UMUCU Hustings 29 Jan 2021 – Ben Pope

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On the questions about national strategy, I believe that we must develop an anti-precarity campaign which expressly tackles the exploitation through risk dumping which is the root cause of precarity and all its consequences. This would complement both the casualization aims of the Four Fights dispute and the new 'PGRs as staff' policy to give us a comprehensive anti-precarity platform around which we could mobilize both permanent staff and all the different types of precarious staff, as well as directly countering employers' inevitability narrative. I made specific proposals for how this campaign could be structured during the hustings, and there are more details on www.popevsprecarity.com.

The casualization aims of the Four Fights dispute are all important objectives which I support, but even if we could win on all of them, they would amount only to a regulation and a mitigation of the precarity system, rather than a real attempt to end exploitative temporary employment and massive, systemic precarity in higher education. This is possible, but only if we take a risk-based approach. With a clear policy response to risk dumping, we could organize for more effective industrial action.

On the question of mass online meetings, I certainly see them as part of wider strategy to achieve the kind of mobilization outlined above. There needs to be a reciprocal relationship between national policy and all-member meetings: we need strong policies to mobilize for meetings, and we need the meetings to help inform the policies and strengthen our ability to campaign for them. The quality of engagement at meetings is therefore at least as important as the raw number of participants, and I believe that we need to further develop a strategy against risk dumping before we can hold our most productive meetings. Precarity is an emergency, but one that is permanently ongoing, and so our response has to planned over time.

On the question of organizing precarious research staff, I agree that these staff are often overlooked (I am one myself). The precarity which we experience is perhaps the most structurally embedded of all forms of precarity in higher education, and it can be difficult for research-only staff to envisage a future which is not dominated by fixed-term contracts. Addressing the fundamentals of exploitation through risk dumping enables us to see a better way forward, and a campaign on this basis could engage research staff far more effectively.

On the related questions of supporting international and migrant staff, I argue that we need a campaign which goes to the heart of the precarity system all the more urgently in the case of these members. In the face of the government's hostile environment, it is absolutely vital that we achieve genuine security of employment by fundamentally shifting risk burden from employees to employers. A mere regulation or 'taming' of precarity as it currently functions will not improve migrant colleagues' security of residence in the UK.

On the question of involving permanent staff in anti-casualization work, I believe that it is vital to emphasize the fact that our workload and casualization disputes ultimately arise from the same exploitation, namely the ability of employers to offload (rather than manage) their workforce planning risk in the form of both excessive workloads and temporary contracts. I feel that we've relied too much on a 'mutual aid' approach in which precarious staff fight for the issues most

important to permanent staff in exchange for permanent staff standing up to the precarity which dominates our experience of work in HE. To achieve greater solidarity, we need to make it clear that our struggles are really one and the same. I have just started work on a branch-level project on the interrelationship of workload and workforce planning at Manchester.

On the question of branch experience and securing wins for casualized workers, I'm proud of what I've achieved since I joined UCU in the second half of 2019 (before which I was working in Germany). In the summer of 2020 I supported fixed-term colleagues who were facing redundancy during the pandemic as part of the Manchester Anti-Precarity Network, and although we couldn't stop the redundancies, we challenged the university management in new ways which produced new ideas about precarity, informing the position which I'm putting forward in this election. But as a relatively new UCU member, I'm clearly not standing in this election on the strength of my CV. As a new member, I instead have new ideas about anti-precarity policy which I believe are important, and I therefore feel that I have a duty to make a case for these ideas. An NEC role is clearly different from a branch organizing role, and a focus on policy and strategy is appropriate to an NEC position.

On the question of affiliations to political parties and activist groups within the union, I'm not currently a member of any political party. I am a member of a new activist network called UCU Commons, all members of which subscribe to values of equality, transparency, and collective action to achieve genuine change which are listed here: https://ucucommons.org/our-values/. It was suggested during the hustings that UCU Commons is a continuation of the 'Grady4GS' campaign: some current members of UCU Commons were indeed involved in this campaign, but many others were not, and I certainly cannot take any credit for any part of 'Grady4GS', as I was working in Germany at the time.