



# UNIVERSITY UNITES

Stirling's Principal, Sir Kenneth Alexander accused the government of promoting "a reactionary and backward looking social policy" with severe consequences for the whole of society.

He was one of four speakers at the demonstration against education cuts held in Queens Court, where an estimated 2,500 people met to protest against the University Grants Committee decision to impose major cutbacks on Stirling University.

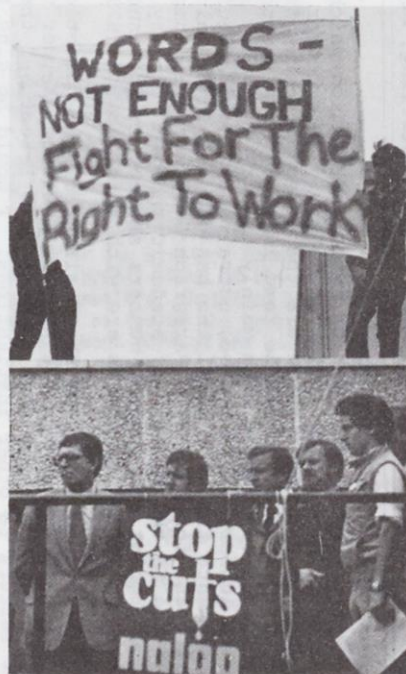
The U.G.C. had faced a difficult task, said Sir Kenneth, but it had emerged as a "bastion of orthodoxy", protecting the interests of traditionalism and ignoring Stirling's innovative role in further education.

Government and UGC had, between them, undermined the principle of equal opportunity to make education a privilege instead of a right. In doing so they ignored the importance of choice in a democratic society, essential for that society's development.

The Principal assured students that there was total opposition to the UGC recommendations within the university. Since the cuts were first announced students, staff and ancillary workers at Stirling had been united against them.

The second speaker, Hon. President Jim Sillars, criticised the Scottish University Principals for their lack of initiative and the disappointing role they had played in the campaign. They had a responsibility, he said, to use their academic prestige, not in quiet diplomacy, but in a crusade against the Tory administration.

Such a campaign, suggested Mr. Sillars could not limit itself to Stirling alone since the effects of cutbacks would be felt too outside the university. Those people who failed to gain a university place would turn instead to the polytechnics, while those who could not reach the polys would join the competition for jobs, so denying thousands the chance of employment.



"Without the stimulus provided by education people could never develop to their full potential. Education cuts then must be seen as "anti-human" concluded Mr. Sillars.

Walter Adam of ASTMS spoke on behalf of the university's one thousand ancillary workers, saying that the question of redundancies was not an issue; none would be tolerated. What was at stake however was the future opportunity of millions of people and not only those going to university. People must be made aware of how education cuts would effect their children, regardless of whether they went into further education.

Letters of support were read out at the demonstration. Local MPs either attended or expressed their support. The one exception was Nicholas Fairburn MP whose lack of involvement did not pass unnoticed by the speakers.

Stirling's own member for Parliament, Denis Canavan, read out the 1979 Tory manifesto, committing a Conservative government to uphold Britain's education standards. In reality though Britain had a worse record for providing further education than almost any other industrial nation while the UGC had ensured that both overseas and home students would face greater difficulty than before.

In addition the cuts represent a threat to the biggest employer in Mr. Canavan's constituency, one which employs 1,100 people and which has generated another 2,000 outside the campus.

Speaking as chairman of Scotland's Labour MPs he promised that local members would agitate in Parliament on Stirling's behalf. The university had been built, said the MP, by the efforts of politicians committed to the right to education and they would continue to support that idea.

The SWSO banner "Words Are Not Enough" remained above the speakers during the meeting. Whether the Labour Party is committed in deed to reversing the Tory policy still remains to be seen.

BRIAN ATTWOOD