UK student protesters denounce fees hike and police violence

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to students involved in the London protest.

Becky Gardner is studying at the University of Portsmouth. She said, “They are treating us like we don’t understand what we are opposing. They keep saying, ‘It’s OK as you don’t have to pay it back when you earn £15,000, but at £21,000’.

“But we are going to pay it at commercial rates of interest, which means the longer you are not paying it back, the more you are going to have to pay. So if you are poor and you do make it through and have to pay all those fees in the first place, you will have to pay more than if you are rich.

“At the election, they were writing to us saying they really valued our opinion. Now they are making out that we are stupid. But we know what they are doing. Today, we were just protesting normally, and the next thing we know, we are being kettled. The violence happened after we got kettled. We were walking through here, and all of sudden it stopped. About 15 minutes later, we realised we had been kettled and now we have been here for the last few hours.

“Our voice is not being heard,” she said. “They are supposed to represent us and they’re not. In five years’ time, when they have supposedly sorted the finances out, is there going to be anything left to make this country something you would want to be part of? If there is no education, no National Health Service, if everything is privatised, I don’t think there is.

“I think the NUS [National Union of Students] have really let us down. It’s clear NUS President Aaron Porter is going to be a politician. I’m for uniting with all workers. My dad is about to lose his job and he works in the NHS, and my sister is also about to lose her NHS job.

“I am not just a student fighting for education. I am passionate about fighting for everyone. The thing that annoys me the most is that they are saying we have this debt due to public overspending. But that overspending was largely due to the banks and bailing them out. Now, they are taking it all out on public services. This is about saving money, but they also want to reform and privatise everything.”

Alan is a computer engineering student at the University of Portsmouth. He said, “The media tries to say that students are rioting and we are violent. But what is going on is that the police are coming in and acting with violence. If they stopped their wars for a day, they could pay for education. And if the rich paid the taxes they are supposed to pay, there would be no need to cut education.”

Anya is from Germany. She said, “I study photography at the London College of Communication and I was planning to pursue a master’s course. I came here to England, and after two years of doing my course, I find that the education doesn’t give me what I’m paying for. We don’t have visiting speakers. We have less time with tutors, and it hasn’t even really started yet. I wouldn’t want to put myself into a master’s degree where I paid £9,000, because I would not be able to study properly. I would just be working.”

Stephen is studying at Goldsmiths University of London. He said, “There are hundreds here from Goldsmiths. We have been occupying our library for the last few days and have been having talks there all the time. The fees issue for me is a big one, but I see it

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more as an attack on the welfare state. A lot of the media are saying students are only protesting because of their own self-interest, but it's not true. My fees are done and dusted and I'm graduating next year, as are many of the people here.

"This is happening all over Europe. We had a banner in Greek at our occupation reading 'Solidarity with our Greek comrades.' What the NUS did was disgusting. You are supposed to represent the views of your student body, and then you run around condemning it to ensure your own New Labour political career. I think we have to broaden this out against all the cuts. Goldsmiths is in Lewisham in London, and there is a Labour-controlled council there forcing through the cuts. It shows that Labour can't be trusted."

Joseph, also from Goldsmiths, said, "At New Cross, the council is cutting services. It demonstrates what the real agenda is. They're cutting nurseries, they're cutting all kinds of things, and it's completely unfair. That's why I'm here. I don't have any faith in any of the parties. Labour isn't Labour anymore.

"There's a lot of talk that when things get violent, people say it's unacceptable. But when you look throughout history, when the state doesn't listen it's understandable why people get violent. I guess the argument goes that they had to bail out the banks because otherwise they'd collapse, but I don't know. Should it be at the expense of ordinary people? It's completely unacceptable that it's funding bankers' bonuses.

"I don't know what the solution is. There isn't one under capitalism. Workers paying—that's how capitalism works, isn't it, boom and bust? Capitalism is completely flawed. Capitalism and democracy, they don't go together, it's an oxymoron. The most important thing is we have to build alliances with the rest of the ordinary working people."

Mohamedeen from Middlesex University said, "We have to save our future. We can't really pay £9,000. They're saying it is 9 percent tax to pay back, but it's going to take a long time. All of these politicians, including Nick Clegg, David Cameron, they've worked it out with the banks so they have millions and billions in their accounts and we are suffering for it.

"I think like you said, a new socialist party should come into existence. I think this movement should unite with the working class and bring down the government. It always starts from small groups, and the students have started."

A student from Camden School for Girls said, "I'm here today because I feel utterly betrayed by the Liberal Democrats. They completely went against their manifesto. And I'm here because on the other side of my banner it says, 'It's all the bankers' fault.' They gambled with our money and got us into this mess, and now we have to pay for it.

"We need to keep a stricter eye on the corporate owners and the banks, as they do a lot of tax evasion. We lose a lot of money through that—it's our money—and should not be taken out on the working class and lower middle class. They might have enough money for a house, but they certainly don't have enough money to pay for these fees."

Noran was attacked by a police officer. She said, "I was just walking along and he grabbed the scarf off my head, pulling my hair as well. He didn't ask me to remove it, he just grabbed it and spun me around. Then he read the riot act to me, Section 60AA, I think. He said it's not cold enough for you to be wearing a scarf. I should have stripped him off to show him how cold it is."

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