



GENERAL REPORT

“The Vandals are at the gates”: defending higher education and research in a time of crisis

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This 7th EI global Higher Education Conference has brought together 110 delegates and 23 observers from 49 affiliated unions in 33 countries. When we last met in Canada, in Montreal in 2002, we were confronted with the major challenge of the GATS and of the marketisation of the higher education sector, as well as the aftershocks of 9/11. Marketisation has indeed become a global phenomenon but in a diversity of ways, not the GATS- driven monolith we predicted in Montreal.

The EI Higher Education Conferences have usually had a big theme or title – ‘Universities: Key Partners for Development’, Dakar, 2003; ‘Higher Education and Research staff in the 21st Century’ – Melbourne, 2005; ‘The Status of Higher Education Personnel – 10 years after the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation’, Malaga 2007. All relatively upbeat, asserting the unions’ place in a rational and ordered university system. The theme of this conference, I would suggest, without hyperbole, has been ‘The vandals are at the gates: defending higher education and research in a time of crisis’. We have explored how far the economic crisis is genuine and how far it is a pretext for the barbarians in power to bring their long-held prejudices and their bankrupt policy proposals out of the cupboard and impose them on us and on other public sector workers. We did not cause this crisis. Reckless political and business leaders did that. Higher education and research are part of the solution: you do not have to be a dyed-in-the-wool Keynesian to see the logic of investing in higher education and research at a time of recession, but in the longer term the universities must provide solutions to the big scientific, technological and social problems – many of them seemingly intractable – which confront the global polity. Certainly that makes more sense than the slash-and-burn that many countries are facing, or the discredited panaceas restructuring higher education as private profit centres.

The current crisis cannot altogether mask the underlying seismic shift towards a more globalised higher education and research community, an arena in which models of cooperation and collegiality versus competition and corporatism, vie for hegemony. We know which side we are on and we need to make sure our voice is heard in the global and national struggles for the future of higher education. Canada and our host union the Canadian Association of University Teachers have been in the forefront of this struggle, and over the years we have appreciated the experience and leadership which

CAUT has shared with us. One of the lessons of this conference must be that need for us all to work more closely together to meet the unprecedented challenges we as trade unionists and as academics, now face.

The opening session of the Vancouver conference was chaired by **Penni Stewart**, President of CAUT/ACPPU (Canada), who welcomed delegates. She referred to the profound world economic crisis and the dramatic shift in the economic and political landscape since the 6th Congress in Malaga in Nov 2007. The public sector is being called upon to pay for a disaster inflicted on us all by private sector greed. The need for concrete trade union strategies and solidarity has never been greater.

Jim Sinclair, President of the British Columbia Federation of Labor - picked up the theme of Solidarity in defense of Education, 'the lungs of democracy'. He described the move in the last 10 years from "low tuition fees and high minimum wage to high fees and low wage minima", with more itinerant workers in North American Higher Education than in agriculture. He condemned the obsession of Governments and society with lowering taxes: for example there have been 57 tax cuts in British Columbia in ten years. The unions must make the case that society has to pay for quality public services.

Fred van Leeuwen, General Secretary of Education International welcomed the presence of CONADU (Argentina) and SNESup (France), and noted that unions from Brazil and Peru had also recently joined EI.

He referred to the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation and the need for affiliates to make use of it in calling governments to account. In particular we must fight the insidious encroachment of the market in education, a direct challenge to collegiality and academic freedom. Fred referred to his participation in the business Leaders forum at Davos and the 'schmoozing' of business by university leaders. Education faces huge challenges of sustainable development and tackling the chronic global teacher shortage which is jeopardising attainment of the Millenium Development Goals. He emphasised the leadership role of the higher education sector within EI.

In conclusion he referred to the attacks on the academic freedom of individual teachers and researchers and in particular called on the unions present to campaign on behalf of Dr Miguel Angel Beltran of Colombia, and to publicise the online petition on his behalf.

1st Plenary : The view from Here: The State of the Profession 2010

Penni Stewart, President of CAUT/ACPPU (Canada), chaired the session. **Bill Ratteree** of the ILO outlined the professional challenges we now face and these include the effects of privatisation, short term and temporary posts and the impact on academic freedom and quality, together with the weakening of assessment, CPD regimes. However, he said, there is some survey evidence of increased job satisfaction! The unions in the sector need to use the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation (as Australian and Denmark have done): it has a number of key clauses which the unions need to invoke, particularly through the complaints procedure.

Mark Thompson, a longstanding member of CEART, pointed out that unlike the 1966 UNESCO/ILO recommendation, the 1997 Recommendation is the formal responsibility of UNESCO only, so it is backed by significantly less resources. EI is a valued partner in this work, and its reports provide authoritative information - but EI needs to provide more evidence. Major issues include the multiplicity of providers, particularly in the private sector, and contingent labour.

Lily Eskelsen, Vice President of the NEA referred to 'the Ebola virus of Reform', the attack on public sector education. President Obama has clearly identified Education and Higher Education as a key part of the solution to the crisis. However, the system is moving costs on to students, driving casualisation of teachers and imposing crude rankings of academics by outcome measures or income generation, with simplistic rewards and punishments. The NEA is robustly fighting these trends and monitoring their effects on education.

Ilze Trapenciere of LIZDA, Latvia, highlighted the gulf between the language of the 1997 Recommendation and the actuality of savage cuts. However even in this environment there have been successes for example, in university autonomy

and academic freedom and the promotion of women, although union representatives are now excluded from university senates, part of a more general attack on trade unions.

Carlos Alberto De Feo of CONADU, Argentina, said that a number of Latin American societies have moved from difficult neo-liberal regimes linked to military repression, towards more populist models. There has been a huge increase in the number of universities in the region from 75 in 1950 to 3,000 today with a wide range of ratios of public to private institutions. The EI-affiliated unions in the region met recently in Buenos Aires and are beginning to build a network of support and encourage more unions to join in the near future. In Argentina, there are 140,000 teachers for 1 million students in public universities but many teachers are part time and less than 20% are unionised.

2nd Plenary: EI activities since the 6th International Higher Education and Research Conference: Update and review

Ingrid Stage of DM (Denmark) referred to the Danish experience of using the 1997 Recommendation and the difficulty of achieving a result unless there was already concrete evidence of an infringement of the Recommendation. Ingrid chaired the 2nd plenary session, in which **Harold Tor**, EI Coordinator, summarised the work EI had undertaken in collaboration with affiliates in the sector on the themes which were identified at the 6th conference in Malaga.

Delegates identified the battles at national level to protect pensions and other conditions, and to resist the threats to academic freedom and the encroachment of business and economic criteria into academic life. **Monique Fouilhoux**, EI Deputy General Secretary, welcomed the ways in which affiliates had responded to the attacks on our sector and our unions. She referred to the Task Force report adopted by the EI World Congress in Porto Alegre in 2004 and pointed to the supplementary report (Annex II in the papers of this conference) which had been prepared by Task Force members for the consideration of this conference. She hoped that the new actions identified in Annex II, will be endorsed and prioritised taking account of our limited resources, and forwarded to the World Executive and the Cape Town Congress in July 2011.

The global economic crisis is in fact highly differentiated with some regions relatively immune or even robust, while in others the mantra of 'crisis' masks the imposition of neo-liberal prescriptions under the pretence that they are objective responses, without a critical analysis of causation.

Delegates argued for more targeted analysis and survey work in respect of higher education, followed by dedicated campaigning. They identified the need for targeted support for union work on the place of higher education in building infrastructure and investment particularly in middle and low income countries, noting the role of Higher Education as a counter-cyclical investment

The conference was concerned that social consequences of crisis include a xenophobic backlash in a number of forms in different countries: EI needs to fight for equity and for education as a public good.

3rd Plenary : Responding to regionalisation / globalization

Manuel Dos Santos of FENPROF, Portugal, chaired the 3rd plenary. **Dominique Lassarre**, UNSA-education, France, outlined the development of the Bologna Process, leading to the creation of the European Higher Education Area this year. She focussed on the role of EI as a consultative member since 2005. She referred to the opportunities for EI presented by the positive references in the Ministerial Communique of March 2010. There is a need to differentiate policies that derive from 'Bologna' and more general global or regional trends which national governments might relate to Bologna. She concluded by referring to the tendencies in other regions to develop Bologna-style frameworks.

David Robinson, CAUT, Canada, outlined emerging trends regarding international copyright and intellectual property rights agreements including the growing recognition of ideas as well as their physical manifestations through to the WTO TRIPS agreement in 1994, and the challenges to copyright in the digital age. ACTA Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement which is being developed has been made more acceptable as a result of pressure from academics and unions. Academics are well placed as both users and owners of copyright material.

Antonio Tinio, ACT, the Philippines, described the effects of marketisation in the Philippines, which has a largely privatised HE system, defined by the World Bank as a private good. The HE system is seen by government as a servant of business and of export industries. These policies have been resisted by the public sector unions and they have been more and more tightly tied down by repressive legislation and violent extra-judicial attacks. The Chair indicated that such policies could be part of the future for other countries too.

In discussion it was suggested that since 2001 'Bologna' has been increasingly driven by competition, which is against its original spirit. However some US institutions are attracted to the Bologna model believing it protects the role of academics. The presentations regarding Bologna and the Philippines were emblematic of the range of possible futures facing universities and their staffs and the nature of the struggles ahead. It was hoped that the lessons of Bologna could be learned by other regions and core principles protected.

Plenary 4 on trade union development cooperation and capacity building

Bernard Bérubé, FPPC/CSQ, Canada, chaired the session. **Monique Fouilhoux** said it was the first time the conference had a dedicated session on this issue and it was important for it to move more centre stage to meet the needs of unions in developing countries - on the principles of equity and sustainability, recognising that this work is long term in character. Support for democratic structures and for effective member services must be developed in parallel. The whole membership including women and young teachers must be engaged. We need to challenge the 'realpolitik' which distributes financial support according to donor interest rather than the actual needs of the countries concerned.

Pedro González López, FECCOO, Spain, referred to the historic links of Spain to Latin America and North Africa. FECCOO have worked with EI and affiliates and other unions in those regions, focussing on Chile and Morocco, as well as a social project in Mali, and spreading experience from those projects. It is essential for the partners to work on the basis of equality and the sharing of ideas. A cooperation with the countries of the Mediterranean rim has also been developed. Such projects can help the union voice be heard in policy debates in the countries concerned, and create enduring supportive union networks in the regions.

Mohammed Derouiche, SNESup, Morocco, welcomed the support of EI for capacity building in North Africa. He referred to a higher education conference for the higher education unions of the Maghreb which led to an association of 65,000 members being set up. He emphasised the scale of the Maghreb region and of Africa and the challenges it faces, for example with Morocco working to restructure its higher education in line with the Bologna Process. Union capacity building and joint action were urgently needed to enable the unions in the region to more effectively confront the actions of international agencies and corporate business. The unions building north/ south and south/ south cooperation are key to a lasting and humane response to the global challenges we face.

In discussion the importance of building common strategies with other workers like university administrative staff was emphasised. Union leaders are under threat in different ways everywhere, and Education is now the target for rampant commercialisation. The unions must make full use of the internet and social networking to engage the younger generation. The quality of development work depends on partnerships. One concrete step which unions in industrialised countries could take, would be sponsorship of delegates from developing countries to HE conferences and to the EI World Congress. In general, more development work must be done in the higher education sector. The success of the regional higher education structures in Europe might provide valuable examples for other regions.

Plenary 5, on Equity and Inclusivity

This session also broke new ground in making a dedicated session on this core area. It was chaired by **Alan Whitaker**, UCU, United Kingdom, who stressed the centrality of equity to trade union work and values.

Penni Stewart, CAUT, Canada, explored the union work on gender over the last 20 years, and the inclusion of other equity

groups into the student and staff body. This reflects a much greater range of issues and demands and calls for a more sophisticated inter-sectional analysis. The debate now goes far beyond access for underrepresented groups. However, disability and indigeneity remain as inadequately acknowledged issues. Members of marginalised groups are still more likely to face disadvantage (eg casualisation) or harassment. Governments are using economic crisis as a pretext for cutting programmes supporting and promoting equity. However governments' inaction and wilful ignoring of legislation have been challenged by unions through audits, affirmative action policies and promotion of equity enhancing language. While the male\female pay gap has narrowed it remains high for marginalised racial groups. Class all too often becomes invisible as an issue in the debate of inclusivity.

Karin Amossa, Lärarförbundet, Sweden, reflected on her own experience of gender discrimination starting in the university and facing exploitation. Gender equality carries obligations as well as rights. The Swedish model has high proportion of women high achievers in schools and universities. The gender split is widening affecting HE and the labour market. Men still make traditional study and employment choices. Women predominate in teaching and education - 65% of graduates are women and only 35% are men. Men go on to make up 50% of 3rd cycle students, are strongly represented in research and technologies but dominate the professoriate (only 20 % are women). (The discussion showed that these ratios are reflected in other regions).

Work on indigeneity or other areas of disadvantage, needs to be addressed within the unions through their own structures and by including indigenous members in them as well as by addressing the issues in broader society. On a practical level, unions can set mandatory elements of their claims to employers, and set inclusivity targets.

In discussion the issues of multiple identities and the rise of xenophobia were flagged. Women are disadvantaged in access to tenure which is the baseline for promotion to senior posts. While there is a need for women to be trained in leadership skills, posts - in universities and in unions - must be genuinely opened up to them. We must recognize that globally, poverty and denial of access to basic education are the issues that confront us. Privatisation of education is a further massive obstacle to Equity. The GEW/ SULF/ UCU work/life balance project referred to in the papers, is an example of how international union strategies can be developed. It was recognized however that structures by themselves will not deliver change. Unions must address the social phenomenon of unpaid work most of which is done by women.

Plenary 6, Rankings and accountability

Chaired by **Marie Blais**, FNEEQ-CSN, Quebec, this session explored rankings and accountability. Sandra Schroeder, AFT, USA, noted that as public funding is cut back, there is a contrary trend towards greater measurement. This is accompanied by pressure to re-locate higher education as a private good and to move it along the spectrum towards training, together with fragmentation into profit- oriented units. Yet accountability in itself is potentially a key tool we can use. Accountability measures can support quality and inclusiveness. However pressure to take accountability down to the level of the individual teacher which is happening in primary and secondary in some states, is an indicator of future trends. Professional responsibility must be matched by the responsibilities of public authorities, providers and students. We need to be robust in defence of qualitative measurement and come to terms with quantitative measurement in appropriate ways.

Mike Jennings, IFUT, Ireland pointed out that assessment is often invasive or destructive and can lead to an undue emphasis on the measurable. Huge increase in internationalisation of HE raises the demand for rankings but doesn't remove the doubts associated with them. Institutions are learning to 'play the rankings game' which are distorting the structures and policies of the system. In this context OECD is spending €9.3 m on the AHELO project which is predicated on the acceptance of the principle of ranking. The project is funded and supported by a number of governments but there is a chronic lack of transparency - EI should call for a debate on the desirability of AHELO and question its true purpose.

Bert Vandenkendelaere, European Students Union, Belgium, expressed concern that the costs of a system arising from the AHELO project could be passed on to students, and that while it might produce new information, it could add confusion in an already crowded field as well as undermining the role of the existing quality assurance structures. He noted that, hardly surprisingly, rankings tend to favour richer and more prestigious institutions.

Discussion focussed on the need to make measurement more sophisticated and more transparent. Rankings that include fee levels as criteria are clearly taking a highly political stance. A genuine debate would expose the flaws in the logic and practicalities of the systems on offer, but there is a prior question of whether there IS a problem that measurement effectively addresses, or whether rankings are part of an insidious threat to our intellectual life. The sheer cost of performance indicators and the loss of control to universities as public funding is actually being cut all have to be contrasted with the accountability and transparency of the existing university systems. The pursuit of rankings can only be viewed as part of the commodification of higher education. The unions should consider developing their own indicators.

Plenaries 7 and 8:

The Conference debated, augmented and endorsed the Action Points in the Supplement to the 2004 Policy Package (Annex II in the Conference papers). These Action Points will be appended to this report when it goes forward to the world Executive Board next month and to the World Congress in Cape Town in July 2011. It is an ambitious programme which will require a commitment of resources from EI but also for the unions represented here to work together in their own countries and both with one another and with EI in order to make it a reality.

Personal reflections

This has been my last EI Higher Education and Research Conference, as I expect to retire before the next one takes place. I have been to all seven, and it has been my privilege to be the Rapporteur at all but one of them (the first, at which I co-wrote the report with the GEW colleague who delivered it to the conference). The rapporteur system was put in place to reflect the fact that the conferences are not part of the formal EI policy making structure. However, we have consistently (though responsibly!) pushed at the margins of what has been possible in EI, and to all intents and purposes, this conference has become the place where the global strategy for higher education and research constituency is thrashed out. This demonstrates the great strength and sense of global community in the higher education constituency in EI, itself a reflection of the international character of the sector as a whole, and the conference has gone from strength to strength over the last twelve years.

That growing strength and self-confidence is reflected in the quality of our debates and the fact that our reports now contain detailed recommendations for action, which belie our formal non-resolutionary status. At the outset there was an institutional nervousness within EI about the higher education unions meeting to determine policy. We as a group and EI as an organisation have matured, and there is now a broad recognition that the higher education constituency can work within the EI structure in a way that meets its own needs, but which also contributes to the role and authority of EI as the voice of the education community as a whole.

The origins of the EI Higher Education and Research conferences lie in the deal which EI struck with the unions in ICUTO (the International Conference of University Teachers' Organisations), in Melbourne in February 1998, which led to the winding up of ICUTO and the agreement of its member organisations to work within EI. Part of the same process saw the establishment of these world Higher Education and Research conferences to replace the global Higher Education and Research Sector Committee which had been set up when EI was founded in 1993. While the Committee, on which Grahame McCullough and I served, generated a phenomenal amount of work and ideas, it was recognised to have too limited a representative base, with only ten appointed members, for the role it played. The conference rapidly established itself as a broadbased and authoritative voice for the sector. We have benefited during the same period from an increased member interest in international matters, both as an issue of solidarity and in recognition of the increasing relevance of global trends and internationally determined policies to national and institutional developments.

The unions in the sector have been very effective in analysing the challenges to the higher education system and

developing strategies to tackle them. We have been less good at looking collectively at our own working methods and evolving them to meet new challenges with limited resources. We are approaching a period of significant change a when we will need to look more seriously at how we do things. The baby boomer generation is retiring, just as new and dramatic challenges are emerging. EI as a whole will be facing pressures for renewal. We in the higher education and research sector are well placed to take a leading role in these renewal processes because of the depth of experience of working together which we share. In particular, I believe that the unions in the sector must find ways of deploying their resources more effectively and in closer collaboration with one another and with EI, in pursuit of common, democratically agreed objectives.

This process will need to start by our thinking together about new ways of working. One change you will need to make, is to review the way the proceedings of these conferences are recorded in future. Personally, I think it is timely for the conference to move as completely as practicably, to a basis of democratically agreed reports and motions adopted. That would depend not only on acceptance by EI, but an active willingness on the part of the unions represented here to generate the business and to work on that basis in future. Otherwise, you may need to call for a volunteer to act as rapporteur next time! In any case I have every confidence that this event will go from strength to strength and be recognised as the authoritative voice of higher education within EI. I would like to conclude by offering my warm thanks to the EI staff who have supported our higher education work so well over the years, but in particular to Monique Fouilhoux, for her exceptional leadership and sheer hard work as the official responsible for higher education.

Thank you colleagues.