

Glasgow University student occupation continues despite police raid

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Up to 100 police officers in at least 12 police vehicles, equipped with dogs and backed up with a helicopter, were mobilised March 22 to evict students and supporters from the former Hetherington Research Club (HRC) at Glasgow University.

Strathclyde Police were called in at the behest of the university's authorities in a bid to end a seven-week occupation launched in opposition to the university's £20 million cuts programme.

Two weeks ago 2,000 students marched through the university and the surrounding area in opposition to the cutbacks and their architect, university Principal Anton Muscatelli. The reductions threaten the teaching of nursing, a large number of modern languages, adult education, and the merger of archaeology and history. A Centre for Drug Misuse is also imperilled. In total, Scottish universities are facing a funding shortfall of £450 million. In response, £283,000 a year Principal Muscatelli is seeking to entirely reorganise the 700-year-old university's teaching and research activity in line with business interests.

The HRC, renamed the Free Hetherington by its new occupants, was surrounded by police and university security staff who forced their way into the building and dragged out and handcuffed a number of protesters. At least one woman suffered a concussion and there are reports of a couple of students suffering dislocated shoulders. The raid rapidly attracted attention and hostility from hundreds of students not directly involved in the occupation. Some 200 gathered immediately around the HRC door, and hundreds more observed from nearby. A number of film crews and journalists were quickly present.

Jack, a science student, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The police surrounding the building on the whole could not fail to recognise the glare of the media. There

was a large contingent of press stood five metres from the police line (in many cases they were physically touching) all directing their cameras at the police. No doubt due to this, the police on the outside of the building in most cases simply locked arms and held people back."

Jack continued, "I came back at about 2 p.m. and everyone had been cleared from the building. Over a hundred students were marching towards the main building, university security were locking the doors and blocking the entrance. The demonstrators burst through maybe three or four sets of locked doors, in one instance scuffling with a lone university security guard who was attempting to hold everyone back. They held a meeting saying that the action was to gain democratic control of the university and force the resignation of Anton Muscatelli."

Thereafter, protesters remained in administrative rooms before the university management agreed to allow the HRC to be re-occupied. David Newall, the director of administration, gave "an assurance that the university will not ask police back on campus in respect of the occupation unless in future there is a serious public order issue."

As well as infuriating large numbers of students, the attempted eviction was immediately condemned by academics, with over 100 signing a statement condemning the university's decision to use "excessive and unnecessary" force to evict its own students.

The academics' statement continued, "We call upon the principal of the university to explain the reasons for the action being taken, and on the Chief Constable to explain the legal basis on which police acted, and the reason for so many police resources being devoted to this action.

"We would also like the principal to clarify who will

pay for this action. We do not think that such actions are consistent with the principles of free and open debate that are the lifeblood of a university.”

Muscatelli sought to distance himself from the police operation. On March 24, he emailed the entire student population, stating, “I fully understand the concerns that many of you have that the action was excessive and unnecessary”. He initiated an investigation involving the University Court, the Senate and the Student Representative Council (SRC).

There is every reason to believe that the investigation will seek to pin responsibility for the March 22 events on the student protesters, and will attempt to rely on the SRC to do so. An emergency resolution to the SRC Council stated that the “SRC opposes any kind of student occupation that effects the quality of learning and teaching such as the continuing occupation of the Hetherington Research Club”.

The resolution, in defiance of broad opposition amongst students to the police action, claimed it was responding to a “demand from fellow students for the SRC Council to take a stronger stance against the actions of University Students on Tuesday 22nd March 2011.”

The Free Hetherington protest has been the subject of a number of right-wing provocations. On March 7, a number of drunk and naked management committee members from the Glasgow University Union reportedly broke into the HRC in the early morning and committed some minor acts of vandalism. According to the Free Hetherington’s Glasgow Uni Occupied Facebook page, on March 23 an unknown individual was observed recording discussions during a meeting. When asked to stop, the person refused and also refused to leave.

It is a measure of the extreme class tensions building up within Britain that a peaceful occupation of an abandoned social club by a handful of students and their supporters should become the focus of such hatred.



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