

News from Education International's Cape Town Congress

Welcome to the first edition of a new UCU newsletter dedicated to our international work, both on substantive education trade union policy and our solidarity work. This first issue has as its main focus, the outcomes of the recent World Congress of the global union federation, Education International.

The next UCU international newsletter will be published in October and will focus on a range of solidarity, global trade and education issues.

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1. A Message from Terry Hoad, UCU's President

Arriving in Cape Town on my birthday to find people singing birthday greetings in public places was a gratifying experience, though it turned into more of a humbling one when I realized the birthday they had in mind was that of Nelson Mandela rather than mine.

But more seriously, the opportunity to attend the 2011 World Congress of Education International on behalf of UCU was for me a privilege and a rewarding experience. We are a trade union whose members' work has many international dimensions – in research and scholarship, in migrations of staff, and in movements of students in the furtherance of their studies. The growth in modern times of state involvement in education and the consequences of the globalization of economic systems has given the international dimension of our work new force.

Being among some 900 delegates from education trade unions from around the world, representing staff engaged with education at all levels from infancy to retirement, gave insight into two things: the diversity of concerns, working conditions and aims of international colleagues, and also the high level to which we all share in common values and aspirations and in the challenges we are facing today.

The visit, both in the formal proceedings and through the informal contacts it was possible to have outside the conference hall, made real a sense of fraternity with those international colleagues. It also pointed to ways in which we can and should act together with them in relevant international forums, to bring pressure to bear on governments and so help maintain and improve educational provision globally. And UCU should play and is playing its part in developing ever better structures within which EI can do that.

The EI World Congress took place this year in a country in which shackles of oppression – literal and figurative – were, within the memory of very many of us, cast off by courageous resistance within South Africa and with the sustained support of trade unionists and others around the world. To have the opportunity to see, even necessarily briefly, the still evolving consequences of that process in a land so rich in natural beauties shows our responsibility to think outside as well as within the confines of our own state.

2. Education is not for sale!

Education International, at its four-yearly Congress, meeting in Cape Town in July, re-energised itself for the fight for public education and a high quality teaching profession in the face of renewed and aggressive attacks by inter-governmental bodies, national governments and for-profit transnational corporations. The Congress, representing some 400 teachers' unions in 170 countries with a total of over 30 million education workers, approved a comprehensive education policy for the first time, making the case for a seamless approach to education across all sectors, with detailed chapters on each sector.

The policy document, augmented by a number of specific resolutions including a particularly strong one on higher education developed with input from UCU, provides the basis for a renewal of the fight with the OECD, World Bank, World Trade Organisation and others seeking to commodify education and de-skill the teaching profession in the context of the global financial crisis.

Congress identified the quality of education, and its place as a public service, as a key battleground. The specific concerns of higher education were addressed, and the fight against tuition fees was referred to the next global conference of EI affiliates in higher education and research, due to take place in Buenos Aires in late 2012 – an important recognition of this sectoral body.

Setting this battle in a broader context, the Congress asserted that investment in education is part of the solution to the global crisis, and called for a new financial order to replace the discredited and corrupt structures which brought the world economy close to melt-down. One of the core action demands was for EI to 'organise a global campaign to achieve a minimum benchmark of the 6% of the Gross Domestic Product for spending on education in all countries and for the adoption and implementation of the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) and a Financial Activities Tax (FAT) which requires changes to economic and fiscal policies in order to increase the financial resources necessary to support all public services, including education.' This is a huge boost for the campaign for the FTT, a flagship TUC policy in the

United Kingdom (see below for further developments in the UK campaign for a 'Robin Hood Tax').

In Cape Town, broad brush motions on global education spending were augmented by important specific motions on for example copyright and intellectual property rights, and, on education and climate change, a composite of resolutions from UCU and the EI world executive. There were also important motions on teacher migration and mobility, and groundbreaking motions on the development of EI's role regarding education support staff, and on recruitment and organisation.

All the resolutions and statements are available on the EI website at: http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/1929.

UCU was represented by Terry Hoad, Kathy Taylor, Alan Whitaker, Paul Bennett and Rob Copeland. The delegation worked with other unions in the British and Irish Group to secure the election of our agreed candidate, Patrick Roach, Deputy General Secretary of NASUWT, to the world Executive.

EI is evolving and the Congress reflected this with an unprecedented number of draft resolutions submitted by member unions as well as those proposed by the world Executive. A number of items were not reached including the UCU draft resolution on vocational education, and steps will be taken to ensure that the world Executive gives due consideration to these issues. UCU will also work with other unions which are concerned to develop EI's internal democracy and transparency, and to promote a new partnership between EI and its constituent unions – an approach which is already paying dividends in higher education and research.

The Congress also provided an opportunity for networking among unions in the global higher education community. The higher education caucus which took place before the Congress, shared information and ideas about means of ensuring that academic and academic-related staff views were heard in key global and regional debates, and it created the opportunity to meet with signatories to the anti-marketisation agreements which emerged from the conference UCU hosted in 2009, and to look at ways of revitalizing this network in closer collaboration with the EI secretariat (see: <http://educationsolidaritynetwork.org/>).

The Congress marked the retirement of Deputy General Secretary Monique Fouilhoux, a good friend of UCU who led EI's higher education work for more than a decade. The higher education brief will be partly held by David Edwards, incoming Deputy General Secretary and David Robinson from the Canadian Association of University Teachers, another staunch ally of UCU who we look forward to working with in coming years.

For more about the EI structure, click on <http://www.ei-ie.org/>

3. Solidarity and human rights

Education International

Solidarity and human rights issues are an important part of the work of Education International. For example, EI is currently running an Urgent Action Appeal on behalf of teachers in Bahrain: http://www.ei-ie.org/en/uas/uaa_details/31 and is examining ways to support new independent teachers' organisations in the Middle East and North Africa http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/1850 (*The next edition of the UCU international newsletter will focus heavily on developments in the MENA region*).

In Cape Town UCU's motion calling for support for the Palestinian university staff union PFUUE, co-authored by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, as a result of other broader resolutions which were put forward, was caught up in an intense debate about policy between the EI leadership and the unions that had proposed motions on Palestine and Israel. We were involved in talks which led ultimately to a statement by the EI Executive on Palestine and Israel, far stronger than anything EI has achieved to date, being read into the Congress record.

Emergency resolutions on South Korea, Northern Cyprus and Haiti were also passed by the EI Congress. The motion on public education in Haiti builds on longstanding EI support for the Haitian trade unions. For example, following the devastating hurricane in January 2010 Haitian teacher trade unions benefited from the use of the EI Solidarity Fund. The Fund was established to assist member organisations in emergencies such as natural disasters, famine, war, persecution or other life threatening situations and is used mainly for short-term relief to help ensure the survival of organisations and their members (for example, as occurred after the Asian Tsunami).

For more on the EI Solidarity Fund, click on:

http://www.ei-ie.org/en/websections/content_detail/3258#intro1

Release of Dr Beltran

In Cape Town it was hoped that we would be joined by Colombian academic Dr Miguel Angel Beltran. Imprisoned for nearly two years on trumped up charges of 'rebellion', Miguel was finally released in June 2011:

<http://justiceforcolombia.org/news/article/984/political-prisoner-professor-beltran-finally-absolved-of-all-charges> . Alongside *Justice for Colombia*, UCU played a key role in securing Miguel's release and his union – the Colombian University Professors' Trade Union (ASPU) - have recently thanked us for our support:

<http://justiceforcolombia.org/news/article/1024/colombian-university-union-thanks-solidarity-and-highlights-ongoing-persecution>. Although in the end Miguel was unable to be in Cape Town, Colombian teachers were well represented at the EI Congress and through their union (FECODE) continue to make sure that trade union rights in Colombia

remain a key issue for EI and many of its affiliates (see: http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/1849).

European solidarity

At the EI World Congress trade unionists from Portugal, Greece and France moved an emergency resolution against neo-liberal policies and austerity plans in Europe. Defending public education in the face of budget cuts has become the number one issue for education trade unionists in Europe and was reflected in a 50,000 strong union demonstration on 17 September in Wroclaw (Poland) demanding greater European solidarity and employment (see: http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/1959)

Concerns about budget cuts, restructuring and commercialisation of higher education featured prominently at the recent meeting in Warsaw of EI's Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC). Meeting twice yearly, HERSC brings together higher education and research unions together from across the European region. The future direction of the 'Bologna Process' and the European Commission's forthcoming plans for research funding under the new Eighth Framework programme (FP8) were also key items under discussion at the meeting.

For more on EI's higher education work, including the HERSC, go to:

http://www.ei-ie.org/en/websections/content_detail/3266

4. Financial Transaction Tax or 'Robin Hood Tax'

As mentioned above, the EI World Congress joined the campaign for a Financial Transaction Tax. The UK section of the campaign is commonly known as the 'Robin Hood Tax' campaign. A new animation tells the story of the campaign so far (with help of some famous celebrity voice-overs!), and aims to inspire people to take action ahead of the G20 Summit. Click on <http://www.robinhoodtaxvideo.org/en/> for more details.

Politically, at the G20 in November in France we have a real opportunity to get a Robin Hood Tax introduced at the European level with the potential to raise tens of billions. French president Nicolas Sarkozy, who is chairing the G20 is leading the call for a European financial transaction tax with Germany keen supporters.

Polls show over 76% of all British voters want to see further taxation on the banks. A Robin Hood tax is timely, technically feasible and morally right. It is set to be the most popular tax in history.

5. Date for Your Diary

World Day for Decent Work – Friday 7 October 2011 - Celebrations at the TUC

Seminars of the Day at the TUC, Congress House

The TUC will be presenting three seminars to mark World Day for Decent Work day:

■ **Decent Work for Domestic Workers?**

This seminar aims to examine what difference the adoption, at the International Labour Organisation, of a convention covering the rights of domestic workers, will make, and how the British government can be encouraged to sign up to it.

■ **Robin Hood Tax**

This seminar aims to address how the British government can be encouraged to sign up to the Robin Hood Tax prior to the critical G20 leaders' summit in Cannes in November.

■ **Can the G20 Deliver Decent Work for All?**

In this seminar a panel of speakers will debate whether the G20 members have the will, the consensus and the means to tackle global inequality and the rising number of people in precarious work.

Click [here](http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-19947-f0.cfm) (<http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-19947-f0.cfm>) to find out more about the seminars, including how to register.

Comedy and Music by Philosophy Football – 7.15pm at the New Red Lion, Islington

For the third year running Philosophy Football is organising a party for the TUC as part of the World Day for Decent Work. This year the evening is headlined by the sublime comedy of Isy Suttie, best-known as Dobby in Channel 4's Peep Show. Plus Llewella Gideon performing her brilliant one-woman show, Little Big Woman. And closing the night a musical fusion of Flamenco, Latin and North African beats from Fernando's Kitchen to get you up and dancing. Plus a DJ set by Melstars: Music filling the dance floor into the early hours. Click [here](http://www.philosophyfootball.com/view_item.php?pid=493) (http://www.philosophyfootball.com/view_item.php?pid=493) for more information including how to book.

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