Quote Of The Month

"I have two great enemies, the Southern Army in front of me and the bankers in the rear. Of the two, the one at my rear is my greatest foe. Corporations have been enthroned, and an era of corruption in high places will follow …… until the wealth is aggregated in the hands of a few, and the Republic is destroyed."

Abraham Lincoln 1863
UCU MAY DAY BASH

MUSIC ★ DRINK ★ DANCING

TUESDAY 1st MAY

Widcombe Social Club
Widcombe Hill Bath BA2 6AA
8.00 TIL LATE
Fairness Fact No 1

Graduates Earn Less in Public Sector Shock-The Story the Media Missed!

When is a fairness fact not a fairness fact? When it comes from the ConDem government. Colleagues will remember the claim in the press and on TV that public sector employees earn on average 8% more than employees in the private sector. How guilty and ashamed we all felt. In fact, this was misinformation, although that did not stop it being widely reported and discussed. It was part of the government’s propaganda campaign that is accompanying its policy of drastically cutting the living standards of public sector employees. And it is a lie.

First the comparison conveniently left out the bonuses that are paid in the private sector. This is not a small amount. In 2011 some £20 billion was paid out in bonuses.

Even more dramatic is the fact that the research that was used to show a supposed pay gap operating in favour of the public sector actually showed the opposite as far as graduates were concerned! Graduates working in the public sector actually earned on average 4.1% less than graduates working in the private sector. This is, of course, an absolute scandal. And what does the government propose to do about it. They are determined to make the gap considerably wider by pay freezes and attacks on our pensions.

CAMPAIGN ROUNDDUP

The Great Pensions Heist: STRIKE

The UCU National Executive committee have voted for UCU to join PCS in striking on Thursday May 10th.

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.

There will be a full UCUATBSU Branch meeting to discuss the strike at 4pm on Wednesday 2nd May in the union office STG10

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.

Continued…
UCUATBSU EGM

John Newsinger is retiring from his position as UCUATBSU Branch Chair. In order to elect his successor we will be holding an Emergency General Meeting in room NE.G13 2-4 on Wednesday 16 May.

Due to excessive workloads (see below) the current structure of UCUATBSU is under considerable stress. Basically we need more people willing to be active participants on the committee in order to spread the workload.

Significant teaching release is available under our facility agreement for key union reps so taking an official post need not mean extra work.

Please contact Chris Jury or John Newsinger if you would like more information and/or if you are able to help.

Redundancy

The Redundancy Avoidance Agreement negotiating committee are in the very final stages of agreeing one of the best enhanced redundancy agreements in the country. In principle the University have agreed to a multiplier of at least 2 x statutory redundancy pay and based on real salaries (i.e. without the salary cap that is part of the statutory entitlement). This enhanced scheme is capped at a year’s salary and for many long-serving staff at BSU it will amount to exactly that. We are waiting for a final negotiating meeting at which we hope to agree the actual multiplier. I hope you will join with us in congratulating the negotiators.

Workload

UCUATBSU and the Bath spa university are still officially in dispute over workload; a dispute that arose from the changes to the modular scheme in 2009.

As UCUATBSU Reps talk to members we are only too aware that the overriding issue at BSU is still workload. We are currently undertaking a survey and a workload calculator can be downloaded from the UCUATBSU website. We urge all members to use the calculator as soon as possible and email the results to us at ucu@bathspa.ac.uk.

The results of the survey so far indicate that over 85% of the staff at BSU undertake workloads over 55 hours per week (or pro-rata for fractional post holders), with many working up to 75 hours per week. It is clear that very few, if any, teaching staff at BSU have a workload that falls within the European Working Time Directive (which is an average of 48 hours per week over a 17 week period excluding holidays).

And for most of us this is before we attempt to produce 4 with REF-able research outputs before November next year, attend conferences and generally engage with the research agenda.

However, this is not an issue the union can address unless we can demonstrate this is a university wide problem and that our members feel strongly enough about it to resist. If you do feel strongly about it please fill in the calculator and email it to us with your results. Continued…
Some Workload related facts:

- BSU abides by the Post-92 Framework Agreement that stipulates a **weekly maximum of 18 hours and annual maximum of 550 hours 'formal scheduled teaching'**.

- These figures were intended as absolute maximums – not as norms. It is widely accepted even by some senior managers at BSU that **‘formal scheduled teaching’** of around 12 hours per week should be a norm. For research active academics this should be reduced to 6-8.

- At BSU we supposedly have a 33 week teaching year. 18 hours of teaching x 33 weeks = 594 hours.

- To fully understand and calculate academic workload you must take into account the substantial preparation, marking, non-scheduled contact and administration that is linked to each hours teaching.

- If we were to assume that each hour of teaching involves a further 2 hours of work then each hour of teaching equals a unit of a lectures time of 3 hours. Thus 18 hours of **‘formal scheduled teaching’** actually represents a **54 hour per week workload**.

- UWE are currently involved in a bitter dispute with management (they may be striking this term), because management have **reduced** their workload model to 1 hour of teaching + 1.5 hours. Even using this 1:1.5 model 18 hours of **‘formal scheduled teaching’** equals a 45 hour working week.

- Some staff at BSU had contracts that refer to the collective terms & conditions, which in turn refer to a 37 hour working week. These collective terms & conditions have now been rewritten to conform to a ‘professional’ model of working hours, where no maximum or minimum is described - we are supposed to work as long as it takes to get the job done. Nonetheless the working time directive still applies and according to legal precedence any policy of the university has to be ‘reasonable’. A working week of 55+ hours a week as normal practice is clearly not reasonable.

- The 8 hours a day, 40 hour week has been fought by trade unionists and for over 200 year years and increasingly became the norm from 1945 to 1979. Since 1979 it has gradually been eroded with today most white collar workers working %0+ hours a week.

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**Fairness Fact No 2**

Whatever vestige of credibility behind the claim that we are all in it together has been finally dispelled by the Sunday Times rich list. The British super rich are getting richer. The last year has seen them increase their wealth by 4.7%. The richest thousand people in Britain are now worth a record £414 billion. That’s one thousand people worth £414 billion. And some of them are thinking about paying tax (only joking!)
Things have not been so good for everyone else though. Everyone else has seen their standard of living fall with those losing their jobs and having their benefits cut suffering most. Some readers might have seen Nick Clegg confronted on TV by a Morrisons’ manager who asked him if he realised there were people going without food so they could feed their kids!

As for the cut in housing benefit and the effective deportation of families, often vulnerable families, single parents with young children, from London, this simply defies belief. Not even Thatcher would have contemplated such a policy. It is positively evil. There is an alternative: rent controls. But too many MPs from all parties are for-rent landlords today for this obvious solution to be even considered at the moment. Disgust at the policy might change that of course.

The following article is written by a member of UCUATBSU who wishes to remain anonymous. This is a sad indication of the prevailing atmosphere of restricted academic freedom and collegiality at BSU that means that a member staff feels unable to openly take ownership of an article that makes such a reasonable case.

ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RESEARCH AT BSU

BSU’s new research agenda is very much to be welcomed, but a good case can be made that it does not seriously address the problems that active researchers have had to deal with in the past and which are still very much with us. Indeed, what seems to be proposed with the appointment of a new class of academic superstars, a sort of Top of the Profs, can be likened to painting some of the old ship’s superstructure gold, but leaving the actual crew still desperately working the pumps because the hull has not been repaired. What is needed is some recognition of the reality for most staff at BSU. The fact is that for many years research at BSU was to all intents and purposes carried out by staff without any meaningful support from the University. The word ‘meaningful’ is crucial here and meaningful implies not just a positive disposition but also appropriate allocation of time and money.

The high teaching loads at BSU, almost FE levels of teaching for some, have been ‘accepted’ by staff partly because there has been no expectation of research activity from management. This all changed in the summer of 2009 when the Board Of Governors adopted a new strategy that focused on research activity, post-graduate provision and overseas students as the route to growing the university.

This was a significant change in strategy for BSU and presented a number of difficulties for staff and our managers, as there was no budget for timetable relief for research, inconsistent financial support for conference attendance and other collaborative academic activity and no system of research sabbaticals.
Without such a system and with the teaching loads that we routinely have to carry, research has only been accomplished by the personal investment that members of staff have been prepared to make themselves. What this means in political economy terms is that research has been disproportionately made possible by the sacrifices of the staff. Of course research active staff make sacrifices at every University (other than Oxford and Cambridge), but I would argue that the balance of investment has weighed disproportionately heavily on staff as at BSU. And, on top of that, in the bad old days the impression was often given that publishing books and articles was actually regarded with suspicion. How come this person had all this time in their hands? Shouldn’t they be teaching more?

We have, of course, all moaned about this, but BSU was after all a Teaching University and if you didn’t like it you either left, narrowed your ambitions, gave up altogether and went into something like Teaching and Learning or became increasingly cynical and disillusioned. What I would argue is that this past history has to be acknowledged and the problems it has created have to be dealt with if the new strategy is to be anything other than cosmetic, other than a sort of academic Botox.

The chequered history of research at BSU has resulted in some anomalies that really say it all. We are in the remarkable position of having, as John Newsinger has pointed out, three categories of professor. There are professors appointed because of their scholarly achievements, more recently appointed professor professors appointed because of their scholarly achievements and because they have brought in money, and we are soon to have professor professor professors appointed because of some sort of superstar status. These individuals will be earning perhaps as much as £80,000 pa, something like twice the salaries of some mere professors!

Something that the union failed to pick up on (no offense meant!) was that when the professor professorships were first advertised, bringing in money was not an essential criteria, but it had become essential by the time the appointments were made.

This is the past however, but acknowledging it is vital if the new strategy is to be successful. What is needed is something more radical than a cosmetic change. What many of us are wondering is what the existing staff could have achieved if the sort of money being thrown at the superstars had been invested in them. We are talking here of something like £1 million pa. And this is precisely what is needed: serious investment in the research efforts of existing staff. If BSU is to be successfully changed then it needs to be changed from the bottom up. What this requires is a University-wide system of significant timetable relief for research, consistent financial support for conference attendance and collaborative academic research and a formal system of sabbaticals.

The question then becomes, ‘where will the money for all this come from?’ Aye, and there’s the rub. Wherever it comes from simply funding research by adding it to the already excessive workloads at BSU (see below) is simply not an option, not because staff aren’t enthusiastic supporters of the new research agenda, overwhelmingly we are, but there just simply aren’t enough hours in the day.

UCUATBSU Anonymous Member
REVIEWS

The Assault on Universities: A Manifesto for Resistance.

Are we prepared to resist the changes that threaten to undermine academic freedom and liberal values? Bailey and Freedman’s ‘manifesto’ offers a wide range of viewpoints outlining the rationale, underpinning values and language, and strategies that those concerned about the future of English universities need to adopt in order to mount a defence, and indeed offense, against the invading neoliberal thought to be destroying our sector.

The text focuses on the teaching role of universities, the responsibilities of academics and students, funding arrangements, and the politics affecting the sector. The introductory chapters helpfully set out the historical and political contexts of university education in England, with particular attention on the effect of the coalition government’s policies on academic practice. For example, Nick Couldry’s ‘Fighting for the University’s Life’ offers a values-based strategy for rejecting neoliberal approaches to higher education, arguing that attempts to reform and reclaim the higher education system ‘must connect with movements outside the university’. Aeron Davis’ ‘Economic Alternatives in the Current Climate’ builds on this point by clearly and concisely summarising and deconstructing the financial arguments used to rationalise the present cuts.

The role of universities as sites of knowledge creation does not receive much attention in the collection; however, Michael Bailey, in his compelling chapter ‘The Academic as Truth-Teller’, argues that academics must retain their moral position by reporting on the world as they see it, not through the lens of commercial or political interests. Other chapters examine the sociological contexts of the struggle and continue to outline the general and specific problems with current approaches to managing and funding universities. International perspectives, such as Giroux’s spirited view of the American context, offer further evidence of the problem of neoliberal policies in higher education.

The main thrust of the collection is that it is time for those of us in academia to take a stand for our social and personal values, to subvert the infiltration of market values on our sector. The ‘manifesto’ itself, presented at the end of the collection, offers specific demands on government and universities. You may find, as I did, that you agree with only some of the demands; however, the authors make a convincing argument that something needs to change in our sector and have the courage to offer specific suggestions on what those changes should be.

Joelle Adams

Fairness Fact No 3

It does look as if the Conservative party is up for sale and this does explain many of their policies. When Cameron took over as Tory leader, the City donated £2.75 million to the Conservative Party (25% of total donations).
In 2010, the City donated £11.4 million (50.8%). Obviously this explains a lot. But is it undemocratic? If the unemployed got together and contributed a fiver each then they could buy the policies they wanted. Influence is open to everyone, not just the rich!

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**REVIEW**


What has been Rupert Murdoch’s response to ‘Hackgate’? He has made clear his willingness to throw overboard as many people, reporters and executives, as are necessary in order to protect his son, James. He has ruthlessly sacrificed the *News of the World*, although some have argued that this was actually a shrewd commercial decision as the *Sun on Sunday* is a lot cheaper to produce. And he has turned on Cameron’s government with a vengeance! On 25 March the *Sunday Times* broke the ‘cash for access’ story with accompanying video, forcing the resignation of the Conservative Party’s Treasurer, the appropriately named Peter Cruddas. This tremendously damaging blow was accompanied by a systematic savaging of George Osborne’s budget in the *Sun*. It was condemned as a budget that looked after millionaires but that clobbered ‘ordinary Brits’. And on 9 April, the *Sun* could proudly boast that ‘Labour’s Shadow Chancellor writes for the Sun’. Yes, indeed, despite all the evidence of criminality and corruption, Ed Balls had an article condemning the ‘Millionaires’ Budget’ in the *Sun*. As far as Murdoch is concerned, he has clearly suffered some hard knocks, but fundamentally nothing has changed. He is still in a position to quite openly punish a government that has crossed him without it causing any apparent public disquiet. The fact is that if Cameron had resisted the pressure to establish the Leveson Inquiry and had remained loyal to his close friend and riding partner, Rebekah Brooks, the *Sunday Times* sting would never have taken place and the *Sun* would have supported the budget as a masterpiece of statesmanship and fairness.

The ability of a billionaire newspaper owner, one of Britain’s oligarchs, to behave in this way is a far greater scandal than ‘Hackgate’, but it goes virtually unremarked. Indeed, it looks as if Murdoch is actually succeeding in the old game of playing the Labour and Conservative parties off against each other. Not only has the Murdoch press given Cameron a public warning, a yellow card so to speak, but the *Sun* also made clear that it was both flirting with and being courted by the Labour leadership. And, of course, at the same time as he was warning Cameron off, Murdoch was sending a clear message to Labour that some sort of rapprochement was not out of the question. All they would have to do is shut up Tom Watson! Indeed, Murdoch has actually let it be known that he wanted to back Gordon Brown at the general election, but was persuaded by young James and Rebekah Brooks that Cameron was the coming man. This, one suspects, is a decision that he now deeply regrets. With the support of the Murdoch press Labour might well have kept the Conservatives out and if that had happened there is no way that Watson, a loyal Brownite, would have been unleashed to inflict the damage that he so ably and enjoyably inflicted.

One thing is absolutely clear: the British political class is not going to dismantle the Murdoch empire in Britain or eliminate the man’s malign political influence. They have got neither the stomach nor the balls for it.

Continued...
Instead, we apparently have to look to OfCom to decide whether or not the Murdochs are ‘fit and proper’ people to control a TV company. Considering that OfCom had no problem with the pornographer, Richard Desmond, a man who has publicly boasted of not knowing the meaning of the word ‘ethics’, one should not expect too much. Or there are News Corporation’s shareholders, who might be morally outraged enough to bring Murdoch down. While the company’s profits continue to rise, despite some huffing and puffing, this seems most unlikely. Indeed, at the time of writing it seems distinctly possible that rather than the ‘Hackgate’ scandal illustrating how someone like Murdoch can be called to account, it might turn out to indicate the exact opposite: how he got away with it! Certainly, this is what Murdoch is hoping, although, it has to be said, so far the scandal has had a tendency to go out of control no matter how much money and how many lawyers he throws at it. What stands out is the character, or rather lack of it, of the British political class, willingly subordinating itself to such a man.

How have we come to this sad state of affairs? David McKnight’s new book, an investigation of Murdoch’s political power, is arguably the best account of this that we have. So far it has only been published in Australia, with a British edition not due until July, and predictably it has been attacked in the Murdoch press over there. McKnight’s research was paid for by the Australian Research Council and this has inevitably led to complaints that the State has been funding a leftwing attack on a leading businessman of unimpeachable character. This attempt to distract attention from the book’s central argument is testimony to how important it is. Lobster regulars, it is worth pointing out, might be familiar with McKnight’s earlier book, Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War.

Essentially, what McKnight argues is that most commentators on and critics of Murdoch have misunderstood the man because they have regarded him as primarily a businessman, motivated overwhelmingly by the need to realise profit. What he shows is that Murdoch is, in fact, very much a political animal, a man committed to political causes, with a vision that his newspapers and Fox News aggressively propagate. As McKnight puts it: ‘Murdoch is at least as devoted to propagating his ideas and political beliefs as he is to making money...Murdoch has a particular conservative view that has evolved over the years and on whose evangelisation he spends many millions annually, through both corporate spending and personal (often secret) donations’. He goes on: ‘Key parts of his empire are deeply enmeshed in their nation’s politics and operate as megaphones for Murdoch’s values and leverage’. Indeed, Murdoch has for many years subsidised loss making newspapers precisely because of the political influence they have brought him: The Australian lost money for twenty years, The Times has lost money every year since he acquired it, and the New York Post has cost News Corporation millions of dollars. These subsidies are not motivated by some sort of sentimental attachment to print journalism, as is sometimes suggested, but have one purpose and one purpose only: ‘to give Murdoch a seat at the table of national politics in three English-speaking nations’.

In Britain, the focus has always been on Murdoch’s close relationship first with Thatcher and then with Blair and Brown. What McKnight brings out is the extent to which it is the United States that is the real object of Murdoch’s affection. While he was very close to Thatcher, it was, in fact, Reagan and Reaganism that ‘were the most important influences on Rupert Murdoch’s political world view’.
This is an important corrective. Indeed, when Thatcher and Reagan disagreed, as over the US invasion of Grenada, Murdoch invariably sided with Reagan. If anything, Thatcher was not Thatcherite enough for Murdoch. He was in favour of dismantling the NHS and privatising state education, measures that had to await the arrival of first New Labour and then of the Coalition. One of McKnight’s achievements is to actually uncover some of Murdoch’s connections with what he describes as the ‘ultra-Thatcherites’, the likes of David Hart and Brian Crozier. Murdoch was right behind Hart during the Miners Strike when Hart was instrumental in establishing the scab Union of Democratic Mineworkers. Indeed, there is a suspicion that Murdoch helped finance the UDM, but this has never been proven. Certainly his relationship with Hart and Crozier indicates that he had a little-known ‘covert role in British politics’ that requires further investigation.

The close relationship that Murdoch had with Reagan was demonstrated when he was appointed one of the fifteen trustees for the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation. By 1996, *Time* magazine could describe him as the fourth most powerful man in the United States. He was, at this time, a pillar of the neo-con opposition to Bill Clinton. Murdoch established the neo-con *Weekly Standard* with a start-up cost of $3 million in 1995. Edited by William Kristol, it became ‘the flagship of the neo-cons’, losing some $30 million over the next fifteen years. This was money well spent, however, because it ‘was designed purely to exert influence both within the Republican Party and inside Washington’. And in 1996, he established *Fox News* which has played an important part in helping to pull US politics to the right over the years, most recently championing the Tea Party movement.

One reassuring assessment of Murdoch is that his political influence is exaggerated because in practice he always backs whoever wins. Murdoch, so the argument goes, inevitably ingratiates himself with whoever is in power or looks likely to be in power soon. This supposedly explains his abandonment of John Major for Tony Blair in 1997. Major was clearly doomed, whereas Blair looked a certain winner! McKnight decisively puts this comforting myth to rest. As he points out, Clinton was certainly a winner in the United States, and yet Murdoch remained irreconcilably hostile. And it has been the same with Obama. And as for Major, the Murdoch press had supported him when Neil Kinnock had looked the winner. Kinnock was, it is worth remembering, the victim of one of the most sustained exercises in character assassination and reputation destruction in British political history. As McKnight puts it, if Murdoch had ‘been a mere opportunist who loved winners’, he would never have subjected Kinnock, who looked like he was going to win the 1992 general election, to ‘the extreme journalist thuggery’ that the *Sun* unleashed. The Murdoch campaign against Kinnock was exultantly celebrated by the headline claim that it was ‘the Sun wot won it’. The reason for this absolutely ferocious assault was that Labour under Kinnock had not yet embraced Thatcherism, was still recognisably a social democratic rather than a neo-liberal party, was unreliable on the question of media ownership and could not be relied on to keep the unions hobbled. Blair was to change all this.

Why did Murdoch turn so quickly against Major? The Major government never courted him in the way he had become accustomed to under Thatcher. Indeed, there were powerful figures in the government, most notably the Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine, who regarded Murdoch’s influence with considerable hostility and had ambitions to curb it.
Major’s mistake was to believe that however much his government offended Murdoch, in the end he would have to support the Conservatives to keep Labour out. He never recognised how far to the right Blair and Brown were prepared to go. Blair gave Murdoch the necessary assurances regarding media ownership, trade union rights and Europe and the Sun declared for Labour in 1997. To be fair to Major, no one recognised how right wing the Labour Party would become so that today any connection it has with the pre-1990s Labour Party is purely sentimental!

With the election of Cameron, Murdoch must have felt that, despite his misgivings that the man was veneer all the way through, everything was coming together. The new Prime Minister was a personal friend of Rebekah Brooks, had installed the former editor of the News of the World, Andy Coulson, as his right-hand man, had cut the BBC’s funding, and was all set to wave through his takeover of BSkyB. In the first fifteen months of the Coalition government a Cabinet member met a Murdoch executive once every three days. This was access! And, moreover, one of his creatures, Michael Gove, a former senior Times journalist, was installed as Secretary of State for Education. Most commentators have missed the significance of this last success. Although he is very much a political lightweight, Gove’s appointment was of tremendous importance to Murdoch because he had identified for profit education as the next big commercial opportunity after satellite television and the Coalition was going to prepare the way. In the months before the ‘Hackgate’ scandal made such meetings politically dangerous, Gove met Murdoch seven times and had another dozen meetings with News International executives. He is today the only prominent politician still prepared to publicly defend, indeed praise, Murdoch. Not even David Blunkett is that stupid. Murdoch was getting ready to sponsor an Academy school to be set up in Newham, specialising in journalism (!), where the educational software developed by his US company, Wireless Generation, would be put in place. The Academy would serve as a Trojan horse, demonstrating that schools could do without half their teachers and that most of those remaining could be effectively deskilled with all that involved in terms of reduced pay and worsened conditions. It was not to be. The ‘Hackgate’ scandal has left Murdoch’s empire wounded, but far from dead. The saga is still unfolding.

By John Newsinger
This review first appeared in Lobster http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/

UCU at BSU
Contact:
Branch Chair: John Newsinger
Email: j.newsinger@bathspa.ac.uk
General Information & Membership
ucu@bathspa.ac.uk
Branch Website
http://ucuatbsu.wordpress.com/