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MICKELODEON

The ubiquitous failed town planner

Strike three

52 days. That's the amount of time it took from the AUT starting the assessment boycott until they bothered to write a letter to the *gair rhydd*, attempting to explain to students what the hell they think they're playing at.

The boycott of students' coursework and exam papers was started on 8 March, in protest over pay. The level of support that the unions are 'enjoying' from students are shown by the fact that, as I'm writing this, there's a small number of somewhat sheepish lecturers standing outside the Students' Union, trying to win over student support for their boycott.

As it stands, if their action continues, no-one in the third year will actually be able to graduate. Everyone else will not be able to find out what marks they have, so no students will know whether they will have to take resits, let alone what marks they have.

The original action was hard to argue with. The one day walkout from university had clear effects for students that could be worked around. The lecturers had a good reason to strike. There's no disputing that they have been given a bad deal. But they cannot possibly expect support now.

The AUT have forsaken students caring about them by not doing the same in return

Today's letter is 52 days overdue. The attempt at a 'consultation' outside the Students' Union today is a case of much too little, much too late.

The letter also shows that nothing has changed in the AUT's attitude. It wouldn't have mattered if their members had explained to students properly why they are stopping us from graduating, but that hasn't happened. The letter is composed of a very long list of whining, but not much else.

It seems to have completely escaped the AUT that whilst they're trying to push the university into giving them a better pay deal, they're actually punishing us. It wouldn't be as bad if they actually had the consideration to explain to us what they are doing.

The fact is that if the AUT respected students enough to tell them what was going on, they would have more support and have a much stronger chance of getting what they want from the university. But they've forsaken the chance of students caring about them by not doing the same in return.



GRADUATION: Neeeeever going to happen

I'm going to make this as simple as possible for any hardcore AUT members reading this. I've paid thousands in tuition fees to come here, and am over £10,000 in debt. I have no control over the wages you are paid, and after the sheer arrogance of your union, I quite frankly don't care. Seeing as you don't have the courtesy to tell me why you are putting in jeopardy the likelihood of me passing my degree on time, and you have taken months to tell me why, then don't bother me in the street and expect my support.

It does aggrieve me to have to write this about the body that supposedly represents people that I've worked with for almost four years. But there's a pretty sizeable difference between my lecturers who tell me their own views on the boycott - which seem more than reasonable - and the AUT decision-makers who are keeping this action going. Having spoken to students in other departments it is largely the same across the board.

But in the end, I don't care whether it's the lecturers or the university that backs down first, as long as our work will finally get marked. I'm almost at the end of university and have enough to try and deal with without having to think about that.

Coincidentally, I've got 52 days left until I'm leaving the country. It would be pretty darned great if I could have a degree by the time I leave.

If not, I'm going to have a heck of a time explaining to employers across the Big Pond why those crazy striking Europeans mean I don't actually have a degree.

The Third Manifesto

Turning to a completely different kind of manifesto to the ones I've looked at in the past few weeks: there seems to be a sudden urge amongst intellectual organisations to pen their principles and beliefs for the world to revel in.

The one making all the big waves has been the Euston Manifesto, penned by a mix of academics, and claiming support from journalists and bloggers.

The manifesto is aimed at opposing tyranny, racism, whilst developing freedom, human rights and equality. In short, it is a talking shop of the Left.

At the same time, the Manifesto Club tried to launch their own new declaration of ideals. The manifesto is aimed at developing ideas of freedom, human rights and equality. In short, it is another talking shop of the Left.

To give the Manifesto Club credit, they at least have the lofty ambition of 'reclaiming the Enlightenment'.

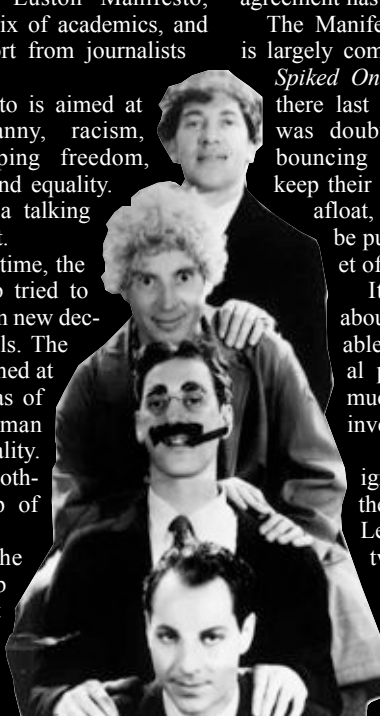
Blimey. But both projects underscore a particular problem in leftist thought: no-one knows what to think any more.

The Euston Manifesto can't even decide on the big topic of the day, whether or not to support the war in Iraq. It's proponents have been split straight down the middle, so no agreement has emerged.

The Manifesto Club, meanwhile, is largely composed of members of *Spiked Online*. I spent a month there last summer. Whilst there was doubtlessly enough ideas bouncing around the place to keep their current affairs venture afloat, they certainly couldn't be put into the straightjacket of manifesto principles.

It looks like there's about to be a rather sizeable outbreak of intellectual posturing - it's pretty much what blogging was invented for.

But what shouldn't be ignored is the fact that there's enough life in the Left that it can support two such ventures at the same time. At a time when talk of the New Right seems to be increasing by the day, it's good to know there's life in the old dog yet.



COMMUNIST: Joke still funny

BALLS

I'm a big fan of advertising in all its forms. Many others feel otherwise. But you can guarantee they'd be the first to start crying if Barry Scott, the Duracell bunny and the Scottish Widow vanished overnight.

Without ads on TV, we'd never get a chance to go to the loo during *Lost*. Without it on billboards, we wouldn't have anything to look at whilst walking down roads (on a side note, the best poster ever was in my home town for Alfa Romeo - 'Because people from Chelmsford expect more than just the average'. They really, really don't.) So all in all, it's pretty lovely.

But every two years our advertising screens are lent over to either the World Flaming Cup, or Euro Flaming <insert year>. You can forget about the Muller Rice captain (actually, I think he was forgotten about long ago, but you get the idea). Every programme insists that everyone's gone football mad.



BURNING: Good

McDonalds announce their promotions are for 'real fans only'. Pepsi insist we'll tell our children about fictional Xbox winning football homecomings. And footballers apparently end every training session with a Pringles kickabout. Should the Muller Rice captain ever be resurrected, odds are he'd be shoved down a park for a quick game with archive footage of the 1966 England team.

It's bad enough you can't move for Flaming football championships through the whole summer without Ronald McDonald turning on you too.

My worst World Cup memory was during France 1998. I was on a French exchange and was staying with a particularly odd French family. I ended up stuck with celebrating French folk for what was the longest weekend of my short life.

But it's at least good to know that we're not the only people that turn into complete eegits come the quadannual events.

In the meantime, I can only suggest that anyone else of the same mindset as me settle down with some nice VHS tapes and blockade your self into your house. It's going to be a long summer.