



THE SAUSAGE FACTORY

25th, 2nd, 4th!

Last Wednesday the 10th of February, a University and College Union (UCU) meeting voted for three single day strikes: the 25th of February, as well as the 2nd and 4th of March.

This announcement followed a cynical, last moment attempt by Vice Chancellor Michael Arthur to undermine UCU by inviting them back to the negotiation table.

This is not the first dirty tactic that Arthur has employed: the UCU maintains that the Vice Chancellor publicly misrepresented their position following the breakdown of the confidential ACAS negotiations on February 4th.

The UCU are striking over compulsory redundancies in the Faculty of Biological Sciences (FBS) where, according to a member of staff, university management “are trying to get rid of the bad faces”. It seems increasingly obvious that those who make trouble or whose research is not deemed profitable will be culled in a university wide efficiency drive. Both the UCU and university management see FBS as the first battle in a wider conflict over cuts and redundancies.

We must support the lecturers in the defence of their livelihoods, but we must also take the initiative and oppose the broader education crisis. UCU are already taking steps towards this end, proposing a festival of alternative education for the Easter break.

During the strikes we see an opportunity for students to seize control of education. Let us occupy and transform; hold participatory lectures, have discussions, workshops, play games and organise parties. If our university is to be really open, then we all must participate and contribute.

To survive and flourish we have to build creative alternatives.



What is a really open university?

Come to the Parkinson Steps at 5.30pm on March 2nd – the day of the second UCU strike – and you may just find out.

27 hour ‘flash occupation’ at Sussex

On Monday the 8th February more than 100 people were involved in a 27 hour “flash occupation” at the University of Sussex.

The occupation was staged in the University’s conference centre, thereby emphasising opposition not only to UK wide education cuts, but to the business-like nature of the contemporary university.

Like in Leeds, Sussex University is facing huge cuts that threaten the quality of education, the livelihoods of thousands, and the possibility of enrolling at University for innumerable amounts.

Statements of solidarity were received from across the world. The Really Open University wrote: “In order to fight the latest in a long line of attacks on education and the

system behind it we must not be merely defensive. We must act to transform education; to open it up, allow people to teach what they want to teach and learn what they want to learn, we need to restore the intrinsic value of the idea and the quest for knowledge. In doing so we can help fight against our oppression more generally.”

The Sussex University branch of UCU is poised to ballot for action against 107 impending redundancies so more action is to be expected.

Across the world people are resisting attacks on education and many are choosing to go into occupation. While important, occupation can only form one part of a wider struggle to redefine the education.

What do we mean by ‘Strike, Occupy, Transform’?

“Strike v 1. To produce as if by playing a musical instrument”

A strike is the removal of our daily life from the circuits of capital, a refusal to let our flesh be turned into profit, a refusal to let all that is solid melt into air. The institutionalized strike can take many forms; a walkout from the office, the slowing down of production through ‘lazy’ marking and the disruption of the flows of the system. Why are these strikes institutionalized? Their effectiveness relies on the very system they seek to challenge, their energy relies upon a functioning system of exploitation, wages, timesheets, efficiency. The essence of the institutionalized strike is the system it purports to challenge – it is limited to a reshuffling of the world that already exists. Just as we know what it is like to be a slave of profit the institutionalized strike is the slave to ideas.

We do not reject the institutionalized strike; it is a valuable tool in our box of tricks. However, we must use it in the knowledge that it is only defensive. Its value comes in forcing open time and space; the time and space in which to do otherwise. What we must do is generalize the method of the strike, not just spreading it through space, to other universities and shop floors, and extending it through time, a day, a month, a year. To generalize the strike is to make it a way of life, the general condition of everyday life.

The refusal to participate in the dominant system of *Value*, where the production of life is reduced to the production of commodities, is only the right hand man to the affirmation of different social relationships. The affirmation of different social relations is not only an affront to the homogenizing force of capital, it is the creation of a world where we can live our lives according to our ethics. From reaction to affirmation, that is the strike we must experience.

“Occupy v 1. To fill up (time or space)”

Occupations are a common part of student struggles across the world. For example in France in 2006 a massive youth movement against the contrat première embauche (CPE, or, the first employment contract) occupied high

schools and universities and blockaded roads. In 1999, the National Autonomous University of Mexico City was occupied for close to a year to prevent tuition fees from being charged. Both of these struggles were successful. Here in the UK we are beginning to see occupation used as a vital tactic in community, workplace and university struggles; from the Visteon and Vestas workers disputes, to school struggles in Glasgow and South London and the wave of university occupations in 2009 in reaction to the Gaza siege. But these historical examples do not get to the bottom of what it means to occupy.

We are always in occupation; of time, of space, of our values, ethics and beliefs. Everything around us is also occupied at every single moment, there is no bit of space or time that is not laced with values and content. Contrary to the ‘common sense’ which has been bred into us, neither space nor ourselves can exist as an absence – that ‘empty’ feeling you get is still a feeling, the classroom without its pupils is still a purpose built institution with endless potentials contained within it.

So what do we mean by occupy? It seems the most ordinary thing. Firstly, we need to learn how to understand what is it that is ‘occupying’ a given space, or rather, what is it that makes something what it is? Much more than a language trick, we often take this for granted to the point where we call a space empty; this is nothing but a blindness. We need to realize that a classroom is constituted with certain assumptions about its use, a ‘class’ facing a single teacher, all the information contained on either a board or a text book, the production of knowledge that ‘someone’ has chosen for you. These ‘spaces’ are tools designed to be used in a limited number of ways, with a limited number of outcomes – 22 nodding Churchill dogs with one conductor at the front. The first stage of occupation is therefore to understand the tools that are littered around us, and to understand that we ourselves are tools that are built and used by others.

Secondly, occupation is the appropriation of these tools. It is to learn how to use a saw as a violin, a screwdriver as a spindle, a hammer as a paintbrush. Occupation is the discovery of the potentials of a tool, the putting to work of a tool in ways you never possibly imagined. Whether the classroom, the city center or your own body – you don’t know what a tool can do until you try to do the impossible with it.

“Transform v 1. To alter or be altered radically in form, function, etc.”

Transformation is a liberating and exhilarating process. It is the point at which you pick up a tool and use it according to your imagination, when the occupied is put to use according to different ethics or values.

Only through transformation will we create a university that people want to go to, where the exploration of knowledge is taken to its limits, where spaces encourage creativity rather than hinder it, where everyone and anyone can teach what they want, how they want. Where boundaries are broken.

Take hold of the walkways, the classrooms, the email systems and the student paper, and use them in a way you didn’t realise they could be used.

Transformation begins with yourself – it begins when you ask ‘Why do I think how I do? Who is interested in me thinking like this?’. Transformation, however, can only be a collective process; your dreams remain dreams until they are actualised with the dreams of others. Collectively we must transform the university, but also the societies we produce around us. We must appropriate and put to use the classrooms and the shopping centres to our own ends, towards the point where strike, occupation, transformation is a way of life.

We encourage you to ask yourself ‘what is a really open university?’. In doing so we may help ourselves understand what it would mean to ‘strike, occupy, transform’ every bit of the world you live in.

*The Really Open University
info@reallyopenuniversity.org*