

How to fight education cuts

Sarah-Leigh Barnett,
Co-Secretary Notts FACE,
describes campaigning at
the grass-roots

"NEVER DOUBT that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead, social anthropologist
AS A newcomer to campaigning I have only recently become aware of *Workers' Liberty* and *Action for Health and Welfare*, two publications which offer a varied and thorough look into political struggles of the past, present and projected into the future. I thought you might be interested in a grass-roots story.]

My anger soared to unknown heights when, via my 6-year old's school, I received a letter from the LEA outlining reductions in the 1995/6 education budget.

I have helped in that school. I know that it is *already* on the headline, that it relies heavily on parents raising funds to buy essential materials.

I rang my local Labour MP to protest — write to the powers-that-be in central government, [he] told me, but warned: "It is unlikely to change anything."

I wrote a letter, which turned into a petition, which I used to assess the strength of feeling of other parents at my local "leafy suburbs, middle England" school. In no time at all I had collected over 150 signatures from a primary school with only 180 pupils. This encouraged me to carry my fight further.

I read in a national newspaper about a new campaign — Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE) — and attended their first national meeting in Rugby on 11 February. I was so inspired by the speakers, by the fact that FACE aimed to be cross-party political, to represent and reflect the views of parents and school governors, that I had to spread the word in Nottinghamshire.

The *Nottingham Evening Post* published my letter outlining the background and aims of FACE, together with my phone number.

I received perhaps a dozen supportive phone calls, two of which proved invaluable in establishing Notts FACE campaign: one from Liam Conway of Central Notts NUT, the other from Jean Thorpe of UNISON. At first I was wary of the interest from these two sources — having lived in a political wilderness for too long I was expecting parents and governors to inundate me with phone calls and offers of practical help — but I soon realised the



We need schools that are able to educate our children

enormous potential of these two seasoned campaigners!

They made it possible for me to mail the headteachers of all Notts schools asking them to pass on information to parents about FACE. They also encouraged me to attend a lobby of County Hall where they knew the press would lap up the arrival on the campaign trail of a parent and housewife! The publicity was a big help to Notts FACE.

Our first public meeting attracted over 100 people angry about the proposed cuts to the education budget. They had all suffered the impact of previous budget cuts, and knew what a fresh round of cuts would mean to schools and children. They were looking for a way to fight the cuts, and FACE offered it.

We called for volunteers to form a steering committee — Notts FACE was officially launched.

The people involved represent a range of backgrounds, professions and political persuasions, but we are all fighting to defend high quality state education, to make it the right of children everywhere.

The combined effort of this group, their determination, motivation, application of skills and sheer doggedness in the 'face' of government intransigence inspires me. Together we have taken 250 parents, children and education professionals to the

national FACE demonstration; supported the Notts NUT one-day strike and demonstration, helping to swell the crowds to 3,000; distributed FACE information packs to schools and individuals; run FACE information stalls; addressed parents' meetings called by local schools; helped organise and support the 500-strong Rushcliffe March Against Cuts in Education in Kenneth Clarke's constituency; organised a Notts FACE conference and much, much more.

My contribution to defending state education was a mere ripple; the formation of Notts FACE has turned that ripple into a substantial wave. Uniting with FACE groups nationwide has produced an enormous *tidal* wave of protest that will bring this government's education policy crashing to its knees. Let's make sure future governments take note of what we, the people, demand, and produce education policies that reflect public, professional and political opinion about how *we* should enable *our* schools to educate *our* children. Which takes me back to the quote at the beginning of this letter!

● Take part in a winning campaign and join your local FACE group now. The national FACE secretaries, Seamus Crowe and Bob Jelley, can be contacted on 01203-313375, Notts FACE on 0115-965 4428.

"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex." Karl Marx

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