities.

**Where the U.S. goes the U.K. follows?**

The Coalition’s ambition to bring US for profit Universities to Britain seems to have stalled for the moment. Cable and Willetts both hoped that this would precipitate a drive to the bottom whereby many of the students from the poorest backgrounds could be offered a ‘Poundland’ degree while the elite institutions that their own children and grandchildren go to continued with business as usual. As with the NHS and with schools, the Coalition is determined to Americanise the University sector. One of the obstacles to this vision of a Brave New World has been the Open University that sets a standard of excellence for part-time distance learning that no US for profit can come near matching and hope to turn a profit. This is a serious problem and we can confidently expect attempts to undermine the OU to begin in the near future. In the longer term, there can be no doubt that the Coalition will try to dismantle and sell off the OU. It really has no place in a world where profit is the standard by which everything is judged.

Continued…
What of the US for profit Universities? Are they really Universities at all? As the THE recently revealed, staff at the biggest of them, the University of Phoenix with 300,000 undergraduates and 60,000 postgraduates have since 1993 has produced some 200 academic papers. It is a profit making machine and scholarship does not generate profit. Cable and Willetts are absolutely desperate to get the Apollo Group, the University of Phoenix parent company, involved in British HE and has already given BPP, a British subsidiary, degree awarding powers. Not only do these US institutions have incredibly low completion rates and sub-standard degrees, but, of course, staff conditions are appalling (no paid holidays, no pension, casualisation, low pay, no office space). This is what they are determined to bring to Britain.

There is a striking contrast between the resistance that the medical establishment is offering to the Coalition attempt to privatise the NHS and hand great chunks of it over to the US and the acquiescence of British Vice Chancellors in the savaging of HE. One problem that civil servants have had in opposing some of the Coalition’s more crazed schemes is that apparently they can find Vice Chancellors who are prepared to support anything. Obviously this tells us a great deal about the quality of the people becoming Vice Chancellors throughout much of the sector, but it has also been suggested that it is related to the spread of bonus culture to senior management levels. While it looks as if the Coalition’s plans for the NHS might well come unstuck and that Gove’s plans for our schools are likely to fall on their face once the implications are realised, they have actually succeeded in HE. It is all very Vichy.

Local Matters

Three points: at the moment union negotiations with regard to the Avoidance of Redundancy Agreement have stalled. The University’s initial offer was disappointing and on top of that they proposed that anyone over 55 unfortunate enough to lose their job would have some management costs deducted from a sum we already felt inadequate. Our UCU regional official had never come across anything like this before. So we shall see.

The University has given assurances that teaching beyond 7pm will not be introduced without prior negotiations with the union. We have to make sure they adhere to this undertaking.

Third, with regard to Saturday working, the University has come back to us with a proposal for two compulsory Open days and one voluntary. This is obviously not what we asked for and leaves the question of Graduation Day as a working Saturday unanswered. We will need to discuss our response to this at a full membership meeting soon.

John Newsinger, Branch Chair, UCU AT BSU

26/02/12
Professors and ‘Professors’

We now have Professors and Readers appointed on fixed salary points above senior lecturer – a welcome development as it means that the University at last has a better salary structure for academics, and for researchers in particular. There have been temporary, fixed-term, readerships in the past, but the title of Professor has never until now brought any financial reward. From now on recognition by the University of excellence as an academic will be more than nominal.

Along with the new posts comes an additional criterion: candidates must now show ‘Evidence of attracting income in support of their research and/or the potential of future income generation.’ It seems quite reasonable to give importance to this, but in practice the additional criterion has brought consequences I’d like to outline briefly, for it seems to have been applied as the final, decisive one.

In explaining the reasons for non-award of readership to some applicants the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) writes that ‘Many of the candidates had impressive track records in terms of their publications and other research outputs. However, a number of otherwise very strong applications failed to meet all the criteria (as with the applications for Professorships, usually in relation to the generation of external research income)’ (email to staff 25 Nov 2011).

More than one person now holding the title ‘Professor’ applied to be professors (and, possibly, readers), and all of them had of course already gone through the rigorous assessment procedure the University used when the title was only an honorific one. None were appointed. Without bringing in enough research money, it seems, your work does not qualify you for the title, for no honorific titles will be bestowed in future (though those already awarded the title will retain it).

But this is a distortion of real academic values. Of course researchers, especially those with academic prestige beyond the University, should try to increase the research income of their departments. But research excellence is not the same as fundraising. At least one of my colleagues (not a professor) has produced world-class research but not much in the way of research income. Without ‘generation of external income’, could someone like this become a reader or professor? It seems not; but surely this criterion should not be the final decider?

And what of the old Professors who applied? They had to approach their referees again and explain that they weren’t really professors at all, but now there was a chance to become one. Now all ‘professors’ who applied – none, I repeat, successfully – have had to tell those referees (many of whom are at the head of the profession, as the saying goes) that the University has decided that their achievement doesn’t merit an appointment as professor. Whether the academic standing of BSU is raised or lowered by this is for others to judge.

Hamilton Academicals

UCU AT BSU Member
Book Review:

Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class

By Owen Jones. Published by Verso

In this timely book, Owen Jones provides an accessible and popularly written account of the extent to which hatred (not too strong a word) of the poor, especially the young, has become part of our culture. It started out under Thatcher and is coming to a climax under the millionaire Coalition government. Much of his material is quite shocking and as he points out if the sort of abuse routinely poured over working class people was thrown at gays, black people or Jews there would be an outcry. In 21st century Britain, however, the working class are fair game.

As he points out,

“Scouring the internet reveals the disturbing levels anti-chav hatred has reached in society at large. Before it was finally removed, a Facebook page with nearly three-quarters of a million members was entitled ‘4,000 Chavs die from tesco cheap booze. Every little helps.

Type in ‘kill chavs’ into Google and you get hundreds of thousands of results: like ‘5 ways to Kill a Chav’ and ‘The Anti-Chav-Kill Chav Scum Now’. And there is even a game called ‘Chav Hunter’ where you can shoot chavs. ‘Chav Hunter is about killing those pikey fucks who dress like 80s rappers. In a sniper fashion, aim for the head’.”

As Jones points out, substitute black or Jew or gay for Chav and you can see the problem. Class hatred is on the rise and it is the hatred that the rich and better-off have for the working class. He tells of a London gym, Gymbox (£175 membership fee and then £72 a month) that offered ‘Chav Fighting’ as a martial arts course for young professionals, urging don’t give them an ASBO, ‘give them a kicking’. Once again substitute black or Jew or gay...

If people like David Cameron and Nick Clegg could fight their way to the top and overcome all the disadvantages they faced (parents who disliked them so much they sent them off to boarding school as soon as they could) then why can’t the children of the poor, cosseted by the state, living in their subsidised housing and having their education provided free, do the same. They are disadvantaged by our dependency culture. The welfare state is the problem. It is the crutches that are stopping them running. Obviously the answer is to take away the crutches.

The cultural demonization of the working class, while pretty foul in itself, is really only preparation for an unprecedented assault on welfare provision in Britain. Shocking though it is, the fact is that today the unemployed are made to work the night shift in Tescos stacking shelves for their dole. A week of nights for £65! Whatever happened to the Minimum Wage?

Continued…
Of course, a lot of people think of this as providing work experience for young men who have never had a job. Think again. Jeremy Vine fans will remember the woman complaining of the damage doing a nightshift at Tesco’s for the dole was having on her 61 year old husband, an unemployed graphic designer. And the woman doing a minimum wage job placement at Tesco with the chance of a full-time job if she was satisfactory who was got rid of at the end of her placement to make way for ‘dole slaves’. Unbelievably, they are even proposing to make the terminally ill work for their benefits! This is 21st Century Britain.

While we know inflicting this sort of misery is what the Conservative MPs dream about, it is still a bit of a surprise to find it justified by the LibDems and by a large number of Labour MPs. Part of the problem is, of course, what has happened to the Labour Party where a poor person has as much chance of becoming an MP today as a camel has of getting through the eye of a needle. When David Miliband stood for the leadership of the Labour Party, at one of the hustings, someone asked him a trick question: how much was the ‘Jobseekers Allowance’? He replied about £100. His South Shields constituency at that time had an unemployment rate of something like 15%! He knew absolutely nothing about these people’s lives. Today this part-time Labour MP is probably the best paid man in South Shields. His earnings last year were something like £21,000 a day or £500,000 pa and, of course, as a rich person you couldn’t possibly to expect him to pay tax at the same rate as an ordinary person: most of his earnings are paid to a private company he and his wife own.

As Jones points out, at the heart of the problem is the decline of the trade union movement. This is where the situation has to be reversed.