

Austerity, Capitalism and the Restructuring of Irish Higher Education

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There is a deep contradiction at the heart of the way governments are dealing with the crisis. By converting bank debt into sovereign debt, they are injecting huge amounts of state money into a system that they stridently claim runs best as a freewheeling market. This constitutes, as Alex Callinicos points out, 'a moment of discontinuity in the neoliberal era', one in which the crisis has forced Western governments into much greater reliance on the state¹. This paradox is being played out in different ways across Irish society at present, and higher education is no exception. Education is supposed to succumb to the 'out there' of global competition but meanwhile, the Irish government, under the guise of austerity policies, is intensifying its own intervention. The effects are leaden and oppressive: every aspect of Irish third level education has become quantifiable and form-fillable. The Irish university system, in the words of Tom Garvin, is being throttled by managers and bureaucrats, and is breeding an 'indescribable grey philistinism' of Orwellian proportions².

Behind this, lies the desire on the part of employers and the state to use the recession to implement a double-pronged strategy: to tie higher education more closely to the needs of capital and, also to entrench neoliberal ideology in what is taught and thought and in the way higher education work is done.

¹Callinicos, 2012, p6

²Garvin, 2012.

³For example, the university where I work, Dublin City University, now officially carries the title 'University of Enterprise'.

⁴DES, 2011, p72.

⁵DES, 2011, p23.

Ideological offensive

The Hunt Report, officially launched in January 2011, marked an escalation of the ideological offensive. Offering a long-term strategy up to 2030, the report officially declared higher education to be an adjunct of the economy with a mission to further 'commercialise' educational provision, research activity and the student experience. Its institutions were to reinvent themselves, complete with CEO-style presidents and a flock of business managers, as 'universities of enterprise' and as producers of high skilled, employment-ready graduates, rebranded now as human capital³. Becoming 'entrepreneurial' entailed reorganising research so that it was revenue rich and geared to discovering what multinational corporations in Ireland specifically wanted. 'R&D' was to dance to the tune of big business and big business could tap into what was on offer free from state-funded universities. Enabling business opportunities, incubating innovation, nurturing entrepreneurialism, incentivising start-ups, commercialising knowledge, individualising intellectual property, and other a host of other corporate clichés now directed the pursuit of knowledge⁴.

Producing an employment-ready workforce meant churning out highly skilled, 'responsive' graduates, who would attract 'value-added investment' and would become a 'workforce capable of dealing with the increasingly complex demands of the

global economy'⁵. This involved rewriting all the modules taught so that they captured 'learning outcomes', made up of minutely subdivided performance skills which the student could supposedly 'do' at the end of the module, (regardless of whether the module was French literature or physics, social theory or analytical science). These skills tables constituted a convenient checklist for an employer but this did not stop academics across the land, hurried on by the dictates of the EU/Bologna harmonisation process, ticking the skills boxes for their various degrees.

The real string pullers now came out from the wings. The Hunt Report Strategy Group was an overwhelmingly corporate grouping. It was chaired by Dr Colin Hunt, Director of the Irish Branch of the Australian financial corporation, Macquarie Capital Advisors, which had interests in private education. It included representatives from the World Bank, boards of multinationals in Ireland, university managements, but, among its fifteen members, astonishingly not one Irish academic⁶. Education policy from now on, the Hunt Report made abundantly clear, was a matter for big business, not for academics, nor for legislators. Parliamentary procedures were summarily put to one side. The Hunt doctrine was fast-tracked, not for the first time, to become official government policy, and appeared straight away on the Department of Education's website⁷.

Most of the policy had been drawn up prior to the crisis. But the arrival of the worst economic depression the Irish state had ever experienced forced some

last minute adjustments. The expansion of higher education continued to be advocated but now with the surprising twist that the already high percentage of those attending college should rise further. The government set a target of a 72 percent participation rate, up 17 percent on today's figures⁸. It also tagged on a new function for higher education in the recession. Where higher education had followed the boom, it was now to lead the recovery. Investment in 'human capital' was the means by which Ireland's knowledge economy would take off. The report painted an idyllic picture of Ireland as 'a commercialisation hub in Europe' which would deliver 'quality', well-paid jobs' for 'the next phase of the development' of the Irish economy⁹. The question of why capital was not being invested much anywhere during a deep recession seemed to elude the notice of these 'human capital' enthusiasts.

The appointment, in 2012, of a new Chairman (sic) of the Higher Education Authority marked another overtly ideological stance. For the first time in the agency's history it was someone who was a pure bred capitalist with no background in education. John Hennessy, formerly CEO of Ericsson Ireland, quickly made his mark by declaring that colleges needed to find ways of 'unshackling' publicly funded universities from 'restrictive practices'¹⁰. This was the other agenda of the Hunt Report - to dismantle the working conditions of public sector workers in the colleges and universities in order to get more with less. Over the period 2004-05 to 2009-10, full-time student numbers increased by 20 percent while public funding per full-time stu-

⁶, 2011, p9; Coulter, 2011. The only practising academic was from Finland.

⁷See http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/he_national_strategy_2030_report.pdf. on the Department of Education and Skills website. The same quick conversion from report to official government policy happened with the OECD Report on Higher Education in 2007.

⁸Hazelkorn and Massaro, 2010, p 14

⁹DES, 2011, p 21

¹⁰Flynn, 2012.

dent fell by 16 percent¹¹. Further shortfalls would be picked up by those that delivered education in the institutions. Courtesy of the Croke Park Agreement, staff reductions in universities over the period 2009- 2011 have been of the order of 6 percent per year and wages across the university sector have fallen in real terms by between 16-23 percent¹². It was now argued that more intensive work and longer hours needed to be put in by lecturers, administrative and technical staff so that even more could be delivered with even less.

Hennessy's other suggestion for higher education was that the hitherto small private sector should expand. In this, he was looking to what had already been done in the recession elsewhere. The University of Phoenix at Arizona showed how quickly for-profit institutions could fill the gap of falling federal funding for community colleges. It made billions of dollars through the delivery of millions of almost useless diplomas, via the callous exploitation of working class people who were desperate to increase their employment prospects¹³. Education for profit was a bit like subprime education, with the same misery of mounting debts for the poor.

Human capital, skills and the knowledge economy

The human capital view of education, promoted a long time back by the Milton Friedman Chicago School of Economics, proclaimed that individuals, not society were responsible for education. If students

paid for it, they would reap later the reward of higher wages¹⁴. Human capital theory incorporates education into the capitalist dream of rising up the social ladder through your own efforts. The Hunt Report speaks a lot about human capital being key, for individuals and for economic recovery¹⁵. So prevalent is the notion that upskilling is the route to economic recovery, that it is seldom challenged. At a common sense level, it seems to fit how economies work and seems to argue for education being directed towards jobs, rather than ivory tower pursuits. But it is selling us a pig in a poke, with some serious political outcomes.

Capital flocking to where there is a pool of highly skilled workers or the knowledge economy generating an endless supply of 'value-added' jobs are myths, as British sociologists, Phillip Brown and Hugh Lauder show¹⁶. The ideological construct of the 'knowledge economy' assumes things about today's world of work that do not hold up. Demand for knowledge workers does not far exceed the numbers now graduating; technical innovation does not create ever more jobs; Furthermore, it does not follow that Irish 'knowledge workers' will be in a position to earn more than workers from elsewhere, nor that knowledge workers in general can earn higher wages.

First, the demand for knowledge workers is way behind numbers graduating from college. In fact, graduate unemployment in Ireland, in 2008, tripled over the previous years and graduates have been the

¹¹HEA 2012a, p5.

¹²23% was the figure given by one trade union activist in DCU who is a lecturer below the bar, ie. the lowest grade of lecturer, a place she has been for twelve years.

¹³See Frontline video College Inc. for a chilling account of for-profit education at <http://video.pbs.org/video/1485280975>

¹⁴Becker, 2002, p3. In the fifties when Gray Becker first coined the term human capital it was considered too debasing to use for people.

¹⁵DES, 2011, p 10.

¹⁶Brown and Lauder, 2006; Lauder, Young, Daniels, Balarin and Lowe, 2012.

most likely to emigrate. An HEA survey of the graduates of 2008, found that only 34 percent of graduates found employment in their country of origin¹⁷. Unemployment among the 18-25 year olds, amongst which there are many graduates, is officially 30 percent in Ireland, the fourth highest in Europe after Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy¹⁸. In this situation, higher education is less of a gateway to employment than a temporary backdoor from unemployment. Significant numbers of young people are re-entering or remaining in education in the hope that to do so will better equip them for jobs¹⁹. This has the added advantage for the government that those who would potentially be joining the dole queue are now paying for themselves in education and bringing down the official number of unemployed²⁰.

Secondly, technological advances, even during periods of expanding capitalist investment, do not continue to create ever larger employment opportunities. In the ICT sector, even where there is significant investment, for every knowledge job there are often far more lower-paid service jobs²¹. But also new technology tends to squeeze labour out and reduce the number of workers needed. For example, the latest state-of-the-art assembly line of the Ford plant in Chennai, India requires highly skilled workers but, even with doubling its annual production, fewer workers than at Ford's other plants²².

It is also wrong to assume that high skilled graduates will necessarily be able to

earn an-above-the-average wage or have, in Hunt's words, 'value-added' jobs. Brown and Lauder show, in the British context, that equally educated but much cheaper graduates elsewhere in the world are also available for high skilled jobs. They argue by 2020, 195 million people in China will have degrees, and in this situation the British graduates will be assured no special place²³. Most British graduates end up working in low-paid knowledge work and 20 per cent of them get no work at all²⁴.

But there is a deeper fallacy in the idea that high skills can attract higher wages. Highly qualified graduates, when they do get work, are not using what they know. Becoming a member of a technical support team may demand that you have a degree, but it doesn't lead to a meaningful career and certainly isn't well paid. It mainly consists of boring 'grunt' work, often requiring thinking conceptually about very little, except perhaps how to shorten the conversation with another irate customer, or to wangle the next break. It is worth remembering this when the government announces new jobs in the ICT sector. For example, IBM's headline announcement in May this year that it was creating 200 'high skilled' new jobs 'in the legal financial and supply chain' for its global services centre in Mulhuddart, Dublin, did not mention that an IBM software developer with one year's experience can expect to earn €25K per annum (marginally below the wages of someone doing security work), that IBM already makes use of students, that interns

¹⁷HEA, 2012a, p5.

¹⁸MaryFitgerald, 2012.

¹⁹National Youth Council of Ireland, 2011.

²⁰Lipman notes the same uses of education as bulwark against disaffection amongst the unemployed, in the US. See Lipman 2011, p 124

²¹Brown and Lauder, 2003, give as an example Silicone Valley, in the US, where huge capital investment has not resulted in large amounts of knowledge work.

²²See <http://www.asiaone.com/print/Motoring/News/Story/A1Story20110617-284680.html>

²³Brown and Lauder, 2006.

²⁴Lauder, Young, Daniels, Balarin and Lowe, 2012, p6

work for free and that, only two years ago, the 190 jobs IBM created in its hardware operations in the same plant in Mulhuddart were moved to China²⁵. These new ‘high skilled’ jobs are low paid, wide open to exploitation and precarious.

The increase in advanced technology and the growth of boring work are not just a coincidence, they are directly linked. Under capitalist production, whose object is more productivity for more profits, new technology brings with it an ever-greater division of labour. During the huge expansion of the service industries in the 1970s, it was noted by the American socialist economist, Harry Braverman, that while modern production calls for much more sophisticated levels of knowledge, the average worker, tied to a job that involves only a tiny repetitive part of the whole work process, experiences deskilling²⁶. The office routine is converted into ‘a factory-like process in accordance with the precepts of modern management and available technology’²⁷. ‘Thank you for calling xxx, my name is Noel, can I have your home telephone number please?’ I have spoken this exact sequence of words at least two thousand times in my life’, Noel, from Dublin told an Irish newspaper in his account of what it was like being a call-centre drone²⁸. Knowledge work, far from holding the potential for more autonomy for the individual worker, in practice is work which is removed from the worker’s con-

trol and belongs to management²⁹. Knowledge put to work in capitalist social relations is monopolized and controlled by the few and, through ever greater division of labour, results in the vast majority experiencing degradation of their work. Ever more specialized labour has other advantages for capital, besides greater productivity; it also renders more measurable the routines of work and also makes the work more easily replaceable. For the individual worker, for perhaps only €18k a year, this is a long way from the ‘value-added’ work beckoning graduates in the strategy mapped out by Hunt and his group.

Higher education and capitalism

Because of the global impact of neoliberal ideology, and the radical changes it has brought, it is often thought that hitching education to the economy is a new phenomenon and that the way to combat this utilitarianism is to look back to an earlier age when education and scholarship was somehow society-free. Some contributions in a recent Irish collection of essays, *Degrees of Nonsense*, (which includes, surprisingly, a foreword by British arch-conservative, Roger Scruton,) follow this line of thinking. A chapter by a neo-Hayekian, Prof Dennis O’Keeffe (from the University of Buckingham, Britain’s only private university) puts the demise of

²⁵See <http://www.itjungle.com/tfh/tfh102510-story07.html>. See also website of the Communication Workers of America, Alliance@IBM, <http://www.endicottalliance.org/archives/jobcutstatusandcomments2.htm> so for a frank reporting of the precarious and exploitative conditions of Bly Sky IBM in the US.

²⁶Braverman, 1974; Barker, 1976; Bellamy Foster 2011; see also Harvey 2006 for a succinct account of Braverman’s position.

²⁷Braverman, 1974, p347.

²⁸Burke, 2008. See also Justin O’Hagan, call Centre Workers in Northern Ireland. Stream and Invest NI Irish Left Review at <http://www.irishleftreview.org/2009/08/24/call-centre-workers-northern-ireland-stream-ni-invest/>

²⁹Hardt and Negri, 2005, argue that workers have greater autonomy in the new networked world and can establish islands of resistance within the system.

the university down to state interference public ownership and, apparently, ‘institutional’ and ‘ideological socialism’³⁰. Another written by Gerard Casey of UCD, (formerly of the pro-life Christian Solidarity Party), takes the surprising line that ‘just as state funding has been bad for the Christian churches in the past so too is it bad for the university’³¹. Cardinal John Henry Newman’s name is often mentioned. Newman’s so called ‘liberal education’, which became the model for a Catholic university in Dublin in the nineteenth century, offers no model at all: it was ‘highly class and gender bound’, more like an aristocratic club than a university, a mini-theocracy imbued with the worst elitist excesses of the Oxford of his day³².

Not all opposition to the neoliberal university is backward looking. Stefan Collini’s popular book, *What are Universities for?* rejects university elitism and puts forward a clear case against intellectual enquiry being shackled to financial goals. He sees the cause of the new instrumentalism of higher education in Britain in a new way of thinking about ‘efficiency’ and the way universities are administered, financed and run³³. Because he does not offer broader economic and political causes, university utilitarianism comes to be explained as the adoption of a mindset. His conclusion is to suggest an alternative set of values which would respect good scholarship and science and preserve the intellectual heritage of mankind. This is all very well but unless we understand how the business model came to be dominant, not only locally but globally, we lose sight of the social origins of present changes in

higher education. Any critique of the neoliberal university is not only an intellectual argument but a political one, and one which, to alter things, will require institutional and social change.

Left-wing critiques also tend to rely on cultural and philosophical values to explain the rise of the marketization of the education. For example, Kathleen Lynch, gives a clear description of how the university is obsessed with measurement and performance, but explains this in terms of positivistic thinking, what she calls ‘carelessness, Cartesian rationalism and liberalism’. ‘Carelessness’, she understands as the ignoring of emotional thought and feeling which encourages ‘the autonomous rational persons whose relationality is not regarded central to her or his being’³⁴. Lynch’s draws on Martha Nussbaum, whose *Not for Profit: why Democracy Needs the Humanities* also argues that it is ‘deficiencies in compassion’ that have made universities so perniciously profit-driven. Nussbaum argues that the humanities should be the champions of reinstating the value of human passion and imagination, and Rousseau and Dewey our models³⁵.

It is not possible to separate ideas about education from the contending political and social forces within society as a whole. Moral values do not drive education systems. Schools and universities, perhaps even more than other social institutions, bear the stamp of the capitalist world. Marx’s description of the interplay between the infrastructure - the economy made up of the forces and relations of production - and the superstructure - the

³⁰O’Keeffe in Walsh, 2012, p112-114.

³¹Casey in Walsh, 2012, 29.

³²Collini,2012, pp39-60.

³³Collini, 2012, p38

³⁴Lynch, 2010, p59.

³⁵Nussbaum, 2010, p86.

state and its institutions, political and civil society, culture and ideology - is relevant to understanding how education is shaped by capitalism. He saw the 'the mode of production of material life' as conditioning 'the social, political and intellectual life process in general' which meant that the ruling class has at its disposal the means of mental production, in which he included education³⁶. As the economic has come to dominate everything, Marx's proposition that the economy directs other social institutions rings truer today than ever. However, the process is complex, and can, for various reasons, not turn out quite as capitalists would have it.

The American Marxists, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, writing in the 1970s argued that education in capitalism replicated class divisions, what they called 'the correspondence principle'. They saw universities as select institutions which, under the cover of intellectual achievement and merit, legitimised social hierarchy³⁷. In Ireland in the 1980s, when only 20 per cent of Leaving Cert students attended college³⁸, their characterisation seemed true. Elsewhere - in France, Italy, Germany and the UK - higher education expanded much more and, even though its main function remained to provide society with employers, managers, professionals, top public servants, the 'correspondence principle' did not quite work out in practice. As the sixties gave rise to economic and political disillusionment, the universities became a ferment of revolutionary ideas and a site of resistance and revolt against capitalist war and exploitation. The Italian socialist, Antonio Gramsci described how in mod-

ern capitalism, universities were required to go beyond producing the formal juridical graduates of the classical era. With the increased complexity of capitalist production, they had to combine intellectual and technical learning and train both professionals and teachers but also specialised functionaries and managers for scientific industrial production³⁹. He argued, writing in the 1920s, that there was always a gulf between university graduates and the working class, but that as universities widened their social functions they also produced independent thinkers and radical critics of the system⁴⁰. Gramsci's understanding of the tensions within the capitalist institutions of education help us better understand how universities today both reproduce class society and harbour the potential to contest it.

Capital and higher education

What has become known as the commercialisation of education is not just a mindset, but a symptom of the way in which the interests of state and capital are interlocked. As competition for markets and profits is even more intense, education is increasingly commandeered by capital to both deliver research and development, vital for competitive advantage, and also to produce tomorrow's workforce primed with the skills, discipline and ideology that it wants. This has played out in different ways in different countries. In the US, it has taken predominantly the privatised, education for profit route; in the UK, and in Australia, over a longer period of time, the state has sought to shift the burden

³⁶Marx, 1977 and 1974, p64. See Harman, 1986, for a clear debunking of mechanical interpretations of the base/ superstructure relationship <http://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1986/xx/base-super.html>

³⁷Bowles and Gintis, 1976; see also Belamy Foster 2011, p8, for an account of their work.

³⁸DES, 2011, p35.

³⁹ Gramsci, 1971, p28.

⁴⁰Gramsci, 1971, p32.

of funding from the state to the individual through the introduction of student loans. In Ireland, the tight capital-state overlap in education has taken the form of the corporate take-over of the universities⁴¹.

In the recession, this process is being speeded up. Multinationals are using Ireland as a base for their R&D and increasingly using universities and institutes of technology as their own private research laboratories. The 2008 report from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment makes abundantly clear how ‘knowledge and enterprise clusters’ operate for the benefit of the multinationals⁴². Its ‘clusters’ map for Ireland shows graphically how corporations in Bio/Pharmaceuticals, Internationally Traded Services, and ICT are shadowing universities and institutes of technology. For the ICT sector, for example, the three universities in Dublin share ‘knowledge flows’ with Google, eBay, Intel, HP and Microsoft; the University of Limerick with Dell and Analog Devices; the UCC and CIT with Amazon and Apple; NUIG with Nortel and SAP⁴³. These college-corporation partnerships are established with the help of large amounts of state money. A key government agency, with an annual budget of around €165m, is Science Foundation Ireland, which has funded the establishment of at least nine Centres for Science, Engineering and Technology which weave universities ever tighter to multinational companies⁴⁴. Corporations give very little in return. Actual monetary contributions from the private sector to the Irish higher education, at 2 percent

of GDP, have remained very low, and well below other countries in Europe. Capital sometimes finds harnessing state resources for its own ends more effective than privatisation *per se*.

Class and higher education

The huge increase in students attending Irish higher education has been strongly marked by social class. Higher participation rates have overwhelmingly benefited the wealthy. Already over the Celtic Tiger period, private education and grinds mushroomed, enabling all the children of the well-off to enter higher education for the first time⁴⁵. The participation rate was 100 percent for the top, ‘higher professional’ category, and outstripped everyone else, and the lowest income category by a multiple of six⁴⁶. Class also influences the subjects studied, with those entering professional faculties such as law, medicine and dentistry disproportionately from middle and upper class backgrounds. There has been little change to entry patterns for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Working class areas in the cities are still hugely disadvantaged regarding entry to third level. The 2006 census found that only 5.8 percent of people living on the North side of Cork city had primary degrees with many not even completing secondary education⁴⁷. A further class distinction, exists between the Institutes of Education and the universities; only 15 percent of university students are from skilled-manual, semi-skilled-manual and unskilled backgrounds⁴⁸. The recession has made

⁴¹Allen, 2007a, p133-159.

⁴²DETE, 2008, p7

⁴³DETE, 2008, p9

⁴⁴DETE. 2008, p 10

⁴⁵Allen 2007b; Whelan and Layte 2004, p92.

⁴⁶DES, 2011, p37

⁴⁷Dorrity and Maxwell, 2011, p20

⁴⁸HEA 2012b p94

things even worse. Social discrimination has been aggravated by the government cutting in, 2011, of the maintenance grant by between €2,440 and €3,900 a year for any individual student.

In this situation, speaking of 'human capital potential' in individual terms, or that learning equals earning, is nonsense. Having a degree does not assure you a better job. For example, women are more likely to have a third-level qualification than men: over half of women aged between 25 and 35 have a third-level qualification compared with less than four out of ten men. Despite this, women earn on average around 27 percent less than men⁴⁹. The unequal structures in society, including woeful accessibility to affordable child-care, determine what job you have how much you earn and whether you have a career in any meaningful sense.

Polarisation within higher education

If higher education reflects class divisions in society in terms of the student make-up, there is also a widening social divide amongst those that work in their institutions. At the top, stratospheric pay levels of Presidents, earning, in most cases, over €200, 000 per annum and close behind, a layer of management earning in excess of €125,000 has created a veritable layer of super-rich in the academy⁵⁰. There has been a corresponding drop in salary levels amongst many lower grade lecturing staff and administrative staff. With the Employment Control Framework moratorium on permanent appointments the 2011 budget stipulations on new entrants to the public service, an increasing number of

temporary contracts have been appointed at the bottom of the scale and at 10 percent less than existing staff. There are also a growing number of researchers poorly paid and insecure who work at the whim of an erratic, and bureaucratic, funding system. The fact that trade union membership in colleges has remained high is a sign of growing job insecurity and carries the potential to give organisational form to the frustration amongst the majority who work in higher education.

Resisting austerity and neoliberal education

Crises of capitalism often find political expression in colleges and universities. In the 1960s, the failure of expectations and disgust with governments' involvement in the Vietnam war mobilised hundreds of thousands of students into a movement that left its mark on socialist politics for decades to come. This economic crisis, too, has seen students taking part in the new resistance to capitalism. In Wisconsin, schools and colleges, suffering cutbacks and attacks on their right to union representation, were in the forefront of the struggle. Unemployed graduates triggered the movement of the Arab Spring. In Egypt, they organised alongside independent trade unions in Tahrir Square. In Greece in 2007, students previously thought as socially conservative, were the first to move into battle against austerity policies, and oppose the privatisation of the universities. Last year, the 'Chilean winter' was led by students, who gave expression to the anger against the ravages of the neoliberal market, and were instrumental in delivering one of the largest general strikes in that country in

⁴⁹CSO, 'Women and Men in Ireland' 2011 <http://www.cso.ie/en/newsandevents/pressreleases/2012pressreleases/pressreleasewomenandmeninireland2011/>

⁵⁰See Kerry Public Service Workers' Alliance, *The tumultuous state of Irish academia*, <http://kpswa.wordpress.com/2011/05/20/the-tumultuous-state-of-irish-academia/>

recent times. In the UK, students occupied their colleges over Israel's assault on Gaza in 2008-09, and mobilised massively against the Tories' raising of fees in 2010. Later British lecturers mobilised against attacks on their pensions⁵¹. In the US, students were centrally involved in the occupy movement, in OWS in New York and in Oaklands, where they linked up so successfully with the trade unions. At this moment there is a massive student movement exploding in Quebec.

There is every reason to suspect, despite the claims made about the conservative nature of Irish students, that Irish higher education will also be part of the growing resistance to austerity. The expectations about what education can deliver, either in terms of employment or economic

recovery, will create deep political disillusion⁵². This crisis has far deeper structural causes than skill shortages. Over-accumulation and the crisis in profitability of capital, which led to the massive growth of financialisation, the property bubble, and the subsequent crash has global repercussions that will be long and deep. Slashing public services, including education, to pay the banks, alongside promises that the economy will recover, become less credible as each year passes. Growing graduate unemployment and education cutbacks are changing the political climate in colleges. Seeing how direct action can hold austerity back - whether through the Vita Cortex victory or through the successful refusal to pay household charges - might just provide the tipping point.

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⁵¹Swain, 2011.

⁵²Browne and Lauder ,2003 ,noted that these factors went something towards explaining the student struggle in Britain.

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