

## **Open Letter to the University of Leicester: Studies of Social Movements and Alternative Organizations belong to Business and Management Studies – signed by 250+ scholars**

On 18 January, the first day of the teaching semester, the University of Leicester announced a series of redundancies targeting staff in five academic Schools and three professional services divisions. In the School of Business, 16 academics were told they were at risk of redundancy. The justification for these redundancies was that the School of Business planned to disinvest from teaching and research in ‘Critical Management Studies and Political Economy’.

Colleagues whose research is deemed to be ‘critical of mainstream perspectives’ on management and business have been specifically targeted for redundancy. Evidence for engagement in these newly ‘forbidden’ areas of research has been provided by references to research outputs, among them a huge number of publications focusing on Social Movements and Alternative Organizations.

Specific books and articles named in the cases for redundancy include an edited collection and a number of articles on Protest Camps, books and papers considering contemporary social movements, work attempting to understand cooperatives and social enterprises, as well as work on activist networks. The ‘forbidden’ work has been published in journals such as *Social Movement Studies*, *Contention*, *Antipode*, *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *Ephemera*.

We are shocked by the blanket attempt to silence research focused on Social Movements and Protest in the context of Management and Business Studies. For it is more than obvious that the study of protest belongs in the discipline. From laws around minimum wages, to anti-discrimination policies, to women’s rights to work, to the rise of sustainability agendas, to corporate responsibility, to the protection of children from forced labour, it is precisely through social movements and protest that businesses and organisations are reminded of their social responsibilities.

Many of the publications listed in the cases for redundancy have had a lasting impact, have been widely cited and quoted. Their social impact has also been demonstrated by the fact that they underpin work to affect social change, public engagement and discussion. The claim that research of protest and social movements does not belong to ‘mainstream’ Business and Management Studies is either incredibly ignorant or entirely disingenuous in light of the role that social movements and protest plays in business and organisation.

In stark contrast to the pluralism, inclusivity, mixed methodology and multidisciplinary promoted by Management Studies’ leading journals and associations, The Leicester University School of Business has sent a message to the international academic community--and to its present and future students--that protests for the critique of capitalism, the investigation of protest and its forms, the rights of minorities, of women and of children are not of importance or of interest to the University of Leicester’s School of Business.

Perhaps even more nefarious, when one looks at the names of those staff members listed as irrelevant to Management Studies, one finds that it is UCU union members and leaders who have been targeted, two core branch officers, a newly elected member of the union’s National Executive, an outgoing member of the NEC, and several local reps and other visibly active members.

Laid bare, the message from The University of Leicester reads: either you fall in line or you are not part of our academic community. It is a message that is heard loud and clear by all those who have been excluded, dismissed, ignored or bullied for advocating for change. It is a message that fuels social movements and protests around the world as they fight back at organisations and workplaces, manifesting the very changes that are at the heart of Business and Management Studies and beyond.

We, the undersigned, know all too well what it sounds like to be told that the research we do and the changes we propose are 'out of scope'. We know what it feels like to be targeted because our scholarship or our advocacy is 'too much' or 'too loud'. And we know what it looks like when workplaces use 'Citizens of Change' as their public tagline, while making their own staff members redundant for trying to understand how change comes about. We stand in solidarity with all academics threatened with redundancy at the University of Leicester as they begin their fightback against the proposals in industrial action. We commit to supporting the struggle by disengaging from any collaboration with the University of Leicester until this conflict is resolved. We call on the University of Leicester to withdraw the threat of redundancies and recommit itself to the value of study of social movements and protest as a central aspect of Business and Management Studies.