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1. **Terry Hoad, UCU President, in Canada**

I was fortunate to be able to spend a few days in Ottawa recently as the guest of our sister organization the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), who had invited me to attend and speak at one of their two Council Meetings of the year (25-27 November) and who generously met all the costs of the visit.

It was a different experience from UCU Congresses – roughly half the size, for one thing, with around 150 participants seated half a dozen to a round table. The agenda was organized around discussions of key issues (marketisation of HE, on which I had been invited to speak and to describe UCU's response to that threat in the UK, and academic freedom being prominent topics), agreeing policy statements and hearing and discussing reports from CAUT's officers and committees. It was also a novelty to attend a national trade union meeting conducted in two language, with simultaneous translation facilities available throughout (in practice the great majority of speakers used English).

CAUT comprises 72 'Faculty Associations' representing staff at Canada's various universities. Each is entitled to send one delegate to Council, wielding a vote proportionate to the size of the institution, and all but four Faculty Associations sent a delegate with, in some cases, accompanying observers. There are also six Provincial Associations and three 'Federated Associations', each of whom sent a delegate.

In Canada, local bargaining rules, with staff employed under collective agreements negotiated at the institutional level. CAUT provides support for local bargaining and aims to have incorporated in local collective agreements the substance of their policy statements on various issues, hence the importance those statements have for CAUT. Its policies on matters such as academic freedom also carry some weight in the courts in case of disputes.

A particularly long-running strike, at Brandon University, came to an end as the CAUT Council was meeting. Lasting 44 days, it had been the longest strike in Manitoba's history. In a

motion passed at the Council meeting, the Faculty Associations represented there declared their 'deep appreciation to BUFA [Brandon University Faculty Association] for standing strong in the face of employer intransigence, union-busting bargaining tactics, and interference by the Manitoba NDP Government.'

A topic of concern to our Canadian colleagues was the spread of contracts with companies such as Google and Microsoft to run university email systems, those contracts often threatening the privacy of individual staff members' email correspondence.

Participants at the Council meeting seemed keen to hear about our engagement with the issue of marketisation, and in turn I found their discussions of other topics informative and stimulating. I will be looking to draw on the latter at relevant points in UCU's deliberations. All in all, the visit demonstrated very clearly the benefits of collaboration between our two organizations, despite or perhaps because of the differences between them and between the contexts in which they operate.

2. Report of 3rd Latin American Higher Education and Research Conference, Buenos Aires by Paul Bennett

I attended the 3rd Latin American Higher Education and Research Conference in Buenos Aires from 7th to 9th November. I was present at the invitation of the Argentinian union CONADU as a Vice President of the EI European Region (ETUCE).

Although delegates from only 4 Latin American unions were present (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru) at the conferences, this reflected the decision to exclude for the moment the larger number of unions who had attended the previous conferences, but who either were not members of EI or who had not been sufficiently active. The seminar which followed the conference, and which looked more closely at several developments in the region and particular countries was attended by a slightly wider range of national unions.

The key aim of the conferences, of setting up an embryo regional Higher Education and Research Committee took a significant step forward at this 3rd conference, spurred by the pace of development in the region but also the need to host the 8th EI Global Higher Education and Research Conference in the Region next year. Carlos De Feo from CONADU is chair of the committee and a programme of meetings and visits to other potential member unions was sketched out. They are well aware of the opportunities hosting the 8th Global will give them.

I addressed the conference on a range of issues including the political and economic situation in Europe and the UK, the Bologna Process and the work of EI in Higher Education and Research and in cooperation and development, and gave an interview for the CONADU newspaper.

I also had useful discussions with CONADU colleagues who will be hosting next year's 8th EI global Higher Education and Research Conference and with the EI regional staff, who will also be involved in the Conference organisation. Pedro Gonzalez of the Spanish union FECCOO

was also present throughout in an advisory role – having been active in assisting the development of Latin American regional higher education union capacity in recent years.

The EI regional staff, Combertry Rodriguez Garcia and Gabriela Bonilla Pacheco, expressed a wish to explore new ways of working including intra-regional cooperation and development, with the secretariat in Brussels and at the forthcoming global Cooperation and Development conference.

Key background factors include the very positive political climate in the region, its avoidance to a great extent of the damage wrought by the 'global' economic and financial crisis, and the potential future held out by the ambitious plans (including the UNASAUR project) linking the fortunes of 12 Latin American countries with the objectives of developing a socially responsive political paradigm and becoming a powerful global economic player to rival the EU and China. While there was a real sense that the region had a new opportunity to develop its identity, having to a considerable extent shaken off US imperialism, there was a degree of recognition of the differences, political cultural and economic, between the partner countries.

Linked to the main meeting was a seminar on Wednesday 9th, the opening session of which further elaborated the ambitions governments of 12 countries and unions across Latin America have for collaboration and integration. The ideas are breathtaking in scope with the ultimate objective of a 'patria grande', a unified Latin American country which would be driven by a progressive social agenda in contra-distinction to the brutal market forces behind the 'Washington consensus' or the 'Caribbean model' still being pursued by Mexico and Colombia. Latin America is a source of some inspiring thinking while Europe is in the doldrums!

The final series of presentations were an academic trade unionist, a student leader and a rector on the crisis in education and in wider politics and society in Chile, over the neo-con government's aggressive imposition of its privatisation agenda and the growing social movement fightback. It was a sobering reminder of how hard the establishment of the progressives' transcontinental dream might be.

3. Report of the Miami 5 Vigil

Over 250 people, including the UCU's General Secretary and President, braved pouring rain to show solidarity with the mothers of the 'Miami 5' outside the US embassy on Thursday 1 December. The 'Miami Five' are Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and René González, five Cubans falsely accused and jailed by the US government of committing espionage against the United States.

The fifth annual US embassy vigil heard from trade union general secretaries and leaders, lawyers, and MPs who all pledged their continued support for the campaign for family visitation rights and their freedom from US jails. It was organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, to which UCU and many other UK trade unions are affiliated to.

For further information about the 'Miami Five' click on:

<http://www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/miami5/index.asp> and on:

<http://www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/news.asp?ItemID=2122> for the photos from the recent vigil.

4. Visit to Trade Unions in Norway

From 2 to 4 November Rob Copeland and Terry Hoad made a brief but worthwhile (and enjoyable) visit to Stavanger in Norway to take part in a meeting celebrating the 30th anniversary of Landsforeningen for universiteter og høyskoler (the National University and College Union), a section of the Norsk Tjenestemannslag (the Norwegian Civil Service Union) [NTL]. Terry had been invited to speak on the current economic, political and social situation in the UK, its effect on UCU members and our work in response to the threats posed. Rob took part in discussions on possible future collaboration with the Norwegian union, with which we have had no previous dealings.

Many of the issues facing the NTL are similar to the ones facing UCU members. Key issues for them include the transition from 'University College' to 'University' status, the shift towards a more corporate form of university governance and leadership, the impact of 'New Public Management' on working practices, the increasing measurement of research outcomes and the outsourcing of cleaning and ancillary services. Although pensions are not under attack at the moment, NTL are anticipating future changes to public sector pensions and so were interested in developments in the UK.

At the same time, the Norwegian economy has largely escaped the worst effects of the global financial crisis and political commitment to the 'Nordic model' of public services, including higher education, remains strong. For example, parliamentary representatives from the ruling parties (Labour and Socialist Left) attended the conference and were largely sympathetic to the NTL's position on New Public Management. Norway is also the only country left in Europe that offers free tuition to international students. In that sense, it is possible to point to Norway as an alternative to a marketised higher education system.

Colleagues from the University and College section of NTL will be in London in the New Year, and it is hoped their visit will provide a further opportunity for discussions with UCU.

5. Corporate greed has got us into this mess – end it now!

There would be no global economic crisis now if corporations paid their way, an authoritative new study finds*. The study was commissioned by the Research Institute of Education International on behalf of the Council of Global Unions, and written by an international team of academic and trade union analysts. It was launched at Congress House in London by the global President of EI, Susan Hopgood, ETUCE President Ronnie Smith, Christine Blower of the NUT and other senior UK education trade unionists.

In the last generation, there has been both a huge increase in the proportion of global income taken as profit – and an even bigger percentage increase in the unpaid tax on those profits. Further, a staggering 60% of all global trade is now routed through tax havens, minimising

the amount of tax paid and maximising corporate profits, at the public expense. In the European Union, tax evasion is estimated at up to 2.5% of European GDP. World-wide, corporate tax revenues have steadily fallen over the last 20 years, while corporate profits have increased as a proportion of GDP from 25% to 35% in the major OECD countries since the early 1980's. Now trans-national corporations conduct a high proportion of global trade within their own structures, artificially setting prices and moving resources to pay as little tax as possible, or through 'arbitrage', hectoring and bullying national governments to extract tax concessions by threatening to shift their assets to countries with more pliable tax regimes.

The global financial crisis and the corporate greed and short-termist casino culture which led to it, have at least opened up a public debate, and opinion even among policymakers is becoming more supportive of more responsible policies. Public discourse in the rest of Europe is far more open to the consideration of a Financial Transaction Tax than allowed for by George Osborne's casual scorn would suggest. But simply applying and enforcing the existing provisions to roll back (immoral but legal) tax avoidance and (immoral AND illegal) tax evasion, and to ensure that the proper levels of corporate taxation are actually levied in the first place, would make huge strides towards solving our economic ills, and creating a more equitable global polity, in which education and other public services could be sustained and grow, and developing countries could be set on the path to economic stability and equity. Equally important, it would reverse the negative, divisive impact of cuts in public services which is the blinkered approach of many governments at the behest of the international financial institutions, still locked in a tired and failed strategy with its origins in the grisly Reagan-Thatcher era.

The study calls for a 'paradigm shift' and that is certainly needed. We must capitalise on the new and widespread impatience with the corporate sector, work with those governments and international institutions which are beginning to see the light, and build new alliances. The trade unions and the bulk of the NGO sector are already firmly on side. One surprising aspect of the report, is that it demonstrates not only that national tax regimes soft-pedal their demands on international corporations at the expense of ordinary workers: they also create a highly stacked playing field against the small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) which we have been told repeatedly are the area of growth and innovation, but which are firmly anchored in national taxation regimes. The SMEs could be an important ally in the fight for change. The international institutions are impatient with corporate greed, which is sucking the life out of economies and undermining investment in the name of the quick buck. The IMF, World Bank and OECD must work with national governments – including the handful of tiny states which have become tax havens – to take on the corporate giants, to build stable global economies, based on long-term investment, social equity and on products of real value to society, not simply vehicles for further profit-taking or asset stripping.

Since the above report was written, David Cameron's achievement of total isolation for Britain at last week's European summit, underlines the patent absurdity of the UK current policies, kow-towing to British corporate greed to the detriment of the rest of the economy and society. Not only has the Cameron government abandoned any serious attempt at reining in

the excesses of the City financiers, and prevented the international community from helping us to do so, he has put us outside the key processes of European and economic collective responsibility for the foreseeable future. 'Well done Dave!'

*Education International Research Institute: '**Global Corporate Taxation and Resources for Quality Public Services**' (Laura Figazzolo and Bob Harris, eds.) December 2011 (see: http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/Study_Global%20Corporation%20Taxation_Press%20copy.pdf)

6. Justice for Colombia Launches a New Peace Campaign

Justice for Colombia has launched a new Peace Campaign following recent events which have underlined the need for international pressure to push the Colombian government to negotiate with guerrillas in order to achieve social justice, peace and genuine democracy. An Early Day Motion (EDM) has been tabled in the UK parliament calling on the UK Government to encourage the parties to the conflict to enter into dialogue. *Justice for Colombia* are asking supporters to write to their MP asking them to add their name to the EDM. Click here: <http://www.justiceforcolombia.org/campaigns/peace/> for further details.

7. Resources

Latin America Conference 2011, London - Report and Photos

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign have distributed the following report of the Latin America Conference which took place on Saturday 3 December in London: 'The annual Latin America Adelante conference never ceases to amaze. It is amazing that yesterday on the first Saturday in December, for the seventh year running, hundreds of delegates turned up in London at Congress House for a whole day of workshops and speeches. It is amazing because the breadth of speakers and topics constantly expands, as Latin America delivers more progressive governments and real examples of human progress.'

Read the full report and see the photos, including Juantorena with his gold medal here: <http://www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/news.asp?ItemID=2123>.

Terry Hoad writes to Bahraini authorities

Terry Hoad, UCU president, has written to authorities in Bahrain to urge them to review charges and convictions and commute sentences of all teachers, teacher unionists and students charged with offences related to the exercise of freedom of speech and right to assembly. He wrote expressing particular concern about the appeals of the Vice-President and President of the Bahraini Teachers Association (BTA). Since the letters were sent the appeals have been delayed until February 2012. Read the letters here:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2408>

8. Dates for Your Diary

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: End the Siege on Gaza Demonstration

Protest Rally at the Israeli Embassy in London - Tuesday 27 December 2011, 1-3pm

The rally will be a commemoration of three years since the beginning of the three week Israeli attack on Palestinian people in Gaza in December 2008/January 2009 and a protest against the ongoing violence and siege against Palestinians living in Gaza.

http://www.palestinecampaign.org/index9b.asp?m_id=1&l1_id=4&l2_id=99&Content_ID=2274

If you have any comments or feedback on International News, please send to Diana Hendry at dhendry@ucu.org.uk.