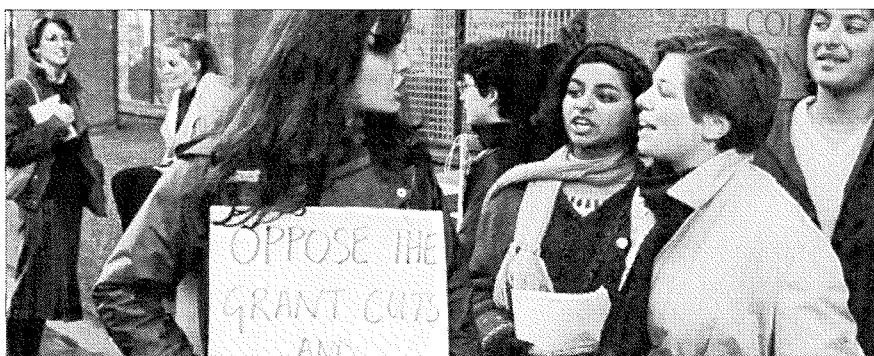


The Campaign for Free Education debates New Solutions

# Who should pay for higher education?



## Everyone

By Erin Lyon\*

**I** THINK we agree on a number of principles: 1. Higher education is in need of reform; 2. Students shouldn't have to pay tuition or top-up fees.

However we must look at the realities of higher education and society before we deal with the question of reform. Higher education participation rates have increased from 1 in 8 in 1979 to 1 in 3 today. Funding, however, has not been increased to match the increase in students. In fact, we have seen a 25% reduction in spending on students in higher education since 1990.

Looking at the present number of students in higher education, and bearing in mind these numbers are increasing, the idea of returning to grants at a pre-1979 levels would mean an increase of 6.5 pence on the basic tax rate — thus hitting the poor. A return to 1979 grant levels would cost £11 billion. No political party would implement this tax increase to cover these costs.

The simplistic arguments offered by Rosie Woods in *WL35* do not in the long run solve the problems of student hardship — the big money on the Trident and Euro-fighter planes has already been spent and to remove these defences would only save a few million pounds. What we need is a recurrent funding policy which would guarantee higher education institutions a source of income so they could plan in the long

term to ensure a quality education and quality environment for students.

So we need a funding system that alleviates student hardship, improves quality and ensures access for all. How? A partnership on education funding — society, business, the individual.

Three obviously separate and defined groups each benefiting from higher education. This is not a round-about way of saying students from working-class backgrounds should pay for their education; it is a straightforward way of suggesting that those who benefit from higher education should pay for it. I think it needs to be stated that the New Solutions policy of funding higher education would mean at long last that a contribution would no longer be paid by the families or by poorer students, but out of the higher income that comes with having a degree.

Those who receive the benefits of higher education often pay back society's investment through the tax system or by entering professions that benefit others (medicine, teaching, social work, etc.). However, it is not the whole community, but the individuals who undertake it who retain most of the benefits through access to rewarding jobs — in both financial and non-financial terms.

So, to answer your question, Rosie, "realistic for whom?", I think the answer is "for everyone."

\* Erin Lyon is President of Exeter University Guild of Students, and a supporter of New Solutions

## The rich

By Alison Brown\*

1. An across-the-board (regressive) increase of 6.5p on the basic tax rate is not the only option open to government for raising revenue. A simpler and fairer (and long overdue) option is to tax the rich.

2. Erin is in favour of graduates spending a large chunk of their working lives paying back their maintenance costs from their student days. Why? Because graduates earn more (a bit of a generalisation, but we'll leave that aside for now). So why not tax high earners more because they are high earners, whether they were helped on their way by a university degree or by an old school tie?

3. "No political party would..." A pathetic excuse which reduces political campaigning to picking between parties and accepting anything they agree on (which, let's face it, is quite a lot). Please note that progressive change in society has come not from spin doctors but from struggle. The student movement should fight for what students need, rather than scrabbling for crumbs that fall from the politicians' table.

4. Let's try extending the 'principle' that "those who benefit from education should pay for it." Kids benefit from school education, people benefit from treatment when they are ill, unemployed people 'benefit' from a fortnightly giro. Shouldn't all these people repay the cost once they return to the world of work, perhaps through a 'partnership' funding policy?

New Solutions live in a world where everything has a price, but nothing has any value.

\* Alison Brown is a member of the Campaign for Free Education