

Letter from John Carolan in response to John Braddock's article on New Zealand students

12 August 2000

John Braddock's article (31st May) on NZ students' national campaign for Free Education examines in some depth the privatisation of the NZ tertiary system. However, as a member of the Fightback! campaign, I feel he misunderstands the dynamic of our movement, especially in regards to how we deal with reformists and trade union bureaucrats.

Fightback! believes primarily in the strategy of simultaneous, nationwide occupations of University registries, using student power to close the financial centres of all NZ campuses. We have strong groups established in Auckland, Hamilton and Palmerston North, and are building in Christchurch, Otago and the Polytechnics. We do not look to Labor/Alliance MPs or trade union bureaucrats to do anything. By putting demands on them, we publicly expose whose side they are on. We believe that students themselves have the power to occupy and shut down these institutions, and call on staff rank and file members of the AUS to support us with strike action.

I feel that John misunderstands the dynamic of the united front method we are using. Within the campaign there are socialists, but there are also rank and file members of the Greens, the Alliance, the Labour party etc as well as students with no political affiliations. We are united however on our direct action tactics and our 10 demands, and put concrete demands on both campus managements and the new Labour/Alliance government. This puts pressure on the reformist parties and shows their rank and file members the gulf between their aspirations and their leadership's commitment to "business as usual". To the extent that local Alliance councillors have come in to support our occupations in the Waikato University.

Secondly, to write off the trade union movement in NZ because of their sad and timid leadership is to retreat from looking on campus workers as potential

and necessary allies. John may suffer from the NZ disease of miserablism when it comes to trade unions here, perhaps experiencing the defeats of the 90s, but Fightback's demands are directed to the unions rank and file, and not any Labour supporting union bureaucrat. As such, staff in the Waikato went on unofficial strike in support of our occupation, leaving the registry open and empty for us to take. This was achieved by leafleting and postering staff canteens, talking to individual staff members on campaign stalls and signing them up to the campaign.

Socialists who are not outward looking and doctrinaire in their aspirations have not built any comparable movement in NZ. We have stressed the demand to tax the rich to fund free education, have demanded the removal of cops off campuses, have exposed police brutality, and reinvigorated several campuses that were badly decimated by right wing student union hacks in the 90s. And we are also raising the arguments for a wider, socialist solution to poverty, low wages, racism and sexism that affect so many young people, both on and off campus.

Next time, John, please talk to some of the people fighting for change from below instead of second guessing what tactics are in our heads.

You didn't mention our 10 demands or interview any of our members. I enjoy reading WSWs and find the journalism on site to be non-sectarian, well researched and a huge resource for revolutionaries and activists. However, I feel you have stereotyped the student "leadership" of Fightback as having illusions in reformist politics and trade union bureaucrats without examining our practice, method or literature.

Kia kaha

Solidarity

Joe Carolan

Fightback Waikato



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