Motion 1: The role of students in fighting austerity

**Submitted by: Socialist Students Steering Committee**

1. The general election in June 2017 delivered a huge blow to Theresa May and the Tory government. Young people and students played a particular role in generating this political earthquake, mobilising in our thousands to support Corbyn’s anti-austerity manifesto.
2. This ‘youthquake’ showed the huge appetite there is for an alternative to austerity. Corbyn’s policies – including free education, a £10 an hour minimum wage and nationalisation – were central to creating a surge of enthusiasm and support.
3. The Tories emerged from the election weak and limping – propped up by the reactionary leaders of the DUP. The government remains extremely vulnerable. Under the pressure of a mass movement, they could be rapidly forced from power and made to call a general election.
4. The potential that exists to mobilise the millions of young people responsible for June’s youthquake to fight to make policies like free education real in the here and now has so far failed to be realised. Had a lead been given by the National Union of Students, by Corbyn and McDonnell, or by leadership of the trade unions, this could have been very different.
5. As it stands, Socialist Students has consistently raised the need for mass action, and taken initiatives, including organising budget day protests in order to seek to galvanise students who see the need to fight and continue to put pressure on NUS and others to act.
6. The protests that erupted at Bath University towards the end of 2017, in response to revelations about the unbelievably high salary being paid to its vice-chancellor, gave a glimpse of what is possible.
7. With university staff organised by the University and Colleges Union now taking strike action over attacks on their pension, there is potential for students to mobilise and organise to get behind and support them. Building solidarity with the UCU must be a top priority for us, and can play an important role in boosting the confidence of the strikers, and assisting them in scoring a victory.
8. We should continue to call on students to ‘strike back with their lecturers’ emphasising the importance of students not crossing picket lines and encouraging them to play an active role in the fightback - joining rallies protests, demonstrations and occupations. We will emphasise that the UCU action is part and parcel of the wider struggle in defence of education, against marketization, fees, cuts, and so on.
9. We must continue to raise the need for mass action to fight cuts. That means continuing to put pressure on NUS to use its resources and authority to organise a movement for free education and against austerity – starting with a major national demonstration.
10. But, particularly if NUS’s currently very right-wing leadership maintains control at this year’s conference, on current trajectory it seems unlikely that NUS will take this step. That’s why we must continue to take our own initiatives, like the budget day protests, and seek to work with all forces in the student movement who are willing to fight.
11. Last year, the Socialist Students Steering Committee wrote to the national campaign against fees and cuts (NCAFC), requesting a meeting about working together to help build for student protests both locally and nationally. NCAFC failed to respond to our letter and instead chose to act in a sectarian manner, failing to support protests on budget day and instead organising a (less successful) day of action exactly one week afterwards! We must continue to challenge this counter-productive approach.
12. In a year which includes the anniversary of the revolutionary movement that took place in France in May 1968, it is especially important that we continue to raise the need for united struggle of students and workers. Centrally important to fighting the government and defeating austerity will be the role of the organised working class in trade unions. This is because it is workers who produce wealth, provide services and carry out the tasks needed to keep society running. That’s why when workers take strike action – particularly co-ordinated action- it can have a huge effect – potentially bringing governments to their knees.
13. In 2018, Socialist Students will continue to be audacious in our approach to building the fight against austerity both on our campuses and on a national level. This includes campaigning against fees, but is by no means limited to this. It means demanding, living grants, an end to campus cuts, an end to sky high rents and privatisation, for example.
14. In the last year, Socialist Students groups have done some excellent campaigning work. We need to continue to build on this, as well as to prioritise developing our position as an organisation leading student struggle nationally. This means campaigning locally, striving to win students union and NUS elections, and continuing to take national initiatives and raise a strategy for the student movement.