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Social AUTcasts

Bored of the boycott yet? Of course you are. It's been almost ten weeks now, and with the unions rejecting a 12.6% pay rise offer, there's still no end in sight to the most ridiculous industrial action since the matchmakers strike.

You may notice from the increasingly strained headline that this is a topic we've stuck with for a while, but it was only last weekend that the national media sat up and noticed the gentle academic massacre unfolding in campuses around the country.

Now we're stuck into the exam period we can start to see where everything is going. People here at Cardiff will have their exams (although the same good luck wasn't extended to Aberystwyth students, who have had 45 exams cancelled). Even if we don't have any clue when we're going to get our marks back, at least once the boycott is over and everything is marked, we'll have full degrees.

Despite what the AUT may claim, the action is still having an effect on students here and now. I had the good fortune to have lecturers who have willingly returned coursework, now that we have exams around the corner. Without it, I'd be blithely drifting towards a 2:2 in one module, and wouldn't be able to rectify that in time for my exam.

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Don't believe any boycotter who suggests that their actions will not have an effect on students; a student who doesn't get their coursework back in any particular module is at an immediate disadvantage.

Working in the other direction, one module that normally has a test on supervised computers has had to be left to the wilds of Blackboard, for students to complete whenever they wanted to in a 24-hour period. There were therefore no controls on what resources were used or whether people worked together, in what is known in testing circles as a 'piece of piss' - and this contributed to students' degrees. The AUT action is creating an absolute balls-up of the exam period.

Still, the good nature of my own lecturers does help to underline the difference between them and the AUT leaders, such as the union's General Secretary Sally Hunt (pictured). An offer of 12.6% was made by the university representatives - and the AUT



LECTURER: So, we still have no decent pictures of the boycott INSET: HUNT: Rhyming slang

management didn't even bother putting the offer to their members.

Whilst 12.6 per cent may not be enough to make up for low pay in the past few years, it means that the issue can be set aside until then. Heck, 12.6 per cent in any other profession would be jumped on. To not even put the offer to the AUT members shows that there isn't really that much interest in resolving the issue. Sally Hunt may believe that lecturers 'expect their employers to treat them with some dignity and respect', but it isn't a courtesy that has even once been extended to students, given how long this dispute has been dragged on.

Still, it's an interesting note on which to be thrown out of the educational system. A significant number of the graduating year (me included) are the lucky folk who've been the educational guinea pigs for most of our lives. There were the experimental Key Stages, followed by the newly split A-level system; graduating late is just the last chance the education establishment have to dump on us from a great height before we enter the big wide world.

But what really riles is that the unions continue to argue that the boycott is not their responsibility, but the responsibility of government and the employers. No, they are responsible for low pay. The morally reprehensible action the AUT insist on pursuing is squarely their fault and no-one else.

It's clear that the lecturers' action is going to have an effect on students. For any lecturers who are reading this that are supporting the boycott, then please reconsider the effect you are having, before you ruin the past three years work of your students.

Goody two-shoes

Writing about 'Welshness' in a Welsh newspaper is a notoriously difficult thing to do; one false move and you'll be strung up faster than you can say 'hypocritical'.

But one thing that has consistently bothered me whilst living here is a common blithe insistence by many Welshies that people from outside Wales don't know anything about it, whilst at the same time the accusers invariably don't know their Dover from their Doncaster.

The *South Wales Echo*, however, has truly outdone itself this time. With Jade Goody visiting town to sign books, 'journalist' David James took the chance to try and belittle her in one of the most painful pieces of writing to grace the paper recently.

The interview that Jade Goody had been good enough to give the paper consisted of them asking questions on Wales, and making snide comments when she didn't get them

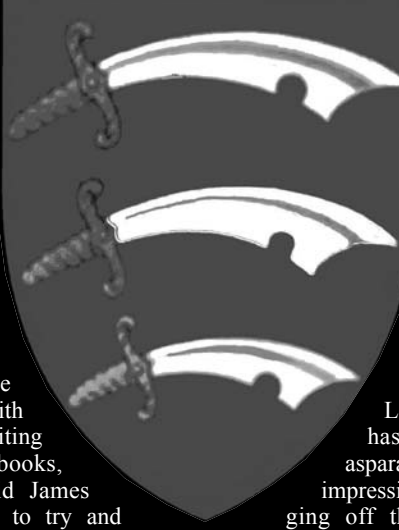
right (despite the fact she actually managed to get most correct).

It would be less obnoxious had the author managed to realise that Bermondsey-born Jade, with Bermondsey being in London, is not an Essex girl. It seems to have escaped the patronising author that Essex, constituting the most populous county in Britain, is not in London.

Sarcastic comments about her knowledge of geography are somewhat undermined by statements about the 'Essex girl who knows all about tormented family life and London slang yet has no idea what asparagus is', or most impressively of all, slagging off the 'Bermondsey-born Essex girl'.

Considering how ultra-sensitive it perceives to be even slightly anti-Welsh, perhaps they would like to take a few geography lessons themselves before they start having a pop at anyone else.

ESSEX: Best. Shield. Ever.



FEAR OF THE WEEK

AS I MENTIONED last week, exams and coursework never fail to bring on a season of terror and fear for poor people who don't get to leave the house anymore.

Yesterday I had to walk to the other side of town, past all sorts of people that might try to assault me at any moment. When I bumped into someone I knew the relief was so overwhelming I almost asked them to walk me home.

It's putting me in touch with some of the true terrors of my childhood.

Hmmmmmm...

■ For a long time as a child, I was convinced that Jesus lived in the window of our downstairs loo. If I missed the toilet then he wouldn't love me anymore.

■ One for the Essex contingent: the giant in the Jack and the Beanstalk part of Never Neverland, Southend-on-Sea. Although in retrospect it looked uncannily like Zordon from Power Rangers.



NOT: In my toilet

■ At the end of the local news on TV the slogan 'Closer to Home' came up on screen, but the slanty writing made it look like it said 'Closed to Home'. I was convinced that my parents would get taken away for intercepting military broadcasts.

■ For most of my 11th year, I was gripped by an unassailable fear of Dover Prison.

■ For as long as I've sat exams, I've had a morbid fear I'm going to wee myself when I've sat there waiting for it to finish. (Why do so many of my terrors have to be urine-based?)

■ Between the ages of about eight and eleven, every time I had a shower I was convinced that Attila the Hun was going to get me.

I'm not really sure at what point in the year I started using this column as my personal psychiatrist couch, but don't worry: I only have four issues left to purge my mind of this nonsense.

Next week: *The priest, the vestry and my secret shame*