

The Sussex University Occupation against Privatisation

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The [Sussex University sit-in](#) against privatisation is in its third week. Josie Long and [Mark Steel](#) have performed on-site. [Will Self](#) and the university's MP [Caroline Lucas](#) have been to speak. Support has come from Billy Bragg and Frankie Boyle, not to mention [professors and public figures worldwide](#). Owen Jones and Laurie Penny come next week. Even [Malcolm Tucker](#) has sent his best wishes!

Sussex University proposes [mass outsourcing](#) of 10% of the workforce, 235 individuals, and vital services like security, care of student residences and catering. Every day [hundreds are part of the occupation](#). They hear a stream of [lectures](#) by supportive academics from Sussex and elsewhere. And [they dance](#). Affected staff send food, [letters](#), and call in, in contrast to the management claim that the 235 oppose those occupying on their behalf.

Regular demonstrations bring supporters to the [foot of the occupied conference centre](#). Across the campus [yellow badges and posters](#) have become a theme of the campaign. Staff have been [asked to remove such symbols of support](#), despite the university's statute supporting freedom of speech.

The occupation is a last resort. It's a widespread topic of discussion at Sussex that there's no meaningful consultation. Adult education has been closed down, a high-prestige research unit moved from its specially designed building, and 112 employees made redundant three years ago. In these cases staff feel discussions with them started after the decisions were made, or not at all.

Staff and [student](#) unions feel that managers had [decided on outsourcing before talking](#) to them. Meetings seem to be so the management can say they've had them, but empty of substance. The sit-in is searching for dialogue. They invited the Vice-Chancellor to their hub for talks. There's no sign of him yet.

There isn't much evidence of, well, [evidence](#) behind the proposals. The management say there'll be no redundancies. Yet the 235 have been offered severance and retirement. They say pay and conditions will stay the same. But admit that pensions will be much worse. After staff have transferred, new contractors are free to hire on lower wages and holidays or [sack employees](#).

The management say the change is to free up funds for more students. Yet applications to universities are plummeting because of the eye-watering fees being charged.

Sussex is renowned for community. But outsourcing would create a divided university: its own employees, workers transferred to contractors, transient staff provided by private operators like G4S, and students becoming customers rather than citizens of the university. Services would be accountable to external privateers, not the campus society.

It's the thin end of the wedge. [Outsourcing across universities](#) will follow. It will expand to education where only courses that turn a profit will run. This will restrict learning to the rich and rule out what doesn't make big bucks. Don't plan on taking a degree that involves thinking critically. Or support the [sit-in](#), which does.