Sussex Stories 1990-2024

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These are stories of my time working at Sussex University 1990-2024.

Some links in this PDF version don't work. I will fix this sometime. The links in the web version work.

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Introduction

I once saw a reference someone had written about me. I think it was for a promotion application, but I'm not sure. It was positive but included the sentence 'I don't know if he would survive outside Sussex'. I was struck by this. However, it's true I've spent nearly all my career at Sussex University. When I arrived there, it was my kind of place, more than any other university. It, in particular, has been part of my identity and life.

I arrived as a lecturer in sociology in 1990. I'm retiring in 2024. This is an account of my time at Sussex in that period.

It's not an attempt to provide a comprehensive account, more my memories, so selective. I didn't keep a diary or journal. I've used some documents and articles. But on the whole, these are recollections, some of which may be flawed and open to revision. If anyone spots errors, let me know.

Students have been more important to me than staff, but this is about my experiences as a member of staff.

The account is chronological but where a topic from later times comes up in an earlier period I've sometimes discussed it in the earlier part. Occasionally it's the other way around.

The stories are about changing politics and culture more than individuals. But, of course, individuals feature. I've changed some names or not named people. I've checked with individuals, where I thought relevant, that they're happy to be mentioned.

The early years were fairly calm and the account reflects that. If you like more drama, that comes later. You can read later posts without reading earlier parts. But the early days were 'beautiful'.

Many thanks to those who checked anything from the odd sentence to the whole of these posts and gave much-appreciated feedback.

The Early Years 1990-98

It was beautiful

In the 2020s I bumped into an ex-colleague at the local swimming pool. She had been made redundant in some savage anti-education cuts at Sussex in 2012 and I had gone part-time by this point. We bemoaned the way the university (and universities in general) had gone and how great it used to be. We reminisced about Sussex in the past. 'It was a beautiful place' she said, looking wistfully into the distance. It was an emotional reflection. On the way home I considered her words. I hadn't thought of the university quite like that. But it *was* beautiful back in the day, in hindsight at least.

Interview: definitely, definitely, definitely

If someone had asked me in 1990 what job in the world I would have chosen to do, any sort of job anywhere at all, I would have said Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sussex. So when I rifled through *The Guardian* education jobs early that year and saw exactly this job there I was stunned. I later found out that Sociology had not had a new appointment for 12 years and this one was a 'new blood' post that had come about as a reward for doing well in some teaching or research review. It was a rare opportunity.

So, I applied myself to doing the best possible application I could. One of my referees, Ted Organ at Brighton Technical College, where I was teaching evening classes in GCSE sociology, told me he had been asked for a reference. This usually meant you were being shortlisted for interview, which I was then invited for, and I put myself full time into preparing for it. I managed to work out who some of the interview panel were likely to be, Jennifer Platt, as the subject (department) chair, and Pete Saunders as a professor. I had already met William Outhwaite briefly around that time and I guessed he would be on the panel. I got those three correct. The other members were Stuart Laing, Dean of the School of Cultural and Community Studies, and Sue Wright, an anthropologist, who was the representative from another group. I don't remember if there was also a Pro-Vice Chancellor (a senior management position) which often there could be.

At the interview, Pete, a convert to neoliberalism, asked me what I thought about privatisation, which was a big political issue at the time, following the Tory privatisations of utilities. I said I thought it wasn't great for consumers but was good for producers and shareholders. Surprisingly to me, this turned out to be exactly the conclusions Pete had come to from empirical work he had done on the issue. Sue Wright asked me what my methodological approach was, which was challenging because I hadn't thought about that a lot and didn't

particularly have one I favoured. I was also conscious that Jennifer Platt, historian of sociological research methods, was on the panel. I was quite proud later that I came up with the answer that I was a methodological pluralist (I had been reading Gregor McLennan's book on *Marxism, Pluralism, and Beyond*). This was true in that I was open to whatever seemed the best approach in any case, but also made it sound thoughtful and theoretical (I thought at least) rather than that I just didn't know or didn't have one. I don't know what Sue thought of my cobbled-together answer, but I grew to respect her a great deal after starting at Sussex. I can't remember what the other questions were but I do know I was 100% focused on getting everything exactly right.

There was a lunch for department (subject group, it was called then) members and candidates and all the candidates were white men. This was later defended on the grounds that these were just the 6 best candidates. The candidates were each allocated a member of staff to go away with for a coffee and chat and I was given Mary Farmer, who was to become a very important part of my Sussex life. In later years the roles would be reversed and I'd be given the job of taking candidates for a coffee. I took one who had just given up smoking and was deeply regretting it that day. It became clear at the lunch for my post that one candidate was older and more experienced than the rest of us. He was the most qualified for the job by a mile but I decided all I could do was my best and to try to impress with what I had.

That evening Stuart Laing rang me at home, said they were offering me the job and talked about pay and terms etc. Just as he was about to hang up he suddenly said, "Hold on, I forgot to ask you if you want the job". This was the first point I lost my composure and I said very excitedly that I definitely, definitely, definitely did. 23 years later I met Stuart when I was giving a talk at a conference at Brighton University about the marketisation of higher education. Now a senior manager at Brighton, Stuart gave an opening welcome to the conference and then came over to say he had been on my appointing committee. Laing was now suited and neatly trimmed, compared to my memory (maybe imperfect) of long sideburns and floppy hair from 1990. I was impressed he remembered and said I too remembered very well, and that it had been one of the great days of my life.

If I hadn't got that job I had an interview the following week at Liverpool University which I then pulled out of. Out of about 50 applications that year these were the only two interviews I was offered and I've often wondered what life would have been like if I had ended up at Liverpool, with kids with Scouse accents. I was a better fit with the radical and interdisciplinary Sussex than with the more conventional Liverpool department and suspect I would have stood less chance of getting the Liverpool job.

I was 25 at the time of the interview, had not finished my PhD, had no publications, and no teaching experience at university level. It took a lot less in those days to get a university lecturing job but I was still quite under-qualified. I never asked what I had said or had had for them that day to swing it. I knew interview committees are often not unanimous and I later pondered who on the panel may have wanted me and who may have been less convinced. And maybe they offered it to the more qualified guy and he turned it down and I was second choice. Or maybe someone else was second choice and they turned it down and I was third choice. Best not to overthink things.

Arrival: I'm not a student

I started at Sussex in September 1990 then aged 26. Even then it was quite young to be a lecturer. There was an induction for new staff and I sat next to Julian Saurin a new International Relations lecturer about the same age as me who I think already had 3 children. I had 2 kids at that point and some thought even that a bit precocious. Julian worked on International Political Economy and environmental issues, and was well respected, especially by PhD students he supervised. He went on to become branch President of Sussex UCU (University and College Union) which I also did much later. He was a very important member of the university. He later taught at the Middle East Technical University in Northern Cyprus. We worked together much later at the Free University Brighton when he came back to the UK. He now lives on the beautiful Isle of Harris in Scotland.

My first day of employment at Sussex came along. It was September the 1st in the vacation and I knew that university lecturers often worked at home. But I decided I should be in my office on the first day. I went in. There was no key for me so I borrowed a master key from the porters. They thought I was a student (this became a theme for a few years with the porters) but took my word for it that I was a new lecturer and entrusted me with the key. Porters were very important pre-email. They lugged great sacks of post around the campus to the different schools and put it in the school pigeonholes. We used to write paper memo after paper memo in those days on small bits of paper that you stapled closed. When you went into the porters' lodge to get your post there was a lot of good-humoured piss-taking both ways.

When I entered my office on day 1 it was still full of the belongings of the previous occupant. I stayed anyway and left her a note at the end of the day saying I had started and would it be OK if I used the office. When I next went in there was a reply from her. I can't remember the contents exactly but it was irritable. Everything seemed very laid back, but there were plenty of individuals who were friendly and welcoming. William Outhwaite was one early on. It was William who suggested I write on environmentalism and this led to my first book *Ecology and Society*. He also pointed out, when commenting on my writing, that environmentalism had an 'n' in it. It stood me in good stead for the future. The political scientist Bruce Graham worked hard to support and encourage new young members of staff. He would have lunch with us, ask us about our research, and give us tips. He had started at Sussex in 1964, near the beginning, and served in senior roles at the university. He was gentle, thoughtful, and generous with his time.

The subject chair, Jennifer Platt, started my employment a month before term started to give me preparation time and gave me a reduced teaching load for a term so I could work on finishing my PhD. I think at the time this was a fairly novel and flexible approach. She was very protective of me, protesting vigorously when she found I had been given an admissions role soon after starting (admissions was a school not a subject group responsibility, more on this division shortly; in fact, I loved being involved in admissions). You were given courses to teach but this consisted of a course title and rubric. You were then left to make up the topics and reading yourself. It was a huge amount of work. Decades later new staff were only expected to teach already set-up courses, something the union had an input into winning I think. Despite that, early career lecturers still had much more to do than later career people in terms of preparation and they did not get reductions in teaching load anywhere near enough to

adjust for that. I tried to increase reductions in such cases when I was later Head of Department but it was still not nearly enough. I recollect that levels above told me even greater reductions would be too much.

My first course was the amazing Themes and Perspectives in Sociology which still runs in some form. Courses then were mainly centred around seminars. Lecture series would have lectures relevant to the course but not necessarily linked at all to the topic of the week. They were seen as extras and contextual rather than the base of the course as later became the pattern. Lecturers from other departments would drop in to lecture on Sociology courses, and vice-versa.

Early on, the Sociology group had an awayday with a consultant and flipcharts etc. It was quite unusual to have this sort of thing in those days and an only just emerging trend. At the opening icebreaking session we all had to get into small groups to talk about the Sociology group and come up with one word each to describe our feelings about our colleagues. It was supposed to warm us up and generate goodwill to get us started. But in the report back one generally mild-mannered member of staff said their word to sum up their feeling for their colleagues was 'contempt'. The facilitator did a double take and she had to check if this is what the member of staff had said. They confirmed. Everyone looked impassive and no-one seemed surprised. Much later in my career I realised this person had less respect for people who did not do research of the sort they favoured. Luckily I did not fall foul of this preference.

From secretaries to co-ordinators

When I joined Sussex I was assigned a secretary. Each secretary in my school worked for 4 or 5 academics. Their job was primarily being a typist although some would do some organisational assistance too. As they typed our letters and reading lists they got to know a lot about us and what we did. I felt very uncomfortable as a 26 year old having a middle-aged woman as my secretary and I hated to ask mine to do anything, so often I just did not. My first secretary was Margaret, who was lovely, lively, and friendly. In fact, all the secretaries (or later, co-ordinators) who were my first port of call were lovely. After Margaret there was Pat, and later Lisa when Pat retired, and Linda after her.

During Pat's time computers were introduced and academic staff were now expected to do our own typing. Some of the secretaries struggled with computers and took retirement. It freed up those left to become administrators (called co-ordinators) and the admin load on academic staff decreased. Administrators later even started to do curriculum work which lessened the load more. Sometimes it could be grating when people from the marketing, admissions, or teaching support departments saw us as stereotypically fusty out of touch ivory tower academics and told us how to do our jobs, when they were not educators and we were the ones who had daily contact with students. But mostly these units were very helpful support for us.

Students, seminars, offices - and chairs

There were about 10 staff in the Sociology group in those days, with a low turnover, and about 40 students in each year. Seminar sizes in the 1990s were a maximum of 12 and frequently

smaller. I taught some courses with just 3 or 4 students. We often held classes in our offices. Mine was E436 in Arts E, it's imprinted on my mind, and was quite small. It had 4 other chairs crammed in, aside from my own, so with any group over 4 there would be students perched on my desk, window sills, chair arms, and even on the floor. No-one complained. Most of us knew most of the students. That's the case now no more. In the 2020s we have, I think, 30 staff or more with probably 150+ students in each year, maybe more.

I practised quite student-centred learning. I tried to get students to determine the themes and questions on the topics we were discussing. I didn't know this at the time but later realised this was quite a Freireian approach to teaching. As time went on I became a more didactic teacher, setting the themes more top-down, guiding students through them, and imparting a fair bit of knowledge of my own. But towards the end of my time at Sussex on my Alternative Societies module I returned more to the Freireian approach. I was often just 5 years older than the students. Many I taught in my first years at Sussex will now be in their 50s. There will be a smattering of grandparents amongst them.

The chairs in my office were commissioned by Basil Spence, the architect who designed the Sussex campus buildings. Incredibly, when my building was knocked down many years later in the post-2007 era these were being thrown out, which just about summed up the level of respect for the Spence university in these later times. So, I took some home to preserve them. They were beautiful but not very ergonomic. In the 2020s I eventually sold mine on eBay and they were bought by collectors, not for much but at least they were kept up.

I was working ridiculous hours and bringing up two small children and was often tired. I took to locking my office door and lying on the floor to have a nap. Much later we would move into a building with glass panels in the doors and walls. The afternoon naps had to end. Before that one of my colleagues in Arts E was seen through a window overlooking his office, slumped in a chair and apparently unconscious. Banging on his door failed to bring a response. The porters were sent to open the door urgently and staff got in. The academic in question was just asleep, a very deep sleep.

There were many mature students in those days, whose life experience added so much to the discussions. I would guess a third or so of my students were visibly mature, the official designation of mature then being anyone over 21 on arrival. When £9000 fees were introduced in 2010 the most obvious effect on my classes was sadly the almost complete collapse in mature students.

Students handed in non-contributory essays 2 or 3 times a term and then we had assessed essays on top of that. It meant that we were nearly always marking. Essays were handwritten. When word-processing requirements came in it was a great relief. External examiners expressed shock at the amount of marking we gave ourselves to do at Sussex. But keeping the marking up was defended to the hilt by many; it was the 'Sussex way'. I think this was one rare example where I did not defend the unique traditions of the university at the time.

When it came to assessed essays it could sometimes be a problem getting students to focus on doing them well, or doing them at all. For some, they were here to learn, not for the assessments. Most were over the moon to get a 2.1. First-class degrees were few and far

between. Most years we had none. Fast forward to the 2020s and assessments are the centre of it all. I get students coming to me 2 or 3 weeks into the course asking how they can get a First. Now we get many First-class degrees every year. This is not grade inflation. It's because the students have upped their game. This is partly because of the pressure to get high grades and the desire to. It's also because of the internet. Students are just very well informed due to instant and easy access to the world's knowledge. To find a niche bit of information you no longer have to spend hours browsing paper newspapers and shelves of books in the library, probably put off from doing so in the first place by the low chance of you pinning down what you want to know.

Sociology held a weekend residential conference for students and staff every year towards the start of the academic year, at the Isle of Thorns conference centre in the Ashdown Forest. If I remember correctly, there had been Italian prisoners of war here (although I don't think it was a prisoner of war camp) and there was a large barn where horses had been kept, with murals all over the walls painted by the Italians. The university later sold the centre to raise money. The sociology lecturers took turns organising the conference and I organised one on a theme suggested by David Harrison - 'The Third World and Development', terms that were still favoured at the time. I tried to make things more interesting by inviting Clive Crook from *The Economist* to speak. He started his talk by saying he felt like a meat-eater at a convention of vegetarians. The fabulous Aiden Foster-Carter from Leeds University, a Korea specialist, also spoke. Aiden ditched his planned talk to give one attacking Clive Crook, calling him 'Crook by name, Crook by nature'. Crook had left by then. If I remember right, Aiden borrowed a guitar a student had brought along and treated us to a few songs in the evening.

At one Isle of Thorns conference Jennifer Platt was chairing a talk and appeared to promptly fall asleep at the start of the session, sitting in full view at the front by the speaker. I was sure she was fast asleep, she looked completely out for the count. But she woke up just as the talk ended and incredibly asked very pertinent and spot-on questions about the topic. Jennifer had a headmistressy manner and some people were scared of her. I liked her a lot. She was head of the group when I arrived, very helpful and thoughtful towards me, and principled. She specialised in the history of sociology and was a major figure in British and international sociology. I replaced her as head of the group when she retired in 2002 and spoke at her retirement do. She remained active on the campus long after retirement, attending seminars and coming in to use workspace she was entitled to as an emeritus professor. I still see her husband Charles Goldie, a mathematician at Sussex (retired), from time to time. Charles must take some sort of anti-ageing drug as he doesn't look a day older than when I first met him back in the 1990s.

The legendary Tom Bottomore, long Professor of Sociology at Sussex, was retired but still about when I arrived and he spoke at one Isle of Thorns conference. He was a non-dogmatic Marxist, with interests in political and economic sociology, which could have equally described me. I only met him once or twice. He appeared to be friendly and unpretentious. He and William Outhwaite were friends and worked together in Tom's last years. He died in 1992 a couple of years after I arrived. Another Marxist legend at Sussex while I was there was the Hungarian philosopher István Mészáros, whose book on *Marx's Theory of Alienation* I had read as an undergraduate. He was an anti-Stalinist and had to flee Hungary after the suppressed revolution in 1956.

After a few years at Sussex, we noticed that our undergraduate sociology students were flagging mid-way through the second year. They didn't have the energy from being new at the university, nor the pressure that came with being nearer the end. So we instituted a 'halfway there' meal for staff and students in the middle of the second year, at a popular and inexpensive large Italian restaurant in central Brighton. The department paid for the food and attendees paid for drinks. It was popular for several years and then take-up started to become thin on the ground and we ended the practice. My school had an annual meal out in Brighton, for staff, I think it must have been a Christmas thing. People took partners but I took my kids who loved it, foodies then and ever since, my son is now a chef. Taking the kids didn't go down very well with the Dean (Head of the School). The future chef, the youngest of my kids, would fall asleep leaning against me during the meal and I would have to carry him home.

Admissions

I was involved in admissions for many years at Sussex. In the early days, academics would deal with all applications and interviewed more or less every undergraduate applicant. Most days I received a batch of UCCA (as they were called then) forms to be dealt with, bound in an elastic band. Then, every now and then, a day would be booked out to interview candidates. It was interesting but a lot of work. Later on, we stopped interviewing by and large, except for mature Access course applicants. Later again, administrators in the admissions office took over dealing with the applications.

For several years I was on the Admissions Criminal Convictions Sub-committee. We had to look at applications from people with convictions, sometimes very serious ones with long sentences. In some cases, the applicants were still in prison and planning for life after release. We had to assess whether they would be a potential danger to people or property if they came to Sussex, whether to admit them and, if so, whether to offer them accommodation on campus. It was a different world for me and fascinating. When I became Head of Department (HoD) in 2002 I had to give it up as HoDs could not be members of the committee. I was gutted.

I was also involved in widening participation (WP). We would make lower offers to applicants from WP backgrounds. Not all subjects were willing to do that. Once or twice a year I would go to a school in inner London and meet pupils who met certain criteria - English not their first language, unstable home background, economic deprivation etc. I would just chat to each pupil about social issues and tell them they were very bright and able and would be great at university (which was always the case). The idea was that they would see a university lecturer was just an ordinary person and that the lecturer saw them as university material. I'd make them all an offer of an interview or a conditional place. I don't know if the university kept data on whether any of these pupils went on to university so I don't know what effect this had. But the school teachers were very enthusiastic about the scheme. We ran taster sessions for pupils from such schools on the campus. I started a Sociology annual day conference for A-level students and we would target WP schools and give them priority booking. A school in Tower Hamlets always sent a coachload of pupils and the social composition of the lecture theatre changed completely when they walked into the room. I think Sussex still has a WP team but I don't know whether they run such outreach schemes visiting schools any more. Sussex later abolished altruism, too expensive, so I'm guessing not.

New Ideas of Socialism

Near the start of my career at Sussex, I gave a paper on 'New Ideas of Socialism' at the Social and Political Thought (SPT) seminar series at Sussex. The paper was later published in the journal *Economy and Society* in 1992, my first proper publication. The room was packed. It was 1991 or so, soon after the collapse of so-called communism and amidst the rising hegemony of neoliberalism. Not many people thought socialism had any future so I think the title may have sparked interest. Soon afterwards I developed my course on 'The Death of Socialism?' (DoS?). I always had to say "it's with a question mark" and this caused great mirth amongst many, especially the economists who said the question mark should be removed. The New Ideas seminar was at the end of the day, about 5pm, and I was so tired from the long wait all day for it and general stress that I was unable to answer questions all that well (the same issue was to be repeated at my Professorial lecture more than 20 years later). At one point Alan Cawson, political scientist and expert on corporatism, kindly took it upon himself to defend me against some of the criticism I was proving unable to answer.

Alan had a room across from mine and became very interested in the emerging internet, dial-up only in those pre-broadband days. He was one of the first people to realise how important the internet would become and later switched from being a Professor of Politics to Professor of Digital Media. People were not online at home at the time so Alan came in some weekends to access it in his office. I remember coming in once or twice on a Saturday to pick up some things I needed and him calling me in for strong black coffee he made in his room. We were both a bit worse for wear from, as he said once, 'too much red wine'. Alan was another friendly and encouraging colleague, and I would have been unlikely to get to know him without Sussex's interdisciplinary structures.

When 'New Ideas of Socialism' was published I sent a copy to my colleague Pete Saunders who was then on a sabbatical at Bremen University in Germany (where many years later I gave a talk at, of all places, the Bremen Tram company, to public transport managers from across Germany). He sent me a long handwritten critique in the post. He then wrote it into a reply article for *Economy and Society*. He used the title 'When Prophecy Fails' from a seminal sociological study looking at how people who predicted the end of the world maintained their views when that did not happen. The researchers actually infiltrated the group in question. I'm not sure the study would fare well in an ethical review now. Pete's idea was that I was also trying to maintain the case for socialism when it had been shown to fail. I was allowed to write a reply to his critique which I called 'Rescuing the Middle Ground' and both were published in the journal. A bit later I met Michèle Barrett at a conference, someone I admired a lot for her book *Women's Oppression Today* on Marxist-feminism. The book had been an important one for me from my undergraduate days onwards and I used it for teaching throughout my career. Michèle had been on the board of *Economy and Society* when our articles were considered. She said she felt it was out of order for a senior member of the sociology group to write a critique of a junior member of staff in the group, but I had relished it and enjoyed the discussion and told her so.

The New Ideas article came out of my PhD written in the late 1980s which was on the possibility for a pluralist socialism after the collapse of communism and after the rise of

neoliberalism. My last book on Alternative Societies published in 2023 is on the same topic. It was a bit of a theme throughout my career. (See also For Pluralist Democratic Socialism)

The Death of Socialism? course ran all the way through my career at Sussex until my last year. I once told the Head of Politics that it was one of the most important things in my life, which was true. Politics (who at that point were hosting the course) tried to delete it one year because they had a big deficit and the income that came from the fees of students on the course went to Sociology as I was a member of Sociology staff. That was how the budget worked and they wanted all the money kept in Politics. I couldn't see why they had to delete it rather than just suspend it. Everyone wanted things tidy and final. It wasn't really logical. But the student reps put up a fight to retain the module and it was saved. Thanks Emma and fellow reps, I haven't forgotten you. Many degrees and courses have been deleted because applications dropped for a year or two, with no sense that things can change.

The overall mood of the DoS? seminar group/s often reflected the times. In the 1990s after the collapse of communism and with neoliberalism spreading around the world most students on the course thought socialism was dead, including the socialists. Then as climate change became more obviously a major issue, central planning and collective ownership seemed to many the obvious solutions and socialism seemed to have more of a future with the students. Positive support would ebb and then things like the financial crisis and the rise of the populist left, Corbyn, Sanders, Podemos etc brought hope for it back. The last term I taught it, Autumn 2023, Corbyn had been defeated and other firm left movements were in retreat. Trump and the racist right were on the ascendancy. Starmer was Labour leader. The pro-socialist students were pretty gloomy about socialism's prospects.

The interdisciplinary system

For me, the most exciting thing about Sussex was that it had a unique interdisciplinary structure. 'Subject groups' like Sociology (what elsewhere were called departments) were spread across schools. There were five schools in the Arts and Social Sciences: African and Asian Studies (AFRAS), English and American Studies (EAM or EngAm), European Studies (Euro), Cultural and Community Studies (CCS), and Social Sciences (SOC or SocSci). Of the sociologists there when I arrived, David Harrison I think was in AFRAS but later moved to CCS, George Rehin in EAM, William Outhwaite was in Euro, Jenny Shaw and Brian Taylor were in CCS, and in SOC were Pete Saunders, Jennifer Platt, Mary Farmer, and Kevin McCormick. There was some talk of whether I would go into CCS when I arrived but I joined SOC.

The sociologists were physically located in their respective schools, all in different buildings. So you could easily see other sociologists only at your termly subject group meeting. In your school you would have offices alongside others from all Arts and Social Sciences disciplines, apart from in my school which was social sciences only. In SOC, though, the economists did have the chilly top floor mostly to themselves. The Vice-Chancellor (VC, the university CEO) who later dismantled this system was an economist and the economists never really bought into the system, although economic and intellectual historians were up there with them too on the top floor. Otherwise, it was a complete mix. On my corridor were sociologists, philosophers, geographers, International Relations staff, political scientists, and social psychologists. In other schools it was the same kind of thing except in them sociologists

would also find themselves next door to academics from arts subjects; English Literature, Art History, Media Studies and such like. It was an amazing mix and I got so much fulfilment from mingling beyond the narrow remit of my discipline.

Students would take half their courses in their subject (like sociology) and half interdisciplinary school courses (sometimes called 'contextuals'). In school course seminars would be students from all disciplines. I taught Foundations of the Social Sciences and my own course The Death of Socialism? in the school. Lots of students arrived not realising that they would be taking interdisciplinary courses for 50% of their time even though it was made very clear in the prospectus. Some economics and social psychology students tended to be pissed off about this as they just wanted to study their own subject. Others couldn't believe their luck that they could explore this rich mix beyond their discipline. Many students loved mingling with students and staff of many disciplines in their classes. It was different from joint degrees (like Politics and Sociology, for example) as the school courses were not supposed to be just from a different discipline, but to cover many disciplinary perspectives in each course.

My own Death of Socialism? included sociology, politics, political philosophy, political economy, and history. You could not identify it with any discipline. Foundations of the Social Sciences (FSS) covered thinkers from among Marx, Mill, Freud, Smith, Weber, Durkheim, Foucault and more. On this course students had to read the thinkers' original texts. It was challenging for them and some found it a struggle in the first year. But many said in the third year it all came together, what the thinkers were doing intellectually, and how it fitted together with the rest of their degree. The theorists on the course were all dead white European men (DWEM). The argument at the time was that, like it or not, the foundational thinkers in the social sciences simply were all DWEM. But the remit of the course could have been tweaked to accommodate women and decolonial (as they later came to be called) thinkers.

The first marking I did at Sussex was on FSS. Everything was blind double-marked in those days. Two examiners marked the assessments independently of one another, then met to agree marks. It could be a long process. One danger was that when markers disagreed they would just compromise on a mark in the middle, leading to a bunching of marks around the median. Sometimes it broke down and a third person had to be called in to adjudicate. My first marks agreeing meeting was with Chris Arthur, the Marxist philosopher. In his retirement speech years later he said, 'I love teaching, but I love not teaching even more'. Later there was more of a marks-checking process (called 'moderation') where the tutor would determine the marks and someone else just checked a sample of them.

There was the legendary and tough Concepts, Methods and Values course (CMV) in the third year of SOC. It had two strands, one analytical (basically philosophy of social science) and one historical (mainly intellectual history). The Sub-Dean of Academic Affairs would get streams of students every year applying (pleading more like) to be exempt from the course and to take an alternative. Time after time their applications were turned down. It was deemed fundamental and essential.

There were drawbacks to the interdisciplinary system and critics. It meant that in the third year you would be teaching students who had radically different backgrounds. So some were very well steeped in what was being discussed and some had no background in it at all. The

subject (like Sociology) would only get students for half of their time so could not give as full a coverage of the discipline as you would like (although this is the same with conventional joint degrees). The school was technically the main organising structure but it cross-cut with subject groups and the management structure was not always that clear or simple.

But it made Sussex unique and different. There was really, as far as I was aware, no other university in the world like it. And the intellectual gains and sheer joy and excitement of working with, studying with, and learning about different disciplines day after day was huge.

Sociology and Social Psychology

At some point in the early days Sociology merged with Social Psychology. We tried to explore intellectual synergies but despite many common interests our different approaches didn't lead to much in the way of collaboration. There were some personal conflicts. But it was on the whole a happy alliance and Social Psychology were reluctant to be moved later to a large Psychology department with more experimental, biological, and cognitive psychology. Some of them felt more at home in a social science department than a psychology one. But move they did, to a large School of Psychology located over on the science side of the campus and I think they settled happily in the end. One of my social psychology colleagues was Pete Harris. We shared an appreciation of Robin Friday, a great wayward footballer who had played for my team Reading and his. Pete, a Cardiff City supporter, studied unrealistic optimism.

The Spence university

The architect of the university campus was the famous Basil Spence who also designed the fantastic post-war Coventry Cathedral that I have visited several times. The Arts and Social Sciences buildings were on a spine that ran in a line from Arts A near the university entrance, through Arts B, Arts C, Arts D and finally Arts E. Arts A to C had beautiful buildings with deep red brick internal walls, squares with grass, benches, ponds, and cloisters. As you came onto the campus from the train station there was a big library square (where many protest speeches were made, including by me, and leaflets handed out), then two large lecture theatres that I lectured in many times. Rising out of them were two high pillars symbolising, I was told, the search for knowledge. In the lecture theatre building there were steps that were too deep to take in one step but too small to comfortably take in two steps. I was told this was deliberate. Spence wanted to force you to think about what you were doing when you walked through the campus. Next to the campus was the lovely Stanmer Park which led on to the Sussex Downs, and in the early years I often went out for a half-hour stroll there to get away from it all.

It was rumoured that you could get all the way around the university without leaving the buildings. I had my doubts about this until much later I became a union officer along with Rob, a project manager in Estates. One rainy day he took me on a long winding route that kept us inside all the way to a meeting with the management.

It seemed the money had started to run out when they got to Arts D and E, where I had offices, because these were more breeze-block affairs. Nevertheless, I was often in the lovely Arts A-C buildings for meetings and lectures until we were moved in the Farthing years post-2007

(more on this in later posts) to the Freeman building out on the periphery of the campus. I rarely had a reason to visit the Arts Buildings then and it changed my whole experience of the university. D and E were eventually knocked down and replaced in the post-2007 period with a new glitzy building for the Business school.

Ian McEwan studied at Sussex and when I was reading one of his novels I realised that a walk he was describing was through a very recognisable part of the Arts buildings. Once when watching an episode of Grace, about a fictional police detective in Brighton, there was a scene with someone in a wheelchair recuperating in a beautiful cloister. I recognised it was filmed in the Arts buildings on the Sussex campus. It was supposed to be at some recuperative home but in the background you could just hear the noise of a university campus, the bubbling of student voices in the open areas, probably the central library square I guessed.

In the Farthing years many buildings were knocked down and new ones erected. It was architectural and aesthetic destruction to match the academic and human destruction of that period.

Managers and meetings

The Vice-Chancellor when I arrived was Sir Leslie Fielding (from 1987-92) a very establishment diplomat, I think also a friend of Margaret Thatcher. It was an odd appointment for Sussex. I had no idea why the university was being run by a diplomat rather than an academic. I was never sure what he did while I was there, but that may have been because I was just focused on trying to keep on top of my job. Then came Gordon Conway (VC 1992-8) who was the first VC I met and I was on nodding terms with if we passed each other around campus. He was an agricultural ecologist concerned with global poverty. 1-1 he was a nice man, although controversial for his support for GM foods. Again, I'm not sure any huge changes were made at Sussex in his time. But that was a good thing. Given what was to come later just keeping the show on the road was an approach that worked for me.

The VC lived in a large listed 12th-century house in the countryside, Swanborough Manor, that was owned by the university. It had belonged to Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell. He (it was always a he in those days) was driven around in a chauffeur-driven limo that would sit in a special parking place outside the door of the main administrative building when not being used. The chauffeur would be in full uniform, peaked hat and all. I once saw Gordon Conway being driven down the gritty urban Lewes Road past my house, an incongruous sight. I never knew what the chauffeur did when they were not required for driving duties. The VCs would hold dinners for selected staff at Swanborough Manor and I think these were expected to be cooked by their wives (but maybe they had a chef). I was never invited, thankfully. The house was eventually sold under Alasdair Smith and I think he was the first VC that dispensed with the chauffeur.

There was little management in my early years at Sussex. Deans of schools and chairs of subject groups were actually more convenors, even if the Deans formally had line management responsibilities. It was both what was good about Sussex, little managerialism and great freedom, but also what was problematic; some poor teaching, for instance, and I don't like to think what else, was left undealt with. When managerialism did come in much

later on, sadly it was very often not of the right kind, and staff were seen as people to be controlled rather than supported. Some managers in the later managerial era were bullying and authoritarian. Others only liked to manage the things they enjoyed managing and were unwilling to deal with anything stressful that needed dealing with - like bullying and authoritarianism.

However, as we moved in the direction of the next era, there were some nasty moments involving Deans. In one case a Dean and a member of staff from the relevant group tried to get a probationer's contract terminated on the grounds they were not meeting their 'targets'. Some of us got together and tried to save the situation. There was a review and a Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC, a deputy to the Vice Chancellor) gave the casting vote to extend the young probationer's contract to a full one. The obvious thing to do in such a situation is to support and help the member of staff deal with problems, if indeed there are any. It was nasty and inhuman to try to just get rid of this person. Apart from that, the person in question was a great colleague and well-liked by students and staff. We needed people like them. But the damage was done. A bitter taste was left and the lecturer applied for a job at another university and left, a big and unnecessary loss for us. This kind of thing was unusual then, as far as I was aware. But later when I was union president at Sussex there were many cases of promotions and probation being dealt with in a quite arbitrary and punitive way, becoming more the norm than the exception, with little sign of humanity or supportiveness.

There was an International Relations (IR) lecturer with an office in my corridor. He was a lovely scouser, warm, funny, and with great integrity. He once wrote a paper which was 2 or 3 times the word limit for a journal and was outraged that it was rejected for being over length as, he contended, it was not possible to write a shorter version on the topic in hand. Because he was so perfectionist about writing and unwilling to bend to rules like word length he did not publish enough to meet the research assessment criteria and so was given a higher teaching load. 'Punishment teaching', he called it. Somehow the entire IR group would all fit into his office when he was chair of the group, for meetings that would start at 2 and still be going at 6 when my own meeting had finished two hours before and I was setting off for home. At our SOC school meetings, IR contributors would often speak as if they were reading an academic paper. School policy and teaching strategy would be addressed with long interventions using Gramscian terminology about hegemony and war of position etc. IR at Sussex was not a training school for diplomats. It was unusually Marxist-dominated and theoretical. There was one liberal, an intellectually brilliant Czech, who took his minority status with good humour and was never intimidated from saying his bit at research seminars. His father was imprisoned following a Communist party purge so his liberal tendencies were understandable. His brother was a left-wing dissident who lived in exile in the UK for many years before becoming a senior government minister in the post-communist period. A young Canadian IR lecturer with the office next to mine would wear suits on days he was teaching and jeans on days he was not. When he came in suited, people would say wryly: 'Teaching day today, Rob?'.

I loved being on the Library Consultative group, as the member of academic staff from Social Sciences. The committee met once a term and was chaired by the librarian - Adrian Peasgood. In those days the head librarians were custodians of knowledge and archives,

careful and caring about the treasures under their guardianship and about their provision to students and staff in pursuit of knowledge and education. How that changed later.

I was on a number of appointing committees in my time at Sussex, where we interviewed applicants for new lecturing posts, I am guessing 20 times or more, sometimes in my own department, and sometimes as the representative of an outside group in other department appointments. Soon after I arrived Politics advertised for a new lecturer and I was asked to be on the appointing committee. One candidate had to come from the USA and we had to fit him in a few days after the other interviews. He had the most amazing references, saying he was the best PhD student that his referees had ever had and all sorts of superlatives of the sort members of the committee had never come across before. It was difficult to get the whole committee together for a second time for his interview. But we were all intrigued and we made sure we had cleared our diaries to be there for this marvel. Needless to say, we appointed him. He, his wife, myself, and some others of the same generation socialised sometimes and my kids called him 'Lego Paul' because when he came around he played with their lego. In the late 2010s, I was asked to write an article that overlapped with his area and I had to gen up on the literature. It was obvious he was a leading international figure in the field, but an unassuming one.

On one appointing committee, the PVC (these committees often had a senior manager on them) dealt with their correspondence throughout all the interviews. In one set of interviews in the early years other members of the committee I was on started talking about the dangers of appointing a young woman as she may have a baby soon after arriving. It was only realistic to consider this they argued. I was appalled and quietly phoned Human Resources (HR) to ask if this was allowed. They said it was at the discretion of the appointing committee to decide on their appointing criteria. I could not believe it. This approach was probably illegal and certainly immoral. To be fair, they did eventually offer the job to a young woman who was a clear future star. I was delighted when she turned the offer down.

I found over the years that this was a common approach. If some manager wanted to pursue some very dubious approach HR would often say it was at his or her discretion. Much later in the post-2007 period, I was allowed to reduce my main job by two days a week to do union work in that time. A vindictive manager wanted to take the reduction entirely out of my research time, which would have ended my research and writing and undermined my career. He (accidentally, I assume) copied me into the email asking a senior member of HR about this. They said it was at his discretion to do so (me copied in again). I was able to use my union training to point out to HR that this would have been breach of contract and breaking employment law. It was not followed through.

Imagine no computers (it's easy if you try)

Imagine a university with no computers or internet. That was the university I joined in 1990. Students wrote their essays by hand. Staff also hand-wrote their reading lists and gave them to secretaries to type. They were not stored on a disk of any kind so when you revised the reading list next year the whole thing had to be retyped again from scratch. There was no email, no smartphones, so no messages, notifications, or news updates throughout the day. Working at home, there was just a paper newspaper in the morning, the TV news at midday

and 6pm, a landline for anything urgent, but it rarely rang. I left mine on an answerphone with a small tape in it to record messages, in those days pretty hi-tech. There was no caller ID so that was how you screened your calls. When you sat down to read a book on a day working at home you just did that all day with no distractions or communications at all. It was much calmer and in-depth and I miss it a lot.

To be fair, there was one huge computer in a cavernous room in the main administrative building programmed by tape with holes punched in it fed in. I think it managed the payroll. It was run by staff wearing white coats. Then personal computers with floppy disks started to come on the scene. The Dean of our school decided to use school funds to offer everyone either a PC on their desk at work or two word processors, one they could have at home and one at work. It was seen by many at the university as a profligate and irresponsible use of school funds but it showed great foresight. I chose the two word processors, and for the first time my desk at work became not a blank space with huge piles of paper teetering on it. A machine sat on the desk but to the side for use now and then rather than a constant presence in front of me. We had repeated computer problems at the time, floppy disks getting corrupted, computers freezing etc, and a computer help centre in a different building that struggled to keep up.

Me at my desk in the 1990s before computers. That's a Basil Spence chair behind me, mentioned in Part 1 of this series.

So the Dean hired Paul Allpress as a roaming technical support person in the school. He would fly into your office, business-like, reassuring and joking, tweak a few things or take away a disk and hey presto everything would be working in no time. One day he took away my malfunctioning keyboard and came back shortly after with a big smile and asked if I ate lunch at my desk, which seemed an odd question. I said 'Yes' and Paul replied, ‘That would explain it’, and deposited on my desk a pile of breadcrumbs and bits of dried-up food he had pulled out of the keyboard. Everything worked smoothly after his ‘repair’. Paul was energetic but calm, good-humoured and friendly, down to earth but highly knowledgeable. He went on to head up the bigger Arts Computing Unit. He always fixed everything and quickly. He’d done all sorts of jobs in his life and had a diverse range of hobbies and interests. After a while he occupied what he called the best office on campus in Arts D. It was big and had wide windows from wall to wall that looked over the central Bramber House catering building at a central intersecting point of campus, with criss-crossing pathways in view where you could see a constant flow of people coming and going. Later I was moved into the same office - D323 it was. It had panoptic views and sometimes students would email me to say they were unable to come to the seminar due to illness only for me to spot them wandering along the paths outside my building looking in peak fitness. A couple of times someone set up bungee jumping outside the office (some charitable fundraiser I think) and it was very difficult to concentrate on work. When you could tear your eyes away from watching, you would be brought back to it by the screams of someone who had jumped and was bouncing up and down on the elastic outside. Paul had health problems early and later in life and sadly died in 2015 aged only 58. He was probably the nicest most likeable person I ever met at Sussex, not to mention how brilliant he was at his job.

When we got connected to the internet it was at dial-up speeds and you tried to use it in the morning 'before America woke up' because it would be even more painfully slow in the afternoon when the USA logged on. When email arrived there was initially limited take-up. When people said they would check their email I assumed there was a room somewhere where the email arrived and you had to go to collect it. The early email system had a red postbox icon on the computer desktop and when a message arrived there would be a ping and a symbol of a letter would appear poking out of the postbox slot. I think you would go hours or even days with no email arriving in the early days. Then people started to complain about getting 5 or 10 emails a day, saying it distracted them from their work. And then staff started to use the cc facility and copy in people which led to waves of complaints about getting emails they felt they did not really need to see. It took a long while for off-campus webmail to come along so when you were at home you were email free. One professor took a while to adjust. If you went to collect printing you would find it buried in reams of messages he was still printing out a decade or two after email came along. It's surprising there's any rainforest left at all.

Pre-internet, organising a student demo involved calling a meeting to plan it then leafletting for days to get the word out. The day came when people could just post on Facebook to get a protest up and running and I was amazed when demos could be organised and happen with an hour's notice. In the 2000s email went into decline amongst students. They were using texting, messaging, and social media instead and there had to be campaigns to get students to check their email.

The first time I really experienced smartphones was when I sent a student an email and then walked out of my office to see him standing in the corridor. He thanked me for my message. I asked how he could have possibly got it as I had only just clicked the send button. He pointed at his phone. I didn't really understand. I didn't know you could pick up email on your phone.

To go back to the library again; in the early days, there was always a problem with there not being enough copies of books that were on the reading list, and constant complaints from students who could not get the resources they needed. I saw an opportunity with the internet. I taught myself HTML code and got some webspace from IT Services. I uploaded readings to the webspace, created links to them, and put them on a homemade webpage which I made available to students. It took a lot longer to set up than it sounds. I put a tracker on the webpage so I could see if it was getting hits. Hardly any students used it. I think it was just outside their frame of reference at that time. When I tried to explain this method to staff most looked blank and indicated they had other business to attend to.

We photocopied readings, to help with this problem, and sold them in big study packs. I had a meeting about this with, I think, the sub-librarian Chris Ravilious. When I talked about formalising the copyright for this sort of initiative, because tutors were just copying and distributing readings without any legal permissions, he said it was best I did not tell him about the latter. But the packs were expensive and students rightly complained about the cost. Later, the university created online course sites (that eventually replaced hard-copy course documents) and online reading lists where you could click through to electronic readings. It became the standard setup and students then started to use them. Even now these online sites are quite clunky. I'm not sure, given the smart world we are in now, why they can't be more smooth and user-friendly.

Chair of Social and Political Thought: 1993-6

Mary Farmer, an economic sociologist, had an office on my corridor. She was highly respected and liked across the school and was committed, conscientious, and very hard-working. The last light on in the evenings was often from her office. She was ever helpful and generous with her time, including with me. She was a Sub-Dean for Student Affairs for a while and, I think, had also been a Labour councillor on East Sussex County Council. She had a nice house in the lovely West Hill area of Brighton and I went round there with my kids at least once for a daytime party. She was chair of the Social and Political Thought (SPT) Graduate Division, which hosted an MA and PhD programme.

In 1993 she went into hospital for minor investigative surgery. It went wrong and she was taken into intensive care. At work, we all held our collective breath. At the weekend I got a call from Pete Saunders, then the chair of the sociology group, to say she had died. Pete was calling round everyone in the department to pass on the terrible news. Her funeral was on a weekday in term time and a coach was hired to take everyone who wanted to go from the university and then bring them back to campus. She was only just into her 40s when she died.

Someone had to take the reins of SPT on an interim basis and the Dean asked me. I then took it on for a full term from 1993-96. I was just 29 when I took over and the Dean put great faith in me to make a good job of it. I really was winging it but it was thrilling to be involved in this

international intense programme. It was made easier because Mary had left such a good operation. I continued her tradition of inviting all the staff and students round for lunch at my house at the start of each year. I'm not the most sociable person and not a very enthusiastic cook but I enjoyed doing it.

The SPT MA was a flourishing course and often had 25-30 students on it each year, from all around the world, many of whom had had it recommended to them by their tutors at home. There was always a strong contingent of Greeks, keen to stay as long as possible, in some cases to avoid compulsory military service. It was possibly the world's most well-regarded SPT programme. The PhD programme had about 30 students on it at the time. There was a weekly research seminar with speakers giving talks. When I was chairing the division (as it was called) it was an intense period. The students were very serious and after the seminars we often went for drinks or to a local Italian restaurant. MA and PhD students and lecturers all got to know each other well. Strong bonds were formed and memories made.

I taught on the SPT MA for years and had a number of PhD students in the division. When I started at Sussex, William Outhwaite, then chair of the division, suggested I put on a course on Recent Political Thought, which I did. It was half on theorists and political theory since the Second World War, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, and so on. The second half focused on thought coming out of social movements, feminism, ecology, recent socialism, etc.

One of my early PhD students, Terry, and her partner Kirby, an artist, came to stay with me while they were looking for somewhere to live. My kids loved them and were impressed by Kirb's art. When they found a place nearby they borrowed my settee and Kirby gave us a gift of a painting he had done for the children. Terry got ill on fieldwork in, I think, Nicaragua and it took me weeks to pick up her email about this. It came over Christmas and there was no webmail at home so you could only get email at work, which I was away from for a long time. On one occasion she and Kirby were caught up in an armed robbery at a bus stop where shots were fired and they had to take cover and flee. Terry was not much younger than me when I supervised her PhD, something that happened quite a bit to me in those days. One anxious PhD student took to appearing at my house unannounced in search of impromptu supervision. Another who I barely knew, also asked if he could come and live with me for a while while he was homeless. One other, before coming from abroad, announced in advance we were going to be great friends and hang out and asked if I would go and look at prospective houses for her and feedback on whether they were suitable.

There were many important staff involved in SPT in those early years, William, Mary, Darrow Schecter, John O'Neill, Andrew Chitty, Neil Stammers and more. Donald Winch taught in SPT and in the School of Social Sciences. He was trained as an economist but became an intellectual historian, especially of economic thought. He cared deeply and sincerely about academic integrity and standards of scholarship and the importance of a history of ideas approach. He could be gruff and scary, but also quite emotional, gentle, and caring. Like Bruce Graham, he took the new generation of academics under his wing and supported them. When Margaret Thatcher espoused the work of Adam Smith, Donald pointed out in various articles, including one in *The Guardian*, that Smith was far from a free marketeer and that his thought did not support the sort of neoliberal approach she favoured. He joined Sussex in 1969 just a

few years after its foundation and did stints as Dean of the School of Social Sciences and as a PVC.

It was at one SPT talk about 1993 that I met Caroline, a lecturer in literature in the German group at Sussex, on a scheme to bring German academics to the UK. Her parents were British but she had been brought up in Germany. Caroline helped me overcome my prejudice against Michel Foucault and guided me through introducing him into my teaching. She was an important part of my life in those years.

While I was SPT chair the Sociology BA was put in for assessment in the Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA - an external audit of teaching quality at universities) and the SPT MA was added in with it. The Sociology chair wrote our submission and covered SPT too, which I felt guilty about as I should have done more on that part. It was an intensive visit, over three or four days I think, with many lectures and seminars attended by the assessment team of academics. I had my MA Recent Political Thought seminar observed and also an undergraduate lecture on capitalism and the environment. There were six categories each marked out of 4. They covered some things we could control, like our teaching, and some we could not, like the library or computer provision. At the feedback session, the 6 scores lay on an overhead projector, but covered with a sheet so we could not see them. The chair of the team gave a talk saying he had encouraged his team to be as critical as possible and then took off the paper sheet to show we had scored 4/4 in every category, a maximum possible 24. I think only two or three other university sociology departments got the top score in that round, possibly Essex and Warwick among them. Much wine was drunk later and, as the news spread, people from outside the department, hearing how we had done, came in amazed and happy for us, to be part of the celebrations.

My excellent successor as SPT chair renamed the role from Chair to Director and replaced the fold-over paper A4 leaflet we sent to enquirers with a glossy colourful one. It was in tune with the way things were going and the leaflet at least was the right way to go. But I preferred the old less managerial title and the less glossy leaflet.

Ecology and Society

The first course I designed myself was 'Ecology and Society'. It was rare for sociologists to consider environmental issues in these days. The course proposal sailed through the various committees that had to look at it, as new course proposals tended to. There were lots of these committees in the complex subject group and school system of the time. Only one unit came back with suggestions for changes. Alasdair Smith, Dean of European Studies, said that the course was based quite a lot on literature from the green movement (which it was) and that more academic literature could be on the reading list. I made a mental note of a rare experience of someone a bit less laid back than was the norm. I made the necessary amendments. The course became a book with the same title, my first book. A few years later I stopped teaching the course as the area rapidly expanded and I felt I could not keep up with the literature well enough.

My publishers entered Ecology and Society for the annual Philip Abrams prize for 1995. This was for the best first book by a young British sociologist that year. I'm not sure how big the

field is for such a niche remit but the prize was prestigious and gets lots of publicity. I got a phone call (landline, of course) from a secretary at the British Sociological Association (BSA) one day who said I had won. The money prize was about £100 and a cheque came in the post soon after. She said it also brought a lot of glory. I said I was more interested in the glory than the money and she said approvingly 'quite right too!'. I was sworn to secrecy until the prize was presented. I had to go the the BSA conference to receive it. I was never a big lover of conferences throughout my whole career, but this one I had to go to. The prize was presented by Michèle Barrett (see the first part of this blog on the early years) and she was very nice. When I asked if I had to make a speech accepting it, she said of course not.

I bumped into John Solomos at that conference at breakfast. John, a sociologist of race and racism, had been the internal examiner on my PhD and we crossed paths many times over the years. A Sussex graduate, he was always fond of the place, and was an external examiner for us when I was Head of Department. Later I was an external examiner at City University when he was Head of Department there. It was not as dodgy as it sounds. I loved the years externalling at City, along with the wonderful Maggie O'Neill. That part of London is a favourite place of mine, they had lots of great people on the staff, and I carried on for the maximum possible term allowed. John had a very gentle manner and was always nice, attentive, and supportive to me. He was a mad Baggies (West Bromwich Albion Football Club) fan and chair of its London supporters club, travelling to many home and away games. He had stumbled across the team when he was a child in Cyprus and was hooked for good.

I went to the Polity Press stall at the BSA conference (Polity published the Ecology book) and the Polity staff member recognised me from a photo they had on file. She introduced me to Anthony Giddens, a very well-known British sociologist and co-owner of Polity. He was quite aloof on that occasion but many years later when I met him at a political think tank conference in Brussels (in 2011) he was much more clubbable and friendly. I took my daughter with me to the conference and Giddens came up to me at dinner and said 'You're Luke Martell, aren't you, I'm Tony Giddens'. I'd written some other books for Polity by then and he joked that I was keeping Polity Press afloat with my sales. After we'd had a chat he moved on and my daughter said to me in awe; 'That's Anthony Giddens and HE KNOWS WHO YOU ARE!'. Giddens knew just about everyone, especially anyone his publishing house took on, but I was happy to impress my daughter.

Much later on I was the energy and environment rep for my school and department. I put together a policy which included requiring relevant units to only fund work flights if the journey could not be easily done by train. This was in consultation with other staff in newly created environmental rep roles and the Student Union President at the time, Dan Glass, who was pursuing an eco-university project. He soon after made a name for himself by glueing himself to PM Gordon Brown in a protest about aviation. Domestic flights were ruled out and some longer ones to Europe. I was shocked that many people resisted and seemed blissfully unaware of the seriousness of climate change, or just unbothered about it relative to their own personal convenience. After much struggle, the policy was passed at department and school levels. It was immediately ignored and short very avoidable flights that clearly broke the policy continued to be supported. Some staff harangued me saying I had no right to ban their private domestic flights. Of course, they were right, I did have no such right. I had not done so. The policy was on the funding of work flights.

I carried on teaching environmental issues on all my courses throughout my career. When I wrote my Ecology book, science was split on climate change. That has obviously changed. These days I find it a difficult topic to think about. There are so many possible solutions but, despite much brave and committed activism, so little political and corporate will to pursue them. You don't have to be a doomer by nature to see that the future of life on earth looks pretty bleak.

The Smith Years 1998-2007

New Labour, New Britain

In May 1994 the Labour leader John Smith died. I bumped into my colleague Stephen Driver on the stairs at work very soon after and we were speculating on who would be the new leader. I said Gordon Brown, but he said no no it'll be Blair. Stephen left Sussex but I bumped into him soon after at a Ralph Miliband memorial conference at the LSE, I think it must have been about 1995. Blair, by then leader and looking likely to become Prime Minister at the next election, spoke at the conference. Stephen and I sat watching, with a brooding Alastair Campbell standing next to us in the aisle. We compared notes and it turned out I was writing a book on social democracy and Stephen was writing one on New Labour. We decided to pool our resources and write one on New Labour together. We thought there was something interesting going on beyond just electoralism and marketing, although there was a fair bit of the latter too.

We started with a 1996 warning shot in the journal *Renewal*, an article entitled 'Beyond Equality and Liberty: New Labour's Liberal-Conservatism' about a drift away from economic egalitarianism and towards moral conservatism in the Labour Party under Blair. In 1997 we followed up with 'New Labour's communitarianisms' in *Critical Social Policy* arguing similarly that the Labour's communitarianism was changing from economic and egalitarian to more social and conservative.

By election day in May 1997, we more or less had a draft of a book ready. Blair's victory was momentous. I had been 15 when Thatcher came to power and had lived under the Tories until I was aged 33 in 1997. I was very sceptical about Blair, but the Tories were out, Blair was young and dynamic, I couldn't help feeling euphoric despite all my doubts. On the 2nd of May, the day after the election, Stephen and I sent a book proposal around publishers and unsurprisingly we had lots of interest. In the end, we chose Polity Press. We waited for a few months into Labour's early days in government to check if we needed to update anything. Then in 1998, the book New Labour came out. I think it was the first academic-authored book on New Labour. In 2002 we followed up with a second book, Blair's Britain.

It was difficult for us to take a definite line on New Labour as Stephen and I differed politically. He was basically a social liberal and economic liberal. I was an old-style Bennite left-winger. I had joined the Labour Party in 1982 at the first possible opportunity, the day of my 18th birthday. Michael Foot was leader and I was a very active member until the late 1980s under Neil Kinnock's policy review. I always took the line I could not be a member of a party whose policies I could not defend when canvassing and I left then. I rejoined when Corbyn was leader and left again when Starmer replaced him. I was more critical of New Labour from a

left point of view and I think Stephen was more sympathetic. So Stephen and I gave a wide array of possible interpretations of New Labour in our books without committing ourselves to one.

We got invited to conferences and seminars to give talks, from India to Canada, Brussels and all over the UK. One event we were invited to, in 2005 I think, was a visit to the UK of a delegation from the Chinese Communist Party. All sorts of luminaries were there, including the bruiser John McTernan, a political advisor to Tony Blair. We said lots of things to the delegation about policy under New Labour but the Chinese delegation kept coming back to the same question: 'How does Mr Blair maintain discipline in the party?'.

I got invited twice to speak at meetings in Brussels of politicians, political advisors, and academics. I was given the task both times of providing a left critique of New Labour. One was a Policy Network (a pro-New Labour think tank) conference in 2011 which mainly consisted of centre-left politicians and advisors. In my talk, I argued that the left needed to play down growth and put more emphasis on environmental concerns, and shift from an anti-immigration stance to one that argued for the benefits of immigration. It went down badly with my audience. The former Prime Minister of Denmark was there and the former Labour minister Liam Byrne chaired my session. He was the one who left a note for the incoming Conservative government saying there was no money left. That was about as high as my direct contact with elites ever went and I don't think they were on board with my talk. But Anthony Giddens, who had written on climate change by then, said, to the side, that he agreed with what I had said and a couple of passionate left-wing women MEPs from, I think, France and Germany, also said they agreed. My daughter came with me and we stayed a few days and did some tourism in Brussels and Bruges. We were in a bit of a bubble and on the way back on the Eurostar I couldn't work out why all the papers were running articles on Steve Jobs. Eventually, I twigged he had died while we were away. Soon after, Policy Network asked me to write a chapter for a book they were publishing. When the proofs came back all the bits where I expressed left-wing views had gone. What were they expecting when they commissioned me to write for them? They claimed it was a mistake. I later found out from an insider that they did sometimes make such 'mistakes'. I got the missing parts put back in.

The other talk I gave in Brussels was at a seminar in 2012 where there were two speakers, the other was a Belgian government minister Paul Magnette. He represented the centre-left perspective and gave a slick talk on the way forward for the left. I obediently fulfilled the allocated role I was given of being 'critical, very critical, very very critical' as the chair of the session put it. The audience was a small one of MEPs, European parliament civil servants, and political advisors. Several of them came up to me afterwards and had questions, asking for reading and such like. One Irishman told me (rightly) that I talked too fast. These were my first two visits to Brussels as an adult and it was a strange place, where English was the main language as you were out and about, the people in the city centre were from all nations, and if you had been parachuted in you would not have been able to guess what country you were in, all a product of being the base for the European parliament. It was a day trip this time and on the early morning train from London there were MEPs and European parliament staff, and in the evening when I went back many of the same faces.

I spent an amazing and memorable few days in Calcutta in the early 2000s where I gave a talk about the Third Way at an EU-funded conference on democracy and governance. I met some lovely people and the organiser, Surendra Munshi, still keeps in touch. Papers from the conference were published as a book. I also went to a small retrospective on New Labour some time after this. Neil Kinnock was there and also Shirley Williams, former Labour Cabinet minister and founder of the SDP who had been a major political figure during the years I became interested in politics. I still write occasionally on the Labour Party.

The end of the interdisciplinary system: The Thrill is Gone

The university started to feel a bit New Labour too - Sussex's old social conscience but mixed with an increasing emphasis on notions of business efficiency. In 1998 a new Vice-Chancellor (VC, university CEO) was appointed. Alasdair Smith came from inside the university, a professor of economics, a Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC, deputy to the VC) and former Dean (head of school). He was to continue in the role until 2007. It felt promising to have a VC who knew the university and was coming up from the ground. He was someone who was willing to talk to students when they set up a protest camp outside his building. Later VCs were not interested in dialogue with student protestors. Mary Stuart was a PVC under Alasdair. She had a nice personal touch. She was very encouraging and supportive to me and later became a well-regarded VC at the University of Lincoln. Alasdair's wife Sherry Ferdman worked at the university as a lecturer and I liked her a lot. I worked with her, if I remember correctly, on study skills materials for students, which there were not a lot of in those days. Another PVC was Evelyn Welch, now VC at Bristol University. I later found out that she is Florence Welch's (of Florence and the Machine) mother and every time Florence comes up in conversation however hard I try I can't help blurting out 'I know her Mum'.

But it turned out that Alasdair's experience of the university had not generated affection for its structures. He proposed abolishing the interdisciplinary school system and replacing it with conventional departments. To his credit, he created a campus-wide email group, that I think everyone was on, to discuss the proposals. Such openness to wide consultation was not continued under future VCs. In my school, I think I was just about the only one who contributed regularly to this email list, in my case on the side of interdisciplinary structures and against the changes. This led some to believe that my school was against the reforms when, in fact, there was probably more support for the reforms in my school than in the others in the arts and social sciences. At the end of the email debate, I sent a very short message to the group along the lines, if I remember the nuances right, that at the start, quoting him, Alasdair had said the changes were not a threat to interdisciplinarity, but at the end, quoting again, said he hoped everyone would move on from interdisciplinarity.

The old system was ended. There was mass migration of staff around the university so we could be co-located in departments. The sociologists were brought together in one place. Interdisciplinary schools were ended and courses that had been lovingly created for them were terminated. I managed to save my course on 'The Death of Socialism?' (with a question mark) by persuading the Centre for European Studies and Politics to host it. They kindly continued to do so for another 20 years. It was a popular, lively course and I loved teaching it.

One person who was aghast that a course he had carefully constructed was due to be lost was Glen Newey, a political philosopher. His course was a brilliant and unusual one on 'Political Persuasion' and he could not believe all his work on this would just be swept away. I can't remember if it got saved in a new unit. Glen always reminded me of Vyvyan from The Young Ones. He had an office near mine and he was devoted to high academic standards, like all good philosophers. I visited his house in the countryside once or twice and met his kids and got to know his wife Linda. Glen would get anxious before seminars about them going well (I did too) and afterwards would get worried if just one or two students did not seem to be fully on board in the classes. I told him you can't please all the people all the time. Glen had a blunt manner, and was scathing about the powerful and privileged. He was unconventional, funny with a black humour, kind-hearted, and popular.

Of course, there were reasons for the changes, and I have mentioned previously some of the limits of the interdisciplinary school system. Nothing is perfect. People were still able to do interdisciplinary work when the university changed to a departmental system. But staff no longer rubbed shoulders day to day with academics of many different disciplines. Students' experience of other disciplines, and especially of interdisciplinarity (which is qualitatively much, much more than multidisciplinarity), was radically curtailed. Interdisciplinary courses more or less disappeared. Sussex lost what made it unique, different, and special and it merged into the homogeneous mass of UK universities, not so easy to pick out as a radical and unusual place. It was very sad. I didn't know then things would get much worse as the next years rolled on. But I also didn't know that as far as structures that support interdisciplinarity go this was not the end of the story. I'll come back to that in the last of these Sussex Stories.

Alasdair played a big part in the creation of the successful medical school at Sussex. The building created for the school did not really fit in with the campus architecture and he later said that he was sorry he had not taken a more hands-on role in keeping an eye on how it developed. He attracted controversy for supporting the introduction of top-up fees and for attempting to close down (or restructure) the Chemistry department, because of thin student recruitment. A high-profile national campaign to save Chemistry was launched. Alasdair had to go before a parliamentary committee to defend his plans. He was not helped by the fact that one of those involved in the campaign was a Nobel prize winner, Harry Kroto, once a member of Sussex Chemistry. Sussex still has a chemistry department. When I was HoD, the Dean position above me became vacant and Alasdair asked me if I was interested. I said that being Head of Department (as I was then) was high enough in management for me.

When Blair decided to introduce top-up fees - where students contributed £1000 a year to their fees - I was conflicted. I had always felt uncomfortable about working-class people funding, through their taxes, what were predominantly middle-class students to go to university. It felt like a regressive tax and the grumblings of Sussex Porters on this issue hit home for me. So, while unconvinced, I had some sympathy with top-up fees, for these egalitarian reasons. Some people said it would be the start of a slippery slope to students having to pay all their fees. I was unconvinced this would happen. It was not the only political misjudgment I have ever made, showing that academics who specialise in politics should not always be relied on for political analysis.

There was a large do at the Brighton Dome when Alasdair retired as VC. I have always thought you should judge people by what they do, not what they are like as personalities 1-1 or in public, and so I should have been pretty negative about Alasdair for dismantling the interdisciplinary structures. But at the last minute, I decided to go to the party.

Leader of the Pack: Head of Department 2002-5

In 2001-2 the chair of Sociology, Jennifer Platt, went around the department consulting staff on who they thought should succeed her as subject chair when she retired. One day she came knocking on my door saying that I had come out as the top (or least bottom) choice. I took a bit of time to consider it. My ego overrode my doubts and I agreed to take it on. I started in August 2002, aged 38. In later years any meaningful consultation with the department about who should be Head (HoD) disappeared and the position was simply assigned from above by the outgoing Head in discussion with the Dean or Head of school above them. One year we were taken by surprise when we were just told someone had been appointed as HoD on the basis no-one else wanted to do it. If we had known this was going to happen others would have been willing to take on the role.

Similarly, when we were allowed a new post, what our criteria for the post would be was discussed by members of the department and I continued this approach when I was Head. On one occasion I found out that the Dean above me had just bypassed me and the department and told HR what kind of new post for us was to be advertised. I was livid. I was able to contact HR in time and get the job withheld on the basis that I, the Head of Sociology, and the department as a whole, knew nothing about the job specs that had been drawn up. In later years department members were no longer consulted about criteria for a new post. Heads of Department or School would decide what kind of post would be advertised and the rest of us would just be told. It was not only undemocratic; it also bypassed lots of on-the-ground expertise which the decision-making would have benefitted from.

While I was HoD there was an attempt by one disgruntled Dean to organise a meeting of Deans and other managers while Alasdair Smith was away in China. It sounded like some sort of mad coup attempt and I'm not sure the meeting even went ahead.

During my term as Head we made a number of appointments, many women. Women became the majority of the department for the first time. After this period, we had some great young working-class women joining the department. On appointing committees I sat on at Sussex, many beyond Sociology, I felt that confident middle-class women were well looked upon. It did feel to me that working-class women had to do more than others to get where they got to. We were still all white. It would take a long time before that changed. Years later Alana Lentin got a new job in Australia and there was a discussion about what sort of person should replace her. Alana and I argued that we should have someone who could keep up her race teaching in the department. I felt every sociology degree should have courses on class, gender, and race. I was pretty shocked that no-one else other than us two thought keeping up race teaching should be a criterion.

After one year as Subject Chair, as the new departmental system kicked in, the role was redefined from Chair of the Sociology Subject Group to Head of Department. One day I heard

loud banging on my door, drilling and hammering. I didn't know quite what to do so I sat it out. When it stopped I tentatively crept forward to open the door and saw a large 'Head of Department' notice had been attached.

When I was HoD, if something was not getting done by the person who was supposed to do it, I just did it myself. It made me popular but it also took its toll. I got a reputation for answering emails soon after they arrived. It was put down to impatience. But the truth is I was getting 250 emails a day and building them up to reply later was just not viable. It took half a day just to read them and, where needed, reply, before the next batch then started piling up.

During this period the theoretically anti-neoliberal Dean of the School, proposed an end to seminars in the first year. Teaching for this group would effectively be lecture only, to cut costs. It would have meant students going through their first year with no seminar group discussion, not just educationally bad but also bad for well-being and integration. Thankfully, this was resisted and a compromise was made where seminars were kept but reduced from two hours to one. Sociology student reps rightly wanted us to do more and suggested allocating money from other budget headings to the hourly-paid teaching budget so we could keep up the 2 hours seminars. But the budget was a school not department one that we did not control and the finance officer at school level would not sign off on teaching claims from non-teaching budgets. What I could not say publicly at the time was that I was massively overspending on the hourly-paid teaching budget by several times over our pathetic limit and it was getting signed off. This was until it was spotted that we had gone way over budget and I was hauled before the Dean who told me to stop. I said if I stopped it would mean doubling the teaching load of regular academic staff to cover the teaching I was using the budget to pay for. I didn't hear any more of it.

While I was HoD a delegation of students came to see me to say students in the department were submitting plagiarised essays and what was I going to do about it. We knew this was happening but in those days it was difficult to detect or prove. This changed later when online plagiarism detection tools were introduced. But while difficult to prove plagiarism, it was possible to try to prevent it from happening. I was invited on to a university plagiarism working group and we organised advice to students on avoiding plagiarism and what the consequences could be if they did it. I was sent out to give talks to students about this. An opposite problem was some staff putting students through horrible plagiarism processes when they were basically just guilty of poor referencing; what they had done did not meet the very carefully worded university definition of plagiarism. I was criticised for being soft on plagiarism and setting a bad example when I would not support some of these cases. But it wasn't me being soft (and I did report plagiarism myself on some occasions). The problem was staff who got on their high horses about careless referencing but did not take care to read carefully what the actual plagiarism definition and rules were, so causing students very avoidable trauma.

Ruth Woodfield was a confidante and valued supporter during my time as HoD. She looked after our part in the national research assessment exercise every department had to go through, an enormous and huge responsibility for a process I was averse to. It was a relief she did it for us and I tried to be supportive. I didn't have much faith in the 'REF' (Research Excellence Framework), the external research assessment process. When I submitted a book

to the exercise, it came back afterwards and it was clear from the signs of use that only the first chapter or two (of 13) had been looked at by the reviewer. I discussed the REF with some sociologists who were on assessment panels and they gave diametrically opposed views of the same sociologists' excellence at research or lack of it. There was nothing scientific about it. One academic at another university that I visited served on a REF panel. He had massive boxes of books and articles piled up to read and evaluate. He admitted he only had time to scan parts of some of them. But putting together our submissions and our case was an art, and the bit the assessors did read thoroughly (at least I hope so) was our submitted document. This is what Ruth handled carefully and professionally.

One job I loved as HoD was presenting the sociology graduates on the stage at the graduation ceremony at the Brighton Dome. I would announce the name of the student and then they would walk over to the Chancellor Richard Attenborough for a handshake and sometimes a few words. Attenborough's daughter had studied sociology at Sussex. She sadly died in the terrible 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Attenborough (very reasonably) made similar speeches at every ceremony. One story he loved to recount to the parents and students was about when he had visited a village somewhere in Africa and asked the poor inhabitants what they most wanted in life. Affecting a sob and a wavering voice he reported back to the parents and students in the arena, after a dramatic pause, that what they had said they wanted most was '..... education'. The response was always a big 'Aaah' and a ripple of applause. One year when I was guiding the graduating students over to him on the stage he looked over and winked at me. It was one of the most exciting things that has ever happened in my life.

We gave a couple of prizes for the best overall mark and the best mark for a dissertation and I would read the names of the winners out on the stage at graduation. Over time I came to hate these prizes. For every winner there were people who did not win. Many people, for social or psychological reasons, had less chance of winning one, and the prize just rubbed that in. One year I proposed abolishing them but I don't think there was much, if any, support for that.

I nominated the Head of Widening Participation (WP) one year for a university award and she was successful in winning. The award was presented to her at the graduation ceremony with her family in attendance. The main reason I nominated her was that she was just great at her important job. I also felt WP was not valued and high profile enough at Sussex and I wanted to raise its visibility. I also nominated an hourly paid tutor for such an award and again she was successful in getting it. I met her and her Mum at the graduation ceremony where it was presented. Again, I thought she deserved it but also wanted to raise the profile of hourly paid tutors who seemed very taken for granted at the time and had terrible contracts.

Jumping ahead slightly: in 2008 I nominated Miss Dynamite for an honorary degree and to my surprise the honorary degrees committee invited her to accept the degree. I gave these reasons for proposing her: "Miss Dynamite (Niomi Arleen MacLean-Daley born 1981) grew up the youngest of 8 children in Archway, North London, wanted to be a teacher or social worker and had a place at Sussex to study Social Anthropology. However, she chose to pursue her successful career in the UK garage music scene, coming through Pirate Radio. She became an articulate voice for young people in the UK, outlining reasons for their alienation from politics and speaking out against gun crime. She was in So Solid Crew before going solo and performed at Live 8. As a solo artist, she recorded ‘Mr Prime Minister’ about Tony Blair and

other songs featuring social commentary. When she won the Mercury Music prize in 2002 she donated the £20k prize money to the NSPCC. She is a supporter of Make Poverty History. She is well-regarded in the anti-war and feminist movements. She has sung against the Iraq war and for the Stop the War Coalition. She has performed for Rock against Racism and in South Africa at a Mandela event raising awareness of Aids. She has sung about absent fathers and parental responsibility and spoken out against gun crime. She is a young black woman and role model who has played an important public role contributing to development, progress, and change in society." I said this fitted in with Sussex's critical and radical traditions.

I felt she was deserving of the degree, because of her broader social stances, as well as because of her contribution to music. I also thought it would do no harm for Sussex to recognise the achievements of a young black woman. However, it had to go through the school and the Dean said we should only be nominating people from establishment spheres and argued for ruling her out. I thought it should be about what you had done, regardless of what sphere of society you were in. A senior member of Anthropology said she was too young and that people should have been around for longer before getting such a degree. I felt it should be about what you did, not how long you had been around to do it. I honestly think, like the Dean, he just felt someone from popular culture should not be recognised. But I got enough support for the nomination to go ahead. I heard nothing about it for a while and when I chased it up was told Miss Dynamite had not responded to the offer of an honorary degree. It seemed odd as she did later accept an MBE so was not averse to accepting honours. One of those opposed to her nomination had a habit of intervening surreptitiously in things that were not going how he wanted, in order to get his way. He'd once asked for an electronic version of a document I was sending to the management and said he would pass it on himself. There was no reason for him to have an electronic copy during its route up to the centre and he was so adamant on insisting he was not going to alter it en route that I felt that was exactly what he planned. I wondered if the offer to Miss Dynamite had ever actually been made. Maybe I'm reading too much into it.

One student who never got as far as his graduation was one of my personal tutees, Felix White. Lecturers were all personal tutors, the first port of call for students with academic or welfare issues they wanted to discuss. The role was later to cover academic issues only, personal or welfare issues being handled by professional counsellors. About 2005 Felix came to see me. He said he played in a band and they'd been offered a record contract and had the chance to go on tour. He didn't feel this would be compatible with being a university student. He was gentle and polite but in a quandary about what to do and asked me for advice. I said to him he had the choice of being a rock star or getting a university degree. It was a no-brainer in my view. My advice, I said, was to take the chance of being a rock star. I'm not sure it was what he was expecting his university tutor to say. But he proceeded to do exactly that. His band was The Maccabees. They recorded 4 albums and split up in 2017. Sometime after he left and made it with the band I saw him walking round The Level, a park in Brighton near my house, and he nodded and said Hi. By that stage, he was quite well known and I'd assumed that everywhere rock stars went they would be mobbed by adoring fans. But he was walking around seemingly quite anonymous that day.

Towards the end of my time as HoD, I was invited to Birmingham University to give a paper. I didn't really want to go. I didn't have anything to present. But I was persuaded and I put

together a not-very-good cobbled-together talk which, to my surprise, later got published. When I got there, myself and some of the staff from the department gathered in the HoD's office. Then suddenly all the staff except for the HoD walked out in unison leaving just me and the Head. I didn't know what was going on. It was like there had been some pre-arranged signal. Then the HoD, a charismatic and energetic professor, came over, sat next to me, where I was seated with one leg crossed over the other and grabbed my foot (yes, my foot). He looked me in the eye intently and said he was moving on and they would be advertising for a new head and they would like me to apply. I love Birmingham (not a phrase you hear that often, but I do). I went there as a child to visit family and have been numerous times since. But I didn't want to end as HoD in one place to then do it again. And I still was loving Sussex even if my devotion had taken a bit of a battering. I was flattered but did not apply.

Strangely one or two people who had been daily smiley visitors to my office, full of goodwill and interest in me while I was HoD, stopped coming almost exactly on the day my term of office as HoD ended. The HoD role is all-consuming and you were then paid about £1000 extra a year to do it, barely any compensation for the scale of what is involved. I spent the money on getting my house refurbished, by a friend Jim, a colourful and likeable character, and husband of one of my PhD students. After the three-year head term finished you got a term's research leave to catch up on lost research time. I had lost pretty much all of my research time for three years and a term did not really enable me to even catch up. It took me quite a while just to get back in the zone of academic thinking and writing. Later on, one head of sociology suddenly and unilaterally, without any department discussion, changed the post-HoD study leave period from one term to one year at the point when their term as head finished.

When I was HoD my teenage son was living with me. He had to listen to my post-work rants. I'm not sure he was listening but it was very therapeutic anyway. When I finished as HoD everyone told me how grateful they were for all my efforts and that I would never have to be head again.

New appointments and equal opportunities: this is the real world

I said the university I arrived at was 'beautiful' in the early years. But it was not beautiful for everyone. The student body was disproportionately white and middle-class. In the workforce, women were crammed at the bottom of the scale, in precarious jobs, with few in senior positions. There were few People of Colour on the staff and I think barely any in any kind of senior positions. One exception was a fantastic colleague in International Relations, Marc Williams, who I liked a lot. He was a school sub-dean. He left to go to Australia. It was a big loss.

Some time after I had finished as head we were granted funds for a new post. One of the sociology staff mentioned this to a professor at another university who said he would be interested in applying. When the senior management heard about this they decided to headhunt this professor without advertising the post in an open competition. Apparently, this was perfectly legal. On the appointing committee, I said this undermined equal opportunities, that we were just appointing a middle-aged white man without anyone else having the chance to be considered. The very senior manager chairing the committee replied: 'This is the real

world, Luke'. Our department had a number of people working on inequality at work but none, as far as I am aware, publicly raised objections. Inconsistency between positions taken in academic work and in practice at the university was a common theme of my time at Sussex.

To entice the professor the university said they would meet his request to fund an additional junior lecturer in his area with his appointment. After the man accepted the job it became clear this promise of a post was not going to be fulfilled. I was given the job of liaising with him while the head of department was away and when he asked about the junior post I said I did not think this was going to happen. He raised his disquiet at higher levels. I was taken to task for revealing the deception to him before he had signed on the dotted line. Truth and transparency were censured; deceit and dishonesty endorsed. Later on, the head of department at the time said that the process of this appointment had not been their most glorious moment.

In this period we had applications for Sociology posts at Sussex from all over the world. We were very popular. I made an effort to link up with contacts in India to spread the news of our posts there when jobs came up. But the higher-up manager who chaired the appointing committees at the time decided we should not consider applicants from places like India (and other Global South places) if they had not published in recognised Global North journals, and top ones at that. I said we should ask to see the applicants' work if they seemed promising and judge the work on its merits, disregarding place of publication. I was willing to put in the work to make this happen. The manager was against. I don't think I got backed on the relevant appointing committees and such applicants effectively got their applications binned without their work being considered on its own merits. It was yet another case of academics committed to egalitarian principles in theory, including anti-colonial ones, not putting them into practice. I don't know what my Indian contacts thought when in the cases of job after job I had encouraged applications for, no-one got even long-listed. I was too ashamed to ask.

Sussex summer school and Laci Löb

For several years I gave a lecture at the English in the Vacation Sussex summer school. This was a residential course for a couple of weeks or so for overseas visitors, mostly but not all European, of all ages, who could brush up their English, attend lectures and seminars on Britain and do a bit of educational sightseeing in the UK. I gave lectures on themes such as New Labour and Britain and Globalisation. The course was run by Laci (Ladislaus) Löb and he carried on doing it after retirement. Laci was a professor in the German group at Sussex.

One year I read a letter by Laci in The Guardian. It was defending Rezsö Kasztner, a Hungarian Jew who had negotiated with Adolf Eichmann, the architect of the holocaust, to buy the freedom of 1700 other Hungarian Jews. Along the way, they ended up in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp but were eventually released from there and travelled to safety in Switzerland. Kasztner was controversial and seen by some as a collaborator with the Nazis, despite having saved these lives. He was later assassinated by an Israeli extremist. I was curious and did a bit more research and discovered that Laci had been one of those rescued.

After our lectures for the summer school we had to fill in a form to get paid and one part required us to complete an equal opportunities section giving our nationality and ethnic group

etc. Laci said he hated this part. As someone who had had to wear a yellow star, he said it made him very uncomfortable. I told him then that I knew about his past and he seemed startled and shaken. Laci wrote a book called *Dealing with Satan* (a later edition was renamed *Rezsö Kasztner*) which was about Kasztner but also about Laci's past in Hungary, including during the holocaust, his time in Belsen with his father from age 11, their escape and what happened to Kasztner. I read the book, which must have been very traumatic to write, and which I recommend highly. I told Laci how good it was. He said he had felt it was his duty to make the case for this man, however controversial he was, without whom he would not be alive, and was obviously very appreciative that I had read the book and been positive about it. Laci lost most of his family in the holocaust. He described himself as, relatively speaking, 'lucky'. At the Jewish museum in Berlin one year I looked at the book that lists victims of the holocaust to search for the name Löb. There was page after page after page after page of Löbs. I had to stop looking and walk away.

Laci lived and studied in Switzerland before taking a job at Sussex towards the start in 1963. I remember that he was very sceptical about a German-Jewish Centre that was set up at Sussex, feeling, I think, that it was trying to make some kind of academic (and maybe financial) capital out of the issue. I think his summer school was pulled by the university in the Farthing years, if I remember correctly because it didn't make enough money or some reason like that. It actually was very inexpensive to run. I shared Laci's contempt for this decision, which had nothing to do with education or humanity, and I really felt for him. Laci lived in the UK until 2017 then went back to Switzerland with his wife, Sheila, where he died in 2021 aged 88. He always said he was very grateful to both Switzerland and Britain. Laci was yet another person at Sussex who was nice to me and supportive. He was courteous and kind and had a mischievous dry humour. I remember some wicked jokes of his about Sussex Vice-Chancellors (university CEOs), best not repeated here. Colleagues wrote in his obituary that, 'his was an extraordinary life and he was an extraordinary man'. When Laci died I wrote to his wife and she sent a very nice reply.

The origins of Sociology at Sussex

I didn't know that the founding of Sociology at Sussex was quite rooted in the second world war and the fleeing of Jewish refugees from the Nazis. But, jumping ahead a bit, in about 2009-10 I was asked to write a chapter on the history of Sociology at Sussex for a book *Making the Future: a History of the University of Sussex*. This was for the 50th anniversary of Sussex in 2011. I asked around people who had been at Sussex Sociology from the early days and discovered quite a story.

Zev (Zevedei) Barbu was born in Romania in 1914, fought on the Russian front in 1941 and was imprisoned for desertion, separatism, and leftism. After the war, he was part of a team that drafted a new constitution for his country and he represented Romania at the Paris peace conference. He sought political exile in Britain in 1950, and in the ‘60s was given the task of setting up the new Sociology group at Sussex. The department had two members at its inauguration. One was Zev and the other was Helmut Pappe, a German refugee from the Nazis in 1939. Helmut came to Sussex with interests spanning sociology, history, philosophy, law, and economic theory, in line with the interdisciplinary traditions of the university. Pappe and Barbu were encouraged to come to Sussex by History professor and later Vice Chancellor

Asa Briggs. In the late ‘60s another refugee from the Nazis, Julius Carlebach, joined Sussex Sociology and had a long association with the university. Brighton has a tradition of putting the names of celebrated residents on the front of buses, and I frequently see the bus that bears Carlebach's name.

A Dean overseeing the publication of the history of Sussex book emailed out a celebratory message saying it was the best-selling book ever published by Sussex University. I was unaware Sussex University had ever even published books. I was sick and tired by this point of managers dressing up things in a disingenuous way and was in trouble-making mode. I emailed him back asking how many books Sussex had published. Maybe they had published a lot and this was genuinely a great success relatively. But I never heard back from him. In 2023 my partner saw a copy of the book in an Oxfam shop, opened it and found my chapter, which she was unaware of, excitedly sending a photo of it to me on her phone. It's a great book and nice for anyone who would like to know more about the university's past. I really enjoyed reading it. My chapter on Sussex Sociology 1961-2010 is here.

Globalisation and Political Sociology

Back to 1998-2007. In this period I put together a course on the Sociology of Globalisation that I taught for many years, at one point a two-term course, then shortened to one term. My other main teaching at this time was a Political Sociology course that I had inherited and developed. I was pretty shocked one year to find that a later head of department had just deleted the political sociology course from our offerings without even asking me about it or bringing it up for discussion at a department meeting. The globalisation course became a book. It was just an introductory book but it was fairly epic, 13 chapters and about 130,000 words. The final months of writing it involved me getting up at 5am in the morning, writing without a break until about 3pm every day, then collapsing, only to rise the next day at the same time to continue the process.

The book didn't do badly in terms of being used by students (which was what it was intended for) and there was a second significantly revised version published in 2017. The first edition got one or two negative reviews but, as I have found over and over with academic reviewing, they were littered with inaccuracies and it was obvious the reviewers hadn't even read the book properly. One particularly grating criticism was that I had only three paragraphs on one specific theme. In fact, I had devoted three paragraphs specifically to the theme but had decided it was better to cover it throughout the book whenever relevant rather than hive it off to one section. A quick glance at the index would have enabled the reviewer to see that. The other annoying kind of review of a book proposal or article submission is the one that's supposed to be anonymous, but where it's clear who's written it from the repeated recommendation over and over that I cover the work of one specific person. I'm not bitter. I've also received critical reviews of book and article drafts of mine where what I've written has been read properly and the criticism been entirely justified.

The Farthing Years 2007-16

The dream is over

The interdisciplinary structures had gone. But more was to come. The university motto 'Be Still and Know' became rarely seen in any public face of the university. There was very little 'Be Still' in the post-2007 period. 'Knowing' also went on the back burner. Education and knowledge were a low priority compared to rationalisation, money, and managerial control in the years to come. Two or three years into this post-2007 period I bumped into Alasdair Smith, the previous Vice-Chancellor (VC, the university CEO), in a café and said 'Come back Alasdair, all is forgiven'. 'I can't do that', he replied.

Money, money, money: flashy buildings

Michael Farthing arrived in 2007 as the new Vice-Chancellor. I was told later that in the interviews for the job he had been the only appointable candidate. It was a shame we had not had more choice. The first years seemed quite quiet. On arrival, Farthing was given a tour of the campus and was said to have expressed dissatisfaction at the state of the furniture in the buildings. There was a programme of refurbishment of lecture theatres and seminar rooms and so on. It seemed a bit superficial to me and I actually preferred the rooms as they were before.

A programme of putting up flashy buildings got underway. Arts D and E where I had had offices were deemed too broken to be saved (they were also the least attractive buildings on the arts and social sciences side) and were demolished and replaced by a flashy new building. It had a large atrium which took up so much room it did not leave much space for offices and teaching rooms around the edges. The management buzz phrase at the time was 'wow factor'. Buildings had to express this and the atrium was an attempt at it. This was not to wow the students or the staff but parents at open days. Marketing for money was put before functionality for students and staff.

Other new buildings popped up so we had somewhere to teach the expanding student numbers and the students had somewhere to sleep. We were told it was in tune with the Spence traditions. But it was not. It was architectural brutality. The devoted and careful Spence design was in ruins.

Sociology, Law, and Politics were supposed to move into the flashy atrium building but it became clear that the expansion of the university would mean there would only be room there for the business school. I was sorry this would lead to us being placed at the perimeter of the campus away from most of my arts and social science colleagues and the beautiful Spence buildings they were in. But I could not care less about the flashy building. There was outrage, however, that we would not get our glitzy new accommodation and Farthing had to come and speak to members of the school to pacify them. I was told in my early days at Sussex that the only things academics ever got worked up about were car parking and office space. Sure enough, there was also much discontent when parking charges for car users were introduced. Academics were concerned about more but there did seem to be some truth in the parking and offices preoccupation.

While we were waiting to be moved into our refurbished building we were in a prefab for a year or two or maybe longer, I can't remember exactly. I actually quite liked it. It adjoined a tiny wild area with a pond, trees surrounding it, and a rough path running through. Outside my window were trees and squirrels, who would sometimes pop in through office windows and eat people's lunch while they were out. One colleague made a tray of meringues for her students at their final seminar. She left them unattended in her room for a few minutes. You know what happened next. I can only assume Farthing never stumbled across this lovely unruly patch because it was exactly his sort of prime target for destructive modernisation.

I was on the project management committee for the refurbishment of the building we were to move into. Most of the people who attended were architects, IT people, heating, electrical and wiring experts, and so on. The three heads of department from the school were on the committee to keep an eye out for the staff and student interests. I had become a HoD (head of department) again (see later). No-one representing the professional services staff (non-academic support staff) was invited to attend, which seemed a real act of snobbery and contempt. The committee opened up a new world of building design to me and, possibly, alongside my membership of the Criminal Convictions Sub-committee, was one of the most fascinating experiences of my time at Sussex. The committee was chaired by PVC (Pro-Vice Chancellor, a deputy to the VC) Chris Marlin, who I had got to know as the PVC who led negotiations with the union when I was UCU (University and College Union) branch president (again, see later).

All these new buildings had to be paid for somehow. I wondered where the money would come from.

Restructuring(s)

We had recently had the Smith restructuring but Farthing didn't like it and decided to launch another one. The schools, he felt, were too big for the Deans to manage. So we were restructured into smaller schools. A dozen new managers were employed, with corporate management styles, in newly created posts on huge salaries. It was all openly about increasing managerial control. The old-school traditional academic title 'Dean' was replaced by 'Head of School'.

Again, I wondered where the money was going to come from to pay for the large Heads of School salaries. A higher education economist that the unions consulted later told us that for a university of its size Sussex spent a disproportionately large amount on £100k+ salaries. Also that the management had built up unusually large debts to pay for its big spending. Both were management choices. And big salaries and debt have to be paid.

It was not really clear where Sociology would go in the incoming structures. I attended a meeting between the senior staff of the Sociology and Politics departments and the Law School to investigate whether we could make a school of the three departments. The lawyers were in suits, the sociologists were in jeans and t-shirts, and Politics were somewhere in between. I said that if we had to conform to common sartorial standards this was never going to work. The fact that people laughed gave me some optimism. And, in fact, we did end up

going into a school together and having more in common than I thought we would. Law turned out to be quite sociological and political and we had many common interests.

This was the second restructuring in a short period. The restructurings caused massive amounts of work that stopped us doing a lot of what we were supposed to be doing. The joke became that when you met other members of staff for the first time you didn't ask how long they'd been at Sussex, you asked which restructuring they had arrived in.

Admin and counselling restructuring

The co-ordinators had had offices alongside the academics and got to know staff and students through daily interactions. Under Farthing's reorganisation of the university, administrative staff were pooled in big school offices away from academic staff and students and were expected to stand in for each other and overlap. Until then the administrators would spot students with problems and refer them on, but under the new system they saw their own students less. We as staff also saw less and less of the co-ordinators on a daily basis. Under the new system, identified student problems declined. Either students were having fewer problems or we were no longer spotting them. You work it out. As with most of the Farthing reforms a system that was good for wellbeing and education was taken away in the name of a rationalisation which was on trend at the time.

Under Farthing counselling was also taken out of decentralised offices in school buildings, where counsellors were close to students and staff, rubbing shoulders with them regularly. It was radically cut and centralised. At one meeting with the VC, a member of staff asked whether the restructuring could lead to a failure to prevent suicides. He replied that the existing system was expensive.

Come Together: 2009-10, 115 staff and 6 students

In 2009 the second of my kids, my son, had gone to university a year or two before. I had adapted to life alone despite predictions I would struggle. But I decided after a while to get a cat. I had always loved cats and now felt it was the right time. Yul joined me in December 2009, a brown striped kitten with patches of ginger that came through more and more as she got older. Her early weeks were snowy and we hunkered down with the heating on over Christmas while I wrote at my desk and she slept on the bookcase next to me.

But just before she arrived a bombshell dropped. The university announced 115 redundancies across a whole range of units, support staff and academic. Of the latter, 10% of lecturers were earmarked for ejection. For many of them, given the academic job market, it would likely mean the end of their careers. Student counselling was, as mentioned, to be slashed and centralised. Other areas were to be reduced. The redundancies announcements followed the appointment of the well-remunerated new managers that had come in. The caring and sharing parts of the university were being cut and highly paid managerial control expanded.

As a fairly hands-off union rep for my department I was suddenly thrown into meetings to consult with us about the way forward. A union general meeting was called. It was packed. It became clear that all but one of the local union committee were up for redundancy. In some

cases, this was probably a coincidence. People were put in pools out of which a certain number had to be made redundant and it just happened the UCU reps were in pools of people in units to be reduced. Others in the units apart from the union reps could have been those to go. But in the case of the branch president he was in a pool of one. It was said his job was no longer needed. When he was eventually made redundant a new post very like his was advertised and another person appointed. He was excellent at his job so that was not the reason he was pushed out. It was not very subtle. Luckily he got a new job in university administration and came to visit us on our picket line in a later dispute. He is a keen photographer and I still follow his fox photos.

One day I was walking down a university pathway, outside the main catering building. I heard the thumping of loud bass and saw one of my students in a car driving alongside me. The bass was so loud the car was literally vibrating. The passenger side window wound down and the student leaned over, animated. 'Luke, I've just been to Portsmouth Uni and I'm about to go to Kent. There are going to be a wave of occupations across the south coast'. It sounded like bravado and very hopeful.

But one day soon after, protesting students stormed the management building in support of the union campaign against redundancies and there was a noisy occupation. Police were called and the students were ejected within hours. As I passed the occupied building I bumped into the union branch president who himself had been ousted from his office by the occupation. He told me our ballot for action had just yielded the biggest turnout in the history of the national union. 80% voted in the ballot, 76% for a strike and 82% for action short of a strike.

As consultations with the unions continued, three days of strike action were proposed, one before the Easter break and two after. The union had made alternative proposals for saving money (called the Unique Solution, US echoing the university's branding initials) and the aim was the action would bring the management to the table to discuss this proposal. At the relevant union general meeting, I argued that the management would just sit out the three days of strike action and then carry on with the process. It would be no more than an expensive (in terms of lost pay) demonstration. We would need to have more sustained continuing action. But a motion on this was voted down. People felt they could not take the hit to their pay packets that multiple strike days would involve. Years later during the pension dispute, this all changed. Members would take rolling ongoing action on dozens of days over and over. But not this time.

Library banner drop 2010 in support of the 115 staff

The student paper The Badger asked me to write an article explaining why we were on strike, which I did. I found out that I hadn't been the first person to be asked. Others had declined, worried that sticking their head above the parapet would lead to them being added to the redundancy list. There was a new culture of fear at the university. As the years went on I got invited sometimes to speak at student demos. It was often me that got called upon. It seemed there was a limited pool of staff available for this job. My politically moderate Mum wrote to Farthing during this campaign, aghast at what was going on. She was worried it would get me into trouble so she used her maiden name. She didn't get a reply. Not even some rubbish standardised letter that got sent to everyone.

After the occupiers had been ejected 6 of them were picked out for disciplinary action. They came to be known as the Sussex 6. They were banned from coming on to campus pending their case. On one strike day they came to the perimeter of the campus about 200 yards from the picket line and in a striking moment waved to us all from afar, receiving roars of supportive cheers in return.

The 6 suspended students got in touch with members of staff about accompanying them to their disciplinary hearings. One of my students asked me to go with her and the students held meetings with us at one of their houses to prepare. The hearings went ahead and some of the more serious charges were dropped after an intense and passionate effort by one of the staff accompanying the first two occupiers going before the panel. Other charges were upheld and the students were fined. The staff union raised the funds to pay the fines for the brave students who had supported us. The students were reinstated and finished their studies. The

student I accompanied went on to become a human rights lawyer specialising in representing people who are victims of the state - the police and mental health services, for instance.

In the end, 112 redundancies were made. This was before the third strike day which consequently did not happen. Staff took voluntary redundancy, as the offer was better than for the compulsory redundancy that would otherwise inevitably follow. In many cases, it was compulsory redundancy to all intents and purposes but the university could deceptively dress it up as voluntary. It was lying and disingenuous of the management to present it as all having ended up happily and harmoniously.

During this dispute, I was dismissed and patronised on the picket line (and elsewhere) by people I knew and thought I respected who said there just wasn't enough money and the cuts had to be made, as if I was stupid and naive and the union's activists were a bunch of ignorant knuckleheads. In this case and all the others I was involved in in the union (more to come), we looked carefully at the management cases, looked for evidence, took expert advice on the finances and law, explored alternatives, and tried to think creatively. This took us time and tested our wellbeing. You wonder how someone can be an academic in theory but drop all the standards of that in practice and passively accept what the management told them without any effort to investigate it critically. We found that these issues were not about if there was enough money but how you choose to spend it, choices not necessity. The management must have been laughing at people who just bought their case without exploration, that this was what had to be done. Who were the stupid ones here? I tried my best to be respectful and friendly to them.

Professor of Political Sociology 2010

I had applied for promotion to Professor sometime in the 2000s, I can't remember exactly when. For months after I applied I heard nothing. I mentioned this to the Dean and he said he'd have a word with the PVC in charge of professorial promotions. The Dean called me in one day with a grim doom-laden face. I thought someone must have died. But it turned out that I had just been unsuccessful in my application. I really did not care. It was more the money than the glory I was interested in this time and I would just apply again at a later date. It turned out my application had been dealt with months before. The PVC had just never got around to telling me the outcome. He must have been busy. When I met him and asked for advice about what I needed to do to better meet the criteria for promotion he seemed lost about what to say. He scanned the papers before him and said just keep on doing what you're doing. It wasn't that helpful so I just forgot about it and had another go in 2010.

I got invited for an interview after I applied this time, which usually means you have got it and they have to go through the motions of meeting you. The professor promotion panels are chaired by the VC, in this case Farthing. At this point it was after the 2010 redundancies but before I was UCU president so I had not had much to do with him directly and had a fairly low profile at the university. At the interview the PVC asked about leadership roles I would like to take up at the university as a professor. I said I had been elected to be Vice President of UCU. This was a recognised university role. I said I would like to use the role to promote a more consensual culture at the university. People on the committee suddenly found papers on their desks they needed to look at or shuffle. I would rather have said it and had it counted against

me, than not say it and live with not having made the point about Farthing's approach. But the panel told me I had been successful.

I had to choose a more specific title than Professor of Sociology. So I became Professor of Political Sociology in 2010. After my interview Farthing said to the committee that being promoted to professor was not the end, it was a beginning. I was thinking of winding down actually. But that's not how it worked out. I later found out that another professor in my department had lobbied the Head of Sociology at the time to recommend against my promotion. Most of my colleagues over the years have been amazing. But I've had the odd nasty very egotistical one.

As soon as I became professor people started treating me differently, and with a lot more honour and respect. I was amazed. I was still the same person as the day before I got promoted. I was also very sceptical about professorial promotions. It was obvious that some people got promoted to professor on dodgy grounds. They threatened to leave and were promoted to persuade them to stay, maybe 5 -10 years before they would have been promoted to professor through normal channels. Some people got their mates to write references for their promotion applications. You were not supposed to get mates to do that, but it depended on how you defined 'mate'. On promotions committees in general I was very disappointed in how people were treated. One person I mentioned earlier in these stories had clearly met the promotion criteria, I think it was for Senior Lecturer, but people on the promotions committee I was on said it was 'too early' for them to be promoted. However much I pleaded that there were criteria and they had been met regardless of timing it did not matter. There was always an HR rep on the committees and they did not intervene to correct these clear transgressions of process and injustice. They would just say that it was at the discretion of the committee. Of course, many people were rightly and justly promoted to professor or other ranks.

Sussex UCU President

Most of the union branch committee left after the 2009-10 dispute ended. It wasn't easy to replace them as no-one wanted to put themselves in the firing line of this management. I was, however, persuaded to help fill the gaps and joined the committee. Within weeks someone had to be Vice-President and I agreed. Then, soon after, the new President resigned. No-one wanted to be in the position of the previous president, who it was seen had been picked out to be sacked. But in the absence of any other takers I agreed to take up the role. I knew very little about the details of employment issues and I threw myself into training days at the union London HQ. It was a steep learning curve from being a lowly branch rep to suddenly be in consultations with the university central management. It had echoes of the time 17 years before when I had suddenly become chair of the SPT division in an emergency and had to adapt fast.

After going on holiday to Istanbul in 2010 with my then grown-up kids I came back for union training on the Sussex campus with national UCU officials. After several days of further training at UCU national HQ in 2011 I became the proud recipient of a National Open College Network Level 1 and 2 Award in Trade Unions Today certificate. This was validated by the

College of Haringey, Enfield, and North East London. It was my first educational qualification since I received my PhD 20 years before.

At an early union training event at the London head office the trainees were put in groups of 3 and in my group I had to play the role of union rep, one other person the manager, and the third the member. We had to role-play a meeting about a disciplinary problem. Suddenly the person acting as the member started shouting at the manager and admitting to serious disciplinary offences and the manager started behaving in an authoritarian bullying way. I was aghast and completely taken by surprise. I told the 'manager' I needed to talk to the 'member' in private. I took him away and had a quiet word with him about his behaviour but he kept shouting and being aggressive. It then dawned on me that it was a set-up. The trainers had told the 'member' and 'manager' to act up. It seemed my response had been the right one. It was good training. I encountered similar situations in real casework I was later involved in.

Yul the cat was joined a year or two later by Sidney, a black and white cat. My son got Sid for his international model girlfriend, but when they split up I got custody of the cat. Sid is from Upper Clapton in Hackney originally, but is the more mild-mannered of the two cats.

The first thing I had done when arriving at Sussex in 1990 was go and find the union branch secretary George Rehin and ask if I could join the union. George was also a colleague in the Sociology group, a mild-mannered American teaching race and racism, in what students described as a very laid-back style. George also did the annual planning of teaching for the Sociology group and would send around highly complex photocopied handwritten charts of our teaching allocations that I am not sure we all understood. George was astonished when I sought him out to join UCU and said, to my surprise, that active requests to join the union were not what he was used to. It was pre-internet and I think then the union recruited by leafletting staff induction days and peoples' pigeonholes. Later when I was on the union committee, HR came up with some ridiculous reason why the union could not have a table outside staff induction meetings.

I wasn't active in the union for quite a time after arriving. I joined in the strikes but rarely joined the picket line. I felt awkward about picketing for higher academic salaries. There was not then the large academic precariat that came along later who I was more happy to more actively support. Many people joined the union as an insurance policy or out of principled commitment to unions. But it wasn't really until the 2009-10 redundancies campaign and then the later pensions disputes that it really mobilised a very broad cross-section of members actively as well as the core diehards. The pensions dispute especially radicalised a lot of people around collectivism.

Reducing the institutional headcount: Senate and REF

I felt there was little we could do to improve what the union branch did under the previous excellent local leadership. But during my time as UCU branch president, we tried to be a bit more frequent and open in communications with members. Members of the branch committee had been mostly non-academic for a while, but more academic staff joined the committee.

One issue that came up was a code of conduct for how Sussex handled the external research assessment process, the REF (Research Excellence Framework). The management proposed that staff who did not do well in the preparatory internal mock REF could be put through capability processes and potentially sacked. This was proposed by a PVC who liked to use phrases like 'reducing the institutional headcount' to describe mass sackings. It was a crazy proposal. Taking a snapshot of someone's research at one moment was not a good way of judging their research capabilities. Putting them into such a scary process should have been a real last resort and not something put in our faces as a threat upfront. There was an uproar and I tried to coordinate opposition, especially on Senate which I was a member of.

At one Senate meeting where this was being discussed the VC looked at me eye to eye across the room and said 'You have been very active on this issue, Luke', before all members of the meeting. Senate was the main academic body of the university. I don't think I had contacted him about it at this point so someone was keeping him informed of my role. Relatedly, in union consultations with the management, the Director of HR showed an uncanny knowledge of the content of our emails to members. She was clearly being given access to them by someone. Bob Allison, the PVC who was running the REF process, asked me to meet him for a coffee in a campus cafe. Bob was a towering man with a big smile and a booming voice. He asked me if I would join a Senate working group to discuss revising the REF code of conduct. It was obviously a ruse to get me on there as UCU President so they could say the union was on their side. There was some discussion on the union committee about co-option and whether I should accept. I thought it was better to be in than out. I said to Bob I would join the working group as long as it was clear I was not on it in my union role but as an academic on Senate. So I joined and the group of 6 or 7 of us came up with a reasonably good document. At the Senate meeting where the document was approved, Bob made a show of saying to everyone that every member of the working group was behind what the document said. Several people looked round at me smiling.

Also on Senate, we had a meeting about what fee level should be set at Sussex, with fees of £9000 having been allowed by the government. The Director of Finance gave a paper in which he set out his costings to show that a university degree at Sussex cost £9000 exactly. I thought it was remarkable that the cost had come to match exactly the maximum fee that the university wanted to charge.

Student union reps were on Senate and were very supportive of us in our various campaigns. SU presidents Tom Wills and Kelly McBride steered careful lines during the 2009-10 redundancies and the anti-outsourcing campaigns respectively. David Cichon and his fellow officers were friendly and supportive when I was UCU President. I worked with many great Student Union officers when I was UCU president and before and after that. I won't name them but they know who they are. They were always fully behind our union even when we pursued actions that were very disruptive to their members, the students.

I hated Senate. The physical set-up was that the management would sit at a top table facing the rest of the members and we would be in rows facing them. What happened to meetings in the round? The power structure was made clear. There was an expectation that people should speak properly, which meant not directly or with any fundamental criticisms. Mild questions which did not question the status quo were allowed if you spoke in accepted

language. You were allowed to raise doubts and accept management reassurances that you didn't need to worry about them. Incredibly, liberal members of Senate seemed to find this kind of brush-off sufficient. You were not allowed to email the membership of Senate without going through the secretary of it. One time I had a critical agenda item I had sent in days (maybe more) in advance. Towards the end of the day before the morning meeting the next day it had not been sent out. All other agenda items had had the items and papers put out. It was obvious my paper would, exceptionally, be sent out too late for people to read it before the meeting so I just emailed the membership myself. I got a reprimand the next day by the VC at the meeting in front of anyone, saying I had not followed set procedures. When I tried to speak at Senate I sometimes got interrupted, one time by a PVC when I had only just started to speak. I had to ask to be able to continue after the interruption so I could say what I had set out to. The management tried to rule critical agenda items out of order. It was a censoring controlled body where you were expected to behave within narrow boundaries of politeness and acceptance. You were expected to meet standards of civility in performance that the management made no attempt to meet in their practices at the university. The minutes were unbalanced, selective, and economical with the truth. Attempts to challenge them were dismissed. When I was not on Senate I sometimes lobbied my Senate reps to represent views on certain items.That was the whole point. They did not have to agree with the views but they were supposed to at least convey those that came up from us. They were reps. They said they would do their best but then sometimes did not. This was my experience of Senate in this period. It may have been different at other times. And, of course, there were brave members of Senate who spoke out despite this all.

There were three major campaigns while I was union president: on the staff Statute 21, outsourcing, and the closure of continuing education. I'll come back to these soon. We were also in dispute over changes to our pensions and took industrial action over this while I was President but I deal with this dispute in the last part of these Sussex stories. I had always been suspicious of managers, but saw them as misled or misguided and corrupted by power and bureaucratic constraints on them. But in this period, when I got face to face with senior management on a day-to-day basis in consultations over these issues, I got to realise just what fundamentally bad people many were, with little humanity or care or respect for people and no misgivings at all about riding roughshod and brutally over peoples lives and tearing up caring and education in pursuit of rationalisation.

So, when you're near me, darling, can't you hear me, S.O.S

Many universities were following Universities UK (UUK) guidance and rewriting staff statutes in their constitutions, and Sussex followed suit. After I did a bit of research on the UUK website it became clear that following UUK guidance was behind a lot of Farthing's reforms. They suggested reforms and he carried them out. A key part of the staff statutes were principles of academic freedom enshrined in them. As the staff statute was part of the terms and conditions of academic and other staff they had to have the recognised unions agreement to any changes, and this included us. At one point the Director of HR said to me they did not need our agreement to change the staff statute, they just had to consult us. I said we had taken legal advice on this, which we had, and they did need our agreement. She went quiet on the issue. This project was brought to us and the management decided to renegotiate all the employment policies at the same time. It was a massive job but I actually enjoyed finding out

in detail about the employment policies on redundancy, sickness, disciplinary issues, capability, and so on. With my fellow UCU (University and College Union) reps, Colin and Rob, we went through these with the Director of HR and PVC (Pro-Vice Chancellor, a deputy to the VC/CEO) Marlin one by one. In the case of Statute 21 on academic freedom many of the talks were just between Marlin and me (because I was the rep who was an academic).

The proposed staff statute the management presented to us was a joke. It ripped out anything meaningful for staff and just left a skeleton. I remember Rob and I leaving the first meeting shell-shocked with what was on the table. It was going to be a long haul, assisted by national union officers. Colin came up with some astute and creative campaign materials based on a logo of the Statue of Liberty and the acronym S.O.S., for Save our Statute. I made the rounds of various departments and units to explain what was being proposed, get support for our campaign, and explain what we were aiming for. We focused on the academic freedom themes that we knew would get academics on board. We managed to get Marlin and the Registrar John Duffy (the Registrar is in charge of non-academic services of the university) to attend what was in the end an angry packed open meeting of staff to discuss the changes. Duffy said he would not guarantee he could come, and when he did turn up he was very nervous.

There was negotiating meeting after meeting, they went on and on, over and over, and we went back time and again rejecting what was proposed and coming forward with different proposals. Both the Director of HR and I had to attend meetings when we were on leave to help move it on. The Senate meeting that was to rubber stamp what was agreed with the union came and went with no agreement to put before it.

I was on the train to London one day and got a call from Rob. Just as we were closing in on agreement on the staff statute he said the management had presented us with a new redundancy policy and said we had to accept that within a week if they were to agree to the new statute for ratification at Senate soon after. This was in August when many UCU reps and national union officers who were helping us out were away. It was classic timing and predictable. But I was absolutely pissed off and said very firmly there was no way we were jumping into agreement on the redundancy policy under that kind of threat. Rob agreed. This was why that Senate meeting was unable to agree the statute as planned. I finished the call and realised I must have been quite loud and animated because the people in the carriage were looking at me amused.

But in the end, we had a document. We won a number of additional clauses that the management had not included: one on freedom of expression for all staff, including non-academic staff, without fear of losing their jobs; a commitment to the maintenance of staff in employment at the university; a clause committing the university to equality of opportunity, avoidance of discrimination and mutual respect; a role for an independent peer on hearings panels in various procedures to do with staff; a role for an external person on panels in appeals against dismissal, to ensure there is an independent check; a role for consultation and Council in redundancies, so that the management could not make redundancies without wider involvement. I'm happy to be corrected, but I think extending the freedom of speech clause to non-academic staff was a first at English universities.

The VC had to be called as he was about to enter the Channel Tunnel on holiday, to approve the final version. It was not ideal, negotiations involve compromise. But at a general meeting of the union branch we got a round of applause for the final document. A special meeting of Senate was called to ratify what had been agreed. Rob and I happened to be on Senate as reps for our day-job units. There was some nervousness on the part of the management that we were going to bring up some last-minute objection, something we had been doing over and over through the process, and reject what was on the table at the last minute. When I asked to make a final comment at the end of the meeting I swear the Director of HR blanched. But it had been supported by the executive committee of the branch and the national union and it was voted through.

This was just the staff statute. We also renegotiated all the employment policies and I think we got policies that were as good as or even better than the ones we had before. It was a lot of work. I already had two days off from my main job to do union work at Sussex and a third was added during the period of this process. To protect my sanity I worked on a novel on my rest days. It was a thriller called 'Night Raid'. I loved writing it and it kept me on the straight and narrow. I still have it on my computer, but I will never allow it to see the light of day. Colin was so good at the negotiations with HR on our employment policies that they suggested he could work for them, said as a joke but also maybe not a joke. They did not realise that Colin would never have gone over to the enemy.

PVC Chris Marlin, who was in charge of talks with UCU, did not seem half as bad as other senior managers and I often wondered how he fitted in with those he had to work alongside. The first time I came across him was when he gave a talk on internationalisation at our school meeting. He had recently been appointed as PVC for this area, coming from Australia to do the job at Sussex. He had a background as a Professor of Computing. In his office at Sussex, he had a very big shiny Mac which seemed at odds with his humble persona. To be honest, his presentation on internationalisation was full of buzzwords and when I asked him at the meeting for empirical evidence for his suggestions he got very irritable. I mean, it was not like it was a university where a bit of research to back things up matters.

But in the UCU negotiations and on the committee to refurbish the new Sociology building he was genuinely friendly and I thought he showed unusual respect for staff for someone from his management team. He had a daughter who was a Green Party activist in Australia and maybe that made him more open to union reps and those with ideals on campus than other managers were. After my very delayed inaugural professorial lecture in 2014, he emailed me to say he was sorry he had missed it. I had a transcript so I sent it to him and to my surprise he read it and replied with comments. At that point, he was off ill for 3 months and said in his email that he was in the hands of medical professionals. I did not know he was dying from cancer then. I guess I should have realised he may have been terminally ill but I didn't. He was reaching out in his humble and friendly way and I regret being a bit distant in those communications, especially annoyed as I was with the management at that point.

The Statute 21 negotiations were in theory a big success. But soon after, in the campaign against outsourcing, a union rep was told by John Duffy to take a 'Save the 235' badge off during negotiations (there were 235 staff up for shipping off to private companies). One head of school told professional services staff to take anti-outsourcing posters off their office wall.

In the catering building staff were prevented from leafletting on the issue by managers and had their leaflets torn up. There were reports of other similar incidents. It was a clear breach of the freedom of speech element in the statute, especially of the new part that extended this to non-academic staff.

Outsourcing and occupation: communists stole my bagel

The university had a mix of catering outlets, some in-house university ones and some private sector. We, the union reps, were a bit mystified when the management started bringing the private ones in-house. One, a small crepery in the Engineering Building, in particular dug their heels in until they too had to leave, feeling bullied by legal threats. It seemed to go against the fashion at the time of outsourcing campus services to the private sector. I was in the management corridor one day, waiting to go into a meeting with the management, when the Director of Finance sat down opposite and we started chatting. He was going through the accounts for the recently insourced catering facilities, raised an eyebrow and said, seemingly with some surprise, that they seemed to be doing well financially. We should have thought more about all this, as there was a reason for this insourcing which was to become evident.

One day in May 2012 I was working at home when at the end of the day two emails came in. One was inviting me as President of the UCU branch to a meeting with the Director of HR and the Registrar the next day at 9am. Alongside it in my inbox was an email from Rob saying he and all the Estates staff had been invited to a meeting with HR the next morning at the same time. This was a classic management tactic when something big was about to happen. You invite people in at very short notice, the night before an early morning meeting so no one has a chance to compare notes or prepare. Rob and I were quite alarmed. The obvious fear was a possible plan for more mass redundancies to be announced.

I turned up the next morning and it became clear that the Unison reps (Unison is a union that represents lower grades at the university) had been in just before me. I went in to meet the Director of HR and the Registrar and there was the usual absurd fake warm-up chit-chat about how everyone was and the weather and holiday plans and the like. I used to hate when managers tried to be chummy. It was the co-option of community and kindness when their intentions were the opposite. Duffy started to read from a pre-prepared paper which I was given a copy of. The university were going to outsource all Catering and Estates facilities, involving 235 jobs, most of them Unison members but some, those on higher grades, UCU members. The Director of HR watched me throughout the meeting warily. There would be a series of meetings with the unions. But the Director of HR and Registrar labelled these as 'communication events', or some phrase like that. In other words, they wanted us to know the changes would not be up for negotiation or consultation. And the communication was not intended to be two-way. We would meet regularly for them to communicate to us the changes they were making. In public they said they were consulting with us but in private the outsourcing had already been decided and was not up for discussion. The unions contacted members of Council to express their concerns about process.

We were later told this day was also when some senior managers found out about the plans. They had been in preparation for a long time but kept tightly under wraps in case they leaked.

Even members of the senior management team were apparently unaware of what was afoot until this point.

After the meeting, I went back to my office. Rob turned up soon after. I was initially quite relieved as it was not an out-and-out redundancy scheme. The management had said they did not expect jobs to be cut, but transferred to private providers. Rob was, rightly, more alarmed, both as one of those to be outsourced and as a union rep. It became clear why they had brought the private catering units in-house. It was so that all the catering was in one block and could be transferred out to a single company as one. Total Facilities Management, it's called. It had been insourcing in preparation for outsourcing.

There was a large open meeting organised with the three campus unions, the student union, and any staff who wanted to come. Myself and the other unions' reps reported back on our initial meetings with the management and questions were asked. A big demo was organised outside the management building. I suddenly found that I was on nodding terms with lots of estates and catering staff I had never met or known before.

I was coming to the end of my term as UCU president and had not stood for election again, although I would stay on the branch committee. But I was there for some of the opening 'communication events'. For these meetings national UCU officers came down, as they often did to help out. At one I asked for the evidence base for the changes. What evidence had been collected from similar outsourcings elsewhere? I said that without this the changes felt like an 'act of faith'. Duffy said that he objected to me describing it as such. He said previous outsourcings at universities and public bodies had been taken into account. But when I asked what instances had been looked at he said he could not immediately remember and would write to me with details. That account of evidence never came. As I have mentioned, it was clear that Farthing et al were implementing suggested reforms of Universities UK. I don't know how far they investigated evidence on whether such reforms had worked well before, odd for people who were (mostly) university academics. As it happens there was quite a bit of evidence that university outsourcing had many negative outcomes, for instance from London, and some summarised by UCU. The Guardian held a live chat on outsourcing at universities, which included Sussex Registrar John Duffy, a Sussex student protestor, and myself, amongst others. Many key issues were raised here. Globally, at a municipal level the trend is for re-insourcing because of the appalling record of outsourcing.

The emphasis of the unions was on negotiating a good deal for the workers to be transferred out. After a long wait, while events were patiently observed from afar by many, some students felt we should organise a campaign against the outsourcing. This was supposed to complement the union emphasis on getting a good deal. We would campaign against outsourcing, while the unions would in parallel try to ensure a good deal in case the changes went through, and a wider campaign might give some strength to the unions' negotiations.

But some local unions' reps were livid about the proposed student-led campaign. I had been attending the campaign meetings, which were also attended by many workers from the affected areas, and got some nasty emails from some reps saying I was undermining their position and it was none of the business of those outside the 235 workers and their reps to get involved. We should be deferring to the unions, especially Unison, and not interfering in what

was their territory. The view of the campaigners, which included workers to be outsourced, was that this was an issue for everyone on the campus. We would all be affected by the outsourcing. We were all users of catering and estates. Many of us knew workers in those units and were worried about them. It was clear that further outsourcings could follow to other units, the library or sports centre maybe, as had happened elsewhere. IT services did go on to outsource operations. Furthermore, it changed what the university was all about and where it was going. The outsourcing was an issue for all of us. In addition, resisting privatisation was the official policy of UCU and Unison. It was odd that reps from those unions were condemning us for following the very policies of their own unions.

A pop-up union was organised by some campus workers. This was aimed at balloting for action and taking industrial action against the changes, in the light of the main unions not initially going down this path. You could be a member of both your main union and the pop-up union and I joined the latter and went to one or two of their meetings. They planned a ballot for action but the management managed to challenge it successfully on a legal technicality about the process. The campus unions did eventually hold indicative ballots on industrial action with good turnouts and clear yes votes. My union, UCU, felt it could not call action, though, unless Unison did as the union representing most of those at risk of outsourcing.

In February 2013, a group of students occupied the university conference centre in protest against the outsourcing. They had waited a long long time patiently before taking action, arguing correctly that there had been no genuine consultation about the changes. It was an astonishing occupation that went on for about 8 weeks. It was run on a direct democracy basis with great comms, attracting a lot of national and international media coverage and many notable public figures publicly declaring their support. Speakers came to the occupation in support, including Caroline Lucas, the local Green Party MP, who also put down an early day motion in the House of Commons on the issue. Visitors included the journalist Owen Jones, Josie Long, Mark Steel, David Graeber, and Laurie Penny. Other supporters included Frankie Boyle, Noam Chomsky, Ken Loach, Peter Capaldi, Will Self, Tariq Ali, Billy Bragg, and even Cara Delevingne who all stated their support.

It became an occupation about what the university is all about, and about private for-profit priorities over public ones. I visited the occupation a few times to speak at meetings or just talk to the student occupiers and compare notes. There was a lot of hair in that occupation; it was like the 1970s. The conference centre was in the catering building and sometimes access to some of the catering outlets was affected. It caused great amusement amongst the occupiers when one annoyed student tweeted about the situation: 'Communists stole my bagel'.

There was a banner drop from the roof of the library, very visible to all passing through campus, and quickly removed by Security. There were many big demos including one national demo where the glass pane in a door to the management building got broke. The management said this proved that the protestors were violent. There was heavy policing at the demos. The yellow square was adopted from Quebec protests as the symbol for the anti-outsourcing movement on campus and all around campus people wore it on their lapels and put yellow squares up in office windows. The management took out a court order which said that people had to obtain permission from them before holding a demo. I was astonished this was

possible. The students just ignored it. John Duffy wrote an article for the Times Higher Education newspaper defending the outsourcing and the handling of protest and I wrote a reply questioning his account.

Campus Not For Sale. Me speaking at an anti-outsourcing demo.

Someone found a file of documents that had been left in the Institute of Development Studies cafe. It was about the occupiers and included documentation about the occupation. It was handed over to the consequently alarmed occupiers. I wondered if the documents had been deliberately left to be found and to scare the occupation. But I don't know. The occupation was eventually evicted and members were dragged away. Some who blocked police vehicles were arrested and charged with obstruction. In echoes of the Sussex 6, five occupiers were picked out and charged with disciplinary offences. If Farthing had hoped to avoid the alliteration of Sussex 6, it didn't work. The affected students became known as Farthing's 5.

The students were determined and had good contacts. They persuaded one of the world's top human rights lawyers, Geoffrey Robertson, to represent some of them at the hearings. He had represented figures such as Salman Rushdie, Julian Assange, Peter Hain, Mike Tyson, and Summerhill School. He offered to work for the students pro bono. If you are appearing before a disciplinary hearing you can take a representative with you and have to notify the university a day or two before who this is going to be. One of the greatest regrets of my life is that I was not there to see the faces of the senior managers when they found out the students would be accompanied by Geoffrey Robertson QC of Doughty Street Chambers. At the hearing, Robertson argued that the chair of the panel, DVC (Deputy Vice-Chancellor) Michael Davies, had previously appeared on radio condemning the occupiers and that he, therefore, could not be impartial. The disciplinary case collapsed. Robertson gave a speech after the hearings

saying what a farce it had been and he hoped he would never be forced to come back and represent the students again.

Eventually, the university was asked by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator to pay compensation to students of £2000 or more for not following fair procedure when they were suspended. The OIA said, "The OIA has now concluded that the suspensions were unfair and unreasonable and has upheld a number of other complaints relating to the conduct of the disciplinary proceedings".

The outsourcing went ahead. Some companies with terrible records internationally were given the contracts. Many staff, disgusted, took the voluntary redundancy on offer and left. The unions managed to get some improvements to the voluntary redundancy package available for those who didn't want to be part of the change, and the pension on offer, but the pension was still worse than the one they had in university employment.

And that was the end of it. Except it wasn't. 10 years later there was a new twist. I'll come back to that in the last part of these Sussex stories.

I wrote a series of blogs and articles between 2010-13 about HE marketisation and the opposition, many discussing the Sussex anti-outsourcing campaign. They are listed at the end of this short blog on the topic. A number of other very interesting articles were published out of the anti-outsourcing campaign, including by those involved. Here are just some examples from The Independent, The Guardian, and Open Democracy.

How Do You Sleep? Closure of CCE

I was in a consultation meeting as a UCU rep with a PVC when he made a passing reference to what he called a 'pseudo-academic' unit being under review. We hauled him back and asked him what he was talking about. He looked surprised and said he thought our union reps would have told us. He meant the proposed closure of the Centre for Community Engagement (CCE, formerly the Centre for Continuing Education).

We knew nothing and after the meeting contacted our reps in CCE. It turned out discussions about closing the unit had been underway for a while and none of the reps in CCE had brought it to the attention of myself as President or the branch committee. This in itself raised concerns. Why had this not been raised with us by our union reps? This was what they were there for. Was our network of reps not working properly? We were kind to the PVC involved, who was more open to working with us than most other senior managers, and when the issue came up with management in future and he was there he looked uncomfortable but we did not reveal he had told us.

CCE provided many evening classes and short courses to local students, often unique and with no other alternative available locally. The cost of running it was higher than the income it brought in. Across the UK universities had been closing such units and now it was Sussex's turn. Nevertheless, the university was not short of cash, some units were very lucrative, especially those bringing in lots of international students' fees, and the unit could have been kept running with cross-subsidy, as happened in other areas. This was our argument

throughout the consultation process that then kicked off but the management continued to reject the possibility of cross-subsidy.

One of our branch committee members met with the CCE staff to take soundings and see, amongst other things, if they wanted to take industrial action to defend the unit. While I and one other rep took on the meetings with management over the proposed closure, this rep was a stalwart handling the liaison with CCE staff. She reported back that there was no fighting mood amongst them for striking. So we were left with lobbying, campaigning, and negotiating. One factor against us was that the soon-to-retire Director of the unit was not on board at all. She was working with the management to close the place down. Time after time at meetings with the management about CCE she would be there siding with them.

We released statements about the proposed closure and the case was put forward for cross-subsidy, with calculations about how much it would cost, and where the funds could come from. We proposed a more selective approach than just closure, with some restructuring and selective changes and more long-term considerations. There was a model motion that went around departments to support. These were passed and sent on to the management and members of Senate and Council. There was a well-supported petition. We wrote to members of Senate and of Council, the governing bodies of the university, highlighting the support for CCE and our case, including mention of other universities where more imaginative approaches had enabled continuing education to stay open. We highlighted reputational issues and made the case for taking into account social and community criteria as well as just financial ones. We rallied local MPs to write to the university in support of CCE, which they did, and also supported individuals and community organisations to do the same. CCE staff had a letter that they could use to make their case, which made many of the points mentioned above as well as pointing out that CCE had been a feeder to other Sussex degrees.

Some CCE staff told me that the head of a unit with plenty of income available had told them he would do his best to speak up for them at Senate. He was called to speak and stood up and said exactly the opposite: CCE was unaffordable and there was no alternative but to shut it down. It felt like a pre-prepared stitch-up. It was also announced at Senate that there was a plan to build a multi-storey car park on campus with levels dug underground. I said something about the management closing CCE to fund a multi-story car park. It was not meant as a joke, it was more a jaded jibe. But there were stifled laughs.

The management made it clear they had no intention of budging. At one meeting with UCU the Director of Finance threw up his hands saying 'Luke, we just cannot afford it', something which we felt was just not true with a more creative approach. The management were not willing to explore or discuss the alternatives being suggested; they had made their decision and were going to stick to it. The so-called consultations were an opportunity for creative thought from our point of view. For them, it was a formality they had to go through to do what they had already decided.

It became obvious that there had been a preparatory running down of some courses. The management would not give us access to information we asked for about the accounts and processes. As mentioned, the Director of the unit was against us and the staff had no mood for a fight. The Students' Union were late in getting on board. CCE was closed down and many

full-time staff, administrative staff, and hourly paid tutors were made redundant. We managed to get improved payoffs for them and some got other jobs at Sussex under the redeployment procedure the union had negotiated. But overall it was not much of a consolation. A unique and valued provision was ended in the name of financial and mental inflexibility. Rationalisation, rigidity, and money won over imagination, creativity, community, and education.

However, structures for cross-subsidy, rejected as a way of saving CCE, were to be looked on more favourably under a later regime, as we shall see.

Moving on: there is power in a union

Health and safety is a big concern of trade unions. I had little involvement in this area, though, as we had a Dutch physicist on the branch committee who handled this issue, also an expert on particle physics interested in what the universe is made of. However, one day a member of staff from my school passed me in the corridor and said he may have to get help from the union. He had been approached by a manager and told his office was a health and safety hazard. I knew his office well. It had massive piles of paper everywhere and precariously stacked books. If you were able to delicately steer a path past them to find a chair there was a good chance that would be unusable because of piles on that too. I once tested him by asking him where the minutes of the department meeting the previous term were. Amazingly he dived into one huge pile of paper and pulled out a stapled document from the middle. Sure enough, it was exactly what I had asked him to find. I said he should come back to me on the issue if he wanted to. But I warned that the advice of the union may well be that his office was, in fact, a danger zone and we would probably suggest that he sorted it out.

My term as President of Sussex UCU lasted only two years (yes, everything above happened in just two years) but I was a member of the branch committee for some years after that. The President period was stressful and sometimes overwhelming. I thought I was weak finding it so and could not see how other local union branch officers coped. But I talked about this to a friend who had been a full-time union officer at a London council for decades and a member of the national executive committee of his union. He was sympathetic. He said that I had faced a particularly virulent management, unusually so (as had my departed pre-2010 predecessor), and an unusually relentless cascade of large-scale changes, one after another in a compressed period, that the union had to fight against. During that time I had worked two or three days a week on union work, including individual casework, and the other parts of the week on my normal job. For my friend, it had been an unusual period, that anyone would have struggled with.

One thing it solved was my 20-year-old anxiety about teaching and about getting it perfectly right. I was often going into a seminar knowing that later in the day I would be consulting with the university management about some large-scale closure with great human costs, or with a local manager trying to save someone's job and future, or to find a solution to a member of staff being bullied (I haven't even gone into the individual casework unions do). Suddenly, whether the seminar went perfectly well or not did not seem to matter so acutely. The pre-seminar nerves I had suffered from since 1990 went away and never really came back.

Many staff do not know most of the work unions do. A lot is getting good policies that protect staff and then making sure these are adhered to in the various processes they set out. Much of this is behind the scenes. When I saw the policies the management proposed in our consultations and the final versions we ended up with I knew how important the union is. I was at a meeting with the VC once and was asking him about redundancy protection. Another member of staff interjected and said he was not a union member and wanted to move on from union questions as if somehow we were taking up his valuable time with issues that were not relevant to him. My question was not a union question, it was an employee rights question, relevant to all union or non-union, and he like anyone else would have gained from any protections in this area. It seemed an incredibly dumb interjection, so much so that I must admit I was rendered silent trying to work out if I was being unfair to him with such thoughts. The member of staff is an expert on British politics. I'm sure I've said plenty of stupid things too. Incidentally, the VC at that meeting said that he did not want to introduce the redundancy procedure mentioned because it would tie the hands of future VCs. It was not a logical response because it could be an argument against any policies the university may have.

The benefits unions win go to non-union members as well as members. Union members pay in expensive subscriptions, lost pay on strike days, and the efforts of active participation (often very stressful, I can vouch for that) for the benefits non-members get at no expense and with no sacrifice. I've never known a non-union member to turn down benefits won for them, on the basis that they did not contribute in the ways outlined. I have known those who take those benefits and then bemoan unions and the trade unionists who have done so much for them at great personal expense. If you haven't already - join a union.

Well into the 2000s, not long after I was UCU president, the university commissioned a report on bullying and staff were invited to contribute their views. The report never saw the light of day. During a change of leadership in the union the local UCU branch didn't chase it. Some staff who had reported bullying and sexism, including by those involved in the management of the survey, felt that their responses must have been deemed unpublishable despite the promise that the survey would be transparent and open.

It was a dark period. Staff became seen as people to be controlled and pushed, not human beings to be enabled and helped to do their jobs well. There were many human casualties. The management affected to be doing something by putting on courses on things like 'Coping with Change'. It would have been hilarious if it was really not that funny. It was not a nice place to work, unless you buried your head in the sand, and even more so if you were trying to fight back against this which many were at the time. Fear and anxiety were rife. I later wondered what would have happened if some of the managers I had to deal with had been put in charge of really big things, like whole national populations, or states, or military force. In 2018 I met a national union official, who I'd known from my President days, on the picket line. He seemed to think it was a mistake that I had gone down to one day a week at work. I was surprised after all his (amazing) work at Sussex and other universities he didn't understand why someone would want to do that.

The General Secretary of UCU nationally, while I was Sussex UCU president, was Sally Hunt. Long before I became UCU president I was going to a restaurant in Brighton with my daughter. As we were about to enter Sally came out and she and my daughter started embracing and

kissing and exclaiming great joy at seeing each other. I had no idea my daughter knew her, let alone on such familiar terms. I said do you know who that is and she said 'Yes, that's Sally from the pub'. My daughter was a barmaid at a pub near where Sally lived in Brighton (she had studied at Sussex University and settled in Brighton). My daughter hadn't known what she did for a living. Later on, when I was UCU president Sally took me by surprise when she phoned for advice about local commitments she had been invited to get involved in. She also got in touch when there were troubles at Sussex and asked what she could personally do to help. I made suggestions and sure enough she did them. She came to our picket lines a couple of times and hung around for a chat. I agreed with Sally about some things and not about others. But she was a very nice and pleasant person, with a nice personal touch, who made a real effort to engage sympathetically on an individual level.

When I finished as Sussex UCU president I was asked to stand on a UCU Left slate for the National Executive Committee of the Union. I agreed with UCU Left about most things but not always everything and didn't feel I could guarantee to toe their line on every matter. It also seemed to me that the NEC was plagued by sectionalist factions and I wasn't sure, at that point, I had the strength for that.

HoD the second time around

I became Head of Department (HoD) again, I think it was in January 2013. There were others who could have done it but it was deemed that would not have been a good idea. However, during my tenure, I decided I wanted to go part-time. I asked the Head of School if this would be OK. He immediately said yes. I pointed out we would then need a new Head of Department because I could not do that on a part-time basis. He said we would find someone. I said there was no one very obvious in the department at the moment who could take it on. He said we'll appoint someone from outside. We rarely saw eye to eye and he seemed very willing about the prospect of spending less time with me. A year later I was no longer Head and was working 3 days a week.

While I was still HoD, a new member of staff was appointed to cover deviance teaching on the sociology BA. Then the Head of School decided we should introduce a new criminology degree. This was entirely about making money, not any educational judgment about what the university curriculum should include. Much to the new appointment's surprise, and mine, she was asked to design this degree. It was an unacceptable amount of work for her. In time, more criminology staff arrived and the department is now a joint Sociology and Criminology one. I got stick privately for being part of the earlier part of this process - it was seen that sociology was being diluted. But the criminologists are a sociological and critical bunch and the degree is a good one.

While I was HoD this second time some of us were startled to suddenly hear at a meeting of the school's management team that the school were setting up a joint postgraduate programme with a university in Qatar. This had been kept from us and announced in passing when the process was well underway. For a school where many people work on human rights, it was a shocking plan. Money, again, was coming before integrity, morals, or openness. We didn't go on social media about it and expose those involved to media harassment. We expressed our concerns in-house.

Alternative societies and free education

During this time I introduced a new course on Alternative Societies. It was based on the idea that sociologists are quite good at being critical about society but say less about what the alternatives could be. I put a call out on social media for suggestions about what to cover on the course and many people contacted me with ideas most of which I included. It covered topics on utopianism, communism, alternative economies and co-ops, communes, alternative social centres and food counter-culture, green society, a society with less work, open borders, alternative education, and slow society.

I gave my professorial lecture in 2014 on this topic and the course turned into a book published in 2023. I wrote an article summarising the themes of the book

I was also involved during this time with the Free University Brighton (FUB) as an organiser and tutor. It took students on its courses free of cost, no qualifications needed. Tutors also did not have to have a qualification, just an enthusiasm for a topic and a desire to teach it. It was life-changing for many ordinary working-class people who had often left school with no certificates and whose intellectual self-confidence flourished at FUB. Students did not have to write essays but if they did there were no grades or fail marks. They just wrote the essay and, if necessary, revised it on the basis of feedback until it got a pass mark - that is if they wanted a pass mark; they could opt for just feedback. There was a free degree that was validated by external academics. But students did not have to pursue the degree. They could just study individual courses for their own sake. It connected with the thought of Ivan Illich on my alternatives course, who argued that education could or even should be done outside conventional educational institutions. FUB is still very much up and running.

The Part-Time Years 2016-24

More time

I've always felt on the borders of mainstream capitalist and bureaucratic society, able to have one foot inside but unable to avoid one foot outside too. I've never felt comfortable in or out, with the balance more in participation than exclusion. But as universities became more neoliberal and authoritarian and there was more and more complicity in this, the balance changed. I could not fight, or passively accept, or a mix of the two, the way universities were on a day to day basis without getting depressed and angry too much of the time. The latter was the way it was going. The only option was partial withdrawal.

In 2014 I had gone down to three days a week. Then in 2018, the department appointed a new member of staff but also wanted to appoint the second choice candidate. I had paid off my mortgage, my kids had left home, and I had lived a very austere life. I had, consequently, got into a reasonable position financially, as much through luck, lifestyle, and planning as privilege. I could afford to work even less and I saw my chance. I said I could change to being just an hourly paid tutor teaching just two classes a week and free up funds to pay for the extra member of staff. The head of department took me up on my offer.

However, the unions had just negotiated that such roles should be properly salaried at a fractional rate. Unions make a difference. So the job would have to be a 0.2 FTE teaching fellow role, two half days a week. I said I would, then, need to have some things written into my contract. I should just teach two final year courses I had designed - The Death of Socialism? and Alternative Societies. I would not have any admin roles or be required to attend meetings. Essentially, I would just be teaching a lecture and a seminar a week. It was still, nevertheless, a slide way down the scales from where I had been. Initially, the HR rep had trouble dealing with this. She said she had never come across someone applying for demotion before, let alone one so far down.

I got sent the contract but someone senior in HR got wind of it and contacted me to say it was not possible, otherwise everyone would want a contract like this. I quickly signed and returned it. There was no going back on it now. The other candidate for the Sociology post was appointed.

From this point on I had minimal involvement in the university. I don't like to report too much on things I observed mainly from a distance and was not involved in. So, this final part of the story will be brief. I enjoyed teaching my modules. With more time, I read lots of books. I looked after my grandson one day a week and later, when he went to nursery and school, picked him up twice a week and we hung out at my house. I continue to do this, with a day a week looking after my baby granddaughter now added in.

New Dawn Fades: Tickell 2016-22

In 2016 Michael Farthing ended his term of office as VC (Vice-Chancellor, the university CEO). I hope he felt proud of his achievements. He had been earning a quarter of a million pounds a year. He got a £230,000 payoff when he left. During one period of his tenure, such was the strength of feeling about his actions that he had to be escorted around campus by security. The next two vice-chancellors indicated they were not too convinced about changes he had made, or the way he had gone about them.

Adam Tickell, coming from Birmingham, was appointed to replace Farthing. He wore open-necked shirts and said he didn't agree with restructuring for the sake of it. At an early meeting with staff in my school I asked him about staff survey results that showed alienation from the previous management. He said he was aware that staff had been troubled by the management style of Michael Farthing, and that he had spotted the distrust of management that came over in staff surveys during the Farthing era (the surveys were generally positive other than on the issue of senior management in that period). He questioned the outsourcing that had happened and said he could not see the case for it. He seemed to be a man who would take things in another direction. There was soon a high turnover of senior management posts, with many of Farthing's sidekicks leaving and being replaced. Early signs were seen by some as promising. Later signs were less so.

We got long emails from Tickell, sometimes mentioning his holidays and activities such as swimming in the sea and recommending we did such things. These messages must have taken some time to write. Tickell was also employed on a quarter of a million pounds a year. I

was told by some who knew him better than me that, as time went on, he seemed confused and hurt that he was not well-liked by everyone.

Slaying the neoliberal beast: pensions disputes

In an interview with a student journalist covering the ongoing pensions disputes, Tickell said that strikes don't work. Sustained industrial action over the next few years showed the opposite. Many staff were radicalised during the pensions dispute which ultimately led to significant gains for university staff. Tickell was on the employers' side on the pensions Joint Negotiating Committee of employers and unions. The Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) had put forward totally implausibely based proposals for reform of the pension scheme that would have hugely deleterious effects on staff. Tickell said there was no choice, universities could not afford the current pensions arrangements. What USS and the employers did not reckon with was a membership packed full of people with expertise on pensions and professional researchers able to expose the flimsy case the employers put forward. Even the Financial Times sympathised with the staff strikes that followed.

In a 1995 academic paper Tickell, a critical geographer, had used the phrase 'Slay the neoliberal beast'. It was seen to have not been adhered to by him when he became a senior manager. The slogan appeared on ironic banners in protests against the pensions reforms. His national role in the pensions negotiations led the neoliberal quip to appear on billboards well beyond Sussex. He was not the only critical geographer to go into management and show another side. Nigel Thrift, VC at Warwick, waded in, instigating forceful suppression of student occupiers.

After years of action that were very disruptive to students and borne by them through understandably gritted teeth, alongside the disruption they also had to endure through COVID, the union won major concessions. It was that cliché: a hard-won victory.

The USS disputes had actually been going on since I was UCU (University and College Union) President between 2010-12 and we took industrial action over it then. One time in that period the Director of Finance, Allan Spencer, called the three campus unions in to discuss proposed changes to the pensions scheme. I went for UCU. He said 'I don't want a to and fro over this' and then went on to give the employer case, ie the 'to', while having ruled out the 'fro', ie our response. Obviously, we had heard everything he went on to say representing the employers' side. We were union reps. We were well briefed. I wondered what the point was. I said we were aware of the case he had set out but that we had been kept informed by our side and did not buy his case. He looked blank. A Unite rep made a very pertinent point about the widely ridiculed assumptions that the pensions reforms were based on. Spencer did not respond. I really don't know if he was so lacking in respect for us that he had no idea we already were well aware of the arguments on both sides. Or he knew we were, but had been told to use our precious time by going through the motions of telling us what we already knew. Either way, it was a waste of everyone's time. Spencer was involved at a national level in the proposed pensions changes.

Which side are you on: left-wing and right-wing students

Some staff in Global Studies organised a meeting they described as being on how to deal with right-wing students. Trumpism and racism were on the rise and they meant far-right students. But the vaguely chosen words caused controversy, especially as Sussex has long been deemed a left-wing university. A poster for the meeting was shared on Twitter by a member of staff and the media got hold of it. They hounded staff associated with the meeting, causing great distress. A debate ensued at Sussex about the silencing of right-wing students at Sussex

Universities tend to be more left-wing than the population as a whole and Sussex more left than most universities. I have been conscious on my sociology and politics courses that most of my students are left-wing and some can occasionally be quite strident when confronted with right-wing arguments. There have always been fewer right than left voices in my seminars. But I have always encouraged and defended those on the right speaking out and have tried to hold back (rare) hostility in tone to them.

My interest in socialism has been less about socialist critiques of capitalism and more about what a socialist society should be like, taking into account that people who attempted socialism (but did not achieve it) have tended to end up repressive and intolerant. In that context, I have always argued that socialism needs to be pluralist and liberal. So I have encouraged liberal and pluralist views, alongside socialist ones.

There are plenty of right-wing students at Sussex. Right-wing arguments are expressed on my courses and if they are not I make sure I voice them. One year student feedback on an MA course complained about the dogmatic neoliberal views of their tutor (me). I had worked hard to make sure neoliberal views (with which I disagree) got heard. It seems I had been very convincing. One right-wing student recently thanked me for protecting him in seminars even though he said he knew I disagreed with him. The Politics staff at Sussex have long struck me as mostly a very un-socialist and conservative bunch.

One year when I was outlining the case for open borders a student complained that I was making assumptions about the views held in the group; that I assumed the students were for open borders and pro-immigration. In fact, he was making assumptions about me making assumptions. I have always thought that students, even on my courses, are not in favour of open borders and supportive of, in varying degrees, immigration restrictions. I have always assumed there are right-wing students in my seminars and more than there may appear to be.

Seen in a wider context, there is no shortage of right-wing views in society. Universities are not bubbles and our students are constantly exposed to right-wing opinions, which is one reason they are passionate about confronting these in seminars. They are not in left-wing silos where they get exposed to only left-wing views. In this broader context, university is a safe haven for some, where they are freer to express the left-wing perspectives that get battered in society as whole. Just look at how Jeremy Corbyn, with his exceedingly modest programme, got treated.

Zoom: COVID-19 and lockdowns

When COVID hit in 2020, VC (Vice Chancellor, university CEO) Tickell incredibly pushed on with face-to-face learning even though it was clear this was putting lives at risk. I don't know how he justified it. It was unbelievable. In my department one member of staff led the way in challenging this approach and many of us were starting to tell students they were welcome to stay away if they chose to when Tickell recanted and introduced distance learning.

For health reasons, I was allowed to teach completely online rather than in hybrid mode (a mix of face-to-face and distance-learning classes). I hate to say it, but in my narrow life lockdowns were, as for others, blissful for me, while tragedy unfolded all around us. I enjoyed the quiet life, the long walks through empty streets. With no people to watch while I was out and about, I started to see the urban art in Brighton that I hadn't really noticed that much before, and started photographing it and posting the photos online. I made bread, tried to find people who could do food deliveries, did Joe Wicks about 3 times, and my partner moved in.

My students that year were great, although many did not like the remote Zoom seminars. Students appeared at seminars from many time zones, in bed or in dressing gowns, with family members shouting or belching in the background. My cats appeared now and then behind me on camera. To the amusement of my students, my partner was heard shouting downstairs when a DIY project hit a problem during one of the seminars. One student wanted me to meet her dog and disappeared off to find him and bring him to the Zoom meeting. At one seminar a student appeared on camera in a deck chair at a garden barbecue, wearing a Hawaiian shirt, and with a can of Fosters in his hand. When he disappeared to the toilet a random other person from the party temporarily took his place. At another seminar, I lost my internet connection and came back to be confronted with what seemed to be some sort of riotous anarchist takeover of the class. As things started to open up I met some of my students from the Alternative Societies course in person in a pub garden, after the course had finished. At least one turned out to be much taller than I had imagined.

Trans and decolonial issues

In the 2010s I began to notice more openly trans students. The Students' Union launched a campaign for gender-neutral toilets and non-binary pronouns were on the rise. A storm rose up around the Sussex philosopher Kathleen Stock because of her gender-critical views, seen as anti-trans, and some called for her to leave her employment. She then did exactly that. Tickell weighed in but paid a lot more attention to her freedom of speech (on the grounds that it was being threatened - in the end it raised her profile and gave her wider platforms for her views) than to trans rights and the experience of trans people at universities and generally in society. Staff who expressed opposing views to Stock got a beating in the media.

I didn't feel confident about covering sexuality and trans issues in my teaching and thought it was better not to, rather than to try to and do it badly. Decolonising the curriculum was another big issue in this period. I felt more comfortable about engaging with this area, and early on, before it caught on at staff level, I was invited to some student-organised meetings on the topic and I went along. I have always been committed to a more global approach and to

covering North-South inequalities internationally. My globalisation course and book discussed these. My Ecology and Alternative Societies courses brought up decolonial perspectives.

Attendance

We moaned about student attendance at classes from my early years at Sussex. But in my final few years, problems with attendance took on a new shape and scale. In the early years I, like others, got drops in attendance in the last week or maybe two, especially the week before Christmas as students were weary and some had gone home. If you had a 9am class attendance could be a bit down, and if there had been a party or a student night at a club the night before it would be lower. But that was it really and the drops were from 80-90% attendance (with absences mostly due to illness) to maybe 60-70% usually and if you were really unlucky 50%. Looking back it wasn't that bad.

But in the last years I worked at Sussex a new phenomenon came along which was people stopping attending before the course had even started. The upside of this was that you could at least assume your own teaching was not the cause. These absentees never came from the start so did not have any experience of it. I started to find my attendance might be maybe 60-70% or so from the start and basically stay at that level. The end-of-term drops did not go down that much usually. Another thing that changed is that in my early days at Sussex I found lectures were generally better attended than seminars, but in later years that reversed. Presumably, some students were not attending lectures because they planned to listen to the lecture recordings that became more the norm in recent years. But then they did not get around to that.

This is one area where my semi-detachment from the university has meant I have not been in the discussions about this, other than the odd corridor conversation with a colleague. In such conversations, when I have complained about 50% attendance at a lecture that week I found myself talking to someone who had a 50-strong group and only 1 or 2 had turned up, or maybe even none. Lecturers across the UK started posting photos on social media with captions like 'My 50 student lecture this week' accompanying a picture of an empty room.

There has definitely been an element of students not attending because of paid work commitments. Many students have told me that is the problem for them, working more or less full-time and trying to fit their course in around that. Another possibility is that university is less an active choice than it was when I started lecturing, when the proportion of people who went to university was much lower and it was less an automatic next stage and more a consciously chosen one. Now as UK HE has expanded many students feel they have to go to university to get a degree and a good job but are not very committed to the course itself. One student emailed me in my last year to say that he felt student participation was being hit by current generations having been brought up on social media. People were used to commenting in one-liners but not with developed discussion, and in detached virtual fora and not face to face. The university seminar was not a natural forum for many students. And, of course, there was COVID. In my last year at Sussex my students had done their A levels on Zoom and face-to-face seminars took some adjusting to. Mental health problems have increased, not just, I think, more noted by better diagnosis and recording, but actually more

incidences of them. This explains some absences. Some students find seminars or even lectures tough because of anxiety.

Poor attendance does affect grades. I have read essays where students miss the point and fail to engage with vital issues we discussed in the classes. The reason: they were not there. Their essays were poorer for this.

None of these explanations alone explain attendance problems. Even if you add them up I'm not sure they in sum account for attendance problems. But if you add them up and see the whole as more than the sum of the parts, this might go some way to explaining the low numbers. The factors add up and then that creates a new one which is a culture and normalisation of low attendance, a new extra dimension built out of and on the others. Non-attendance itself can be off-putting to students. Some of my students told me they were disillusioned by classes where many others did not attend and that put them off coming too.

When I started university teaching seminars were smaller, more cosy, informal, and personal. Relationships with students were less distant and formal. Now we have mass teaching. Increasingly huge impersonal cohort sizes, where student-student and tutor-student relations are more distant and alienating, must be a factor. There is less of a sense of a community of learning. With my longevity at universities maybe I have more of a sense of this contrast, compared to others who have only taught during the post-1990s era of mass higher education.

Some of my students report excruciating seminars where discussion is forced and there are long periods of quiet while the tutor tries to squeeze blood out of a stone. My seminars have never been like that, as much because of the kind of topics I teach as because of me. I have tried to teach in a way that follows the students' agenda as much as imposing mine which may help, but again my kind of course allows that more than others. Faced with a seminar with non-participation will be quite off-putting for students and a factor affecting attendance.

I never had a class with zero attendance, although I got close a couple of times. In my last year, I feared I would end my time at Sussex with a seminar with no students. I got through to my last week of teaching and approached the last class with trepidation, apprehensive I would end with such an experience. But 11 out of 22 turned up; 50%, not bad for the last class with an essay deadline looming. There was a lively and high-quality discussion. Thank you Alternative Societies 2024.

Sasha Roseneil: it was beautiful - the past revisited

In 2022 a new VC came along, Sasha Roseneil. She is a psychotherapist, sociologist, and expert on feminism. Her PhD was on the Greenham Common Peace Camp, which I visited soon after it started. This, in part, inspired me, at the tender age of 18 while a Students' Union President, to set up the Daws Hill Peace Camp in the early 1980s. It was in High Wycombe, outside a USAF air base which housed nuclear weapon launch controls. Roseneil is interested in non-conventional living arrangements, something we discuss on my Alternative Societies course when we cover communes.

On arriving she said that she sympathised with the Sussex anti-outsourcing movement of the Farthing years and recognised the importance of Sussex's interdisciplinary past, both of which I have discussed in these Sussex stories. Roseneil said she would re-insource facilities as much as possible initially. With those that have to be outsourced for now, it would be done on a more ethical procurement basis. Total Facilities Management was being dropped. Tickell had said he hadn't seen the case for the outsourcing. Now, Roseneil said she would do something about it. Sasha's statement linked to above meant a lot to me and others.

She also said she would introduce larger faculties, encompassing many departments and schools, that would allow the sort of cross-subsidies Farthing would not permit in the case of CCE (the Centre for Community Engagement), leading it to close. They would also, she said, allow more interdisciplinary research across departmental boundaries, of the sort the Alasdair Smith reforms had erected.

During the Gaza crisis, Sasha met the unions, staff and students, and said she would review investments, neither of which Farthing would have done, and possibly also not some other VCs in my time.

On paper and in principle, and leaving aside details, these are steps back to some traditions of the 'beautiful' past Sussex that I have discussed in previous parts of these Sussex Stories. They could also be steps to a better future. Changes that previous managements said were necessary and unavoidable were now said to be exactly not that. From a distance, it looks like a promising period of leadership just as I am moving on. I'll keep my critical hat on, just in case.

The Last Waltz

Over 2020-22 I made quite a lot of changes to my two courses on socialism and alternative societies to update them. I was enjoying the courses and the students were great. However, I felt I was losing my passion for teaching. I was 40 years older than most of my students and was feeling a bit out of touch. I began to think about retiring. I thought I'd rather leave on a high while I was still enjoying it and doing what I thought was a reasonably good job than hang around too long until I had really just had enough. There had been some voluntary redundancy schemes but they came too early for me. I wasn't yet ready. I thought about calling it a day in 2023 but my pension would increase a lot if I held out until my 60th birthday in summer 2024. At the start of the 2023-4 year, I wasn't that enthused at the prospect of teaching. But I had great groups and in the end thoroughly enjoyed the year. Nevertheless, by early 2024 I knew it was time to go, so I told the department not to offer my courses as options for the next year.

On Thursday 2 May 2024 I taught my last university seminar after 34 years as a lecturer, all at Sussex. It was, appropriately, on the topic of slow society, on my module on Alternative Societies. At the end of the seminar, one student asked whether the course would run next year and I said no. He looked dismayed. I hadn't meant to bring it up but I said it was because I was retiring. There were lots of smiles and thanks as they left and that was that. I didn't mention to the group that this was actually my last ever class and I don't think (quite reasonably) it occurred to them it was. It was a great group and we had nice discussions. I

enjoyed it and it ended on a nice note (for me at least). I went home, drank a can of beer, and fell asleep on the settee.

When I joined Sociology at Sussex in 1990 there were 10 academic staff in the department. I was the youngest by about 15 years. 4 are no longer with us. The others are long since retired. I am the last of that group to call it a day. By the end of my time at Sussex I was by far the longest standing member of the department and the second oldest. Sociology has become Sociology and Criminology. There are about 30 staff, many young. More than a third arrived during my 5 semi-detached years of just teaching two classes a week and consequently I have never met most of them. Those I have met are friendly and I like them. Some are active in the union. I'm leaving it to them. Meanwhile, I'll hang out with the grandchildren, read some books, and work on my blog. I'll keep an eye on things from afar.