

Britain: ISSE addresses rally in support of six suspended Sussex University students

Paul Mitchell
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Over 500 students held a rally at Sussex University March 11, following a week of protests against education cuts and in support of six students suspended for taking part in an occupation that was attacked by riot police. According to the student newspaper, the *Badger*, “It was a completely overblown and aggressive response to a peaceful demonstration,” during which students were “arrested, others handcuffed and cautioned, and many others prodded, hit, verbally abused and intimidated.”

Speaking to the rally, International Students for Social Equality member Josh Warren condemned the unprovoked and anti-democratic response by the university authorities. He explained that the reason they took such unprecedented action was a result of a profound shift in world politics, provoked by a deepening crisis of the capitalist system.

What every government is setting out to do is to claw back the trillions that have been used to bailout the banks from the working class and youth, Warren continued. “Sussex management has made it absolutely clear. Any resistance will be met with brute force and intimidation. Make no mistake. What happened last week is being closely followed in much wider circles,” he said.

Warren posed the question, “How do we fight back against such an attack? The trade unions have not lifted a finger against Labour. The call for a one day strike [on March 18] completely ignores the gravity of the situation.”

He described how in Ireland and Greece there have been huge demonstrations and protests, but the unions have saved the governments and are helping impose austerity programmes. He criticised the petty bourgeois parties, whose perspective consists of putting pressure on the authorities, a tactic that has proven time and time again to be a dead end.

“What is needed is a political struggle. The defence of education means a political struggle against the authorities, the Labour government and the police. This can only be conducted as part of the fight for the reorganisation of society in the interests of the vast majority,” Warren said.

Through the ISSE, students at Sussex could link up with those in the UK and internationally who were facing the same attacks.

Warren’s speech was met with applause by students, but jeers and scowls from union representatives and the petty bourgeois groups such as the Socialist Workers Party whose speakers lined up behind the Universities and College Union (UCU) and its one day strike on March 18 designed to put pressure on the university to discuss the UCU’s “Unique Solution” to the budget crisis at Sussex.

The UCU solution is not unique. It is what trade unions are doing across Europe—ensuring that the working class pays for the global financial crisis. The UCU states that it “respects [the university’s] overall budget,” and proposes that it “delivers savings whilst engaging staff positively in delivering them through choice.”

The UCU accepts voluntary redundancies and advances a “voluntary fractional scheme” in which staff can ask for their hours (and wages) to be cut. For services rendered, the union says its proposal “places the trade unions in the centre of future processes for

addressing funding” and that its “new industrial paradigm” is “transferable to other campuses.”

Following the rally, around 300 students and staff occupied a lecture theatre in the Arts Department, which is still continuing despite a High Court injunction taken out by the university in an attempt to stop sit-in protests. The occupation demanded the unconditional reinstatement of the six students who were suspended, no disciplinary action against the occupiers and “no punishment of non-violent dissent, no criminalisation of any form of non-violent protest, demonstrations or occupations” before they would leave.

A statement from the protestors read, “We, the students of the Stop the Cuts campaign, have assembled in Arts A2, in response to the actions of the management, specifically the arbitrary suspension and exclusion of six students by the vice chancellor last week. These students were not violent, and the demonstration in no way merited the presence of riot police on campus. There has been a widespread response from both outside and inside the university condemning this action as disproportionate. These students are part of a wider campaign involving hundreds of students and workers, which continues to be against the compulsory redundancies of staff at Sussex, and to defend public services nationally.”

Last week the university wrote to the six suspended students to say they were allowed on campus to continue their education, but that they were prohibited from taking part in any activities not connected with their studies while disciplinary processes are in progress.



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