

## EDUCATION CUTS - THE EFFECT ON NLP

At the risk of boring everyone to stupidity, I'm afraid that a few historical facts seem necessary to fully understand the present position. Before the last election, all parties expressed support for the Russell Report and its modest suggestions for educational expansion. The Labour Party made its usual claims in support of the Open University, and the Conservative white paper, Education: A Framework for Expansion, called for massive expansion in both the further and higher sectors. But in January 1974, the Conservative Government cut £182m off education spending, aiming to cut student numbers by 50,000 by 1976/7. The effect of these cuts was aimed at the post-16 year olds.

Further cuts were introduced in April 1975 by the Labour administration. These cuts of £86m will probably further reduce student places by over 20,000. The cut in capital expenditure is particularly large - £54m. Although Fred Mulley maintains that he is keeping ahead of inflation, the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions estimate that there has already been a real cut of 4% because of planned commitments. The effect will be obvious in the lack of curriculum development, maintenance of buildings etc.

Those of us working in education have already felt the cuts. At the well-publicised North London Poly, we received a 5% cut in staff some 18 months ago, an economy nicely facilitated by the Poly Administration's policy of keeping vacancies unfilled. We have since been told to prune staff numbers still further, and to halve expenditure on part-time teachers. As tax-payers, it makes sense to want rationality in staffing, but the real problem with blanket cuts is that they bite deepest in the most hard-pressed areas. Thus staff are most likely to leave if they are employable elsewhere; this means that the greatest mobility of staff is likely to occur in those areas which are popular and have most students. Their non-replacement is likely to be felt by their colleagues whereas the (unlikely) departure of a scientist, for example, would impose

little strain. Again, the fact that one does not have much sympathy for the profits of Rank-Xerox does not offer much consolation when faced with duplicating restrictions.

The immediate effects are often small, but one is increasingly becoming aware of other, larger developments. For example, Local Education Authorities have reduced the amount of their discretionary awards, and at least one Authority is known to be thinking of abandoning them altogether. It is the implications of these things in the long term which concern us, rather than the petty aggravations which also confront us. The present economies will do lasting damage to the development of post-16 education.

Of course, many forms of action are possible over these cuts. A wider awareness is important in itself, but more positive action seems possible, particularly in the Trade Union Movement. We can also support the NUS in their fight against grant cuts. Few of us would argue that all is rosy in further and higher education, but blanket cuts are not the answer.

Bob Gilchrist

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The recent government cuts of £1250m are expected to mean further cuts in expenditure on education by £500m over the next 4 years. Also there may be a possible further cut of £50m this year if inflation persists.