

## **Condemning the University of Leicester — Standing for Political Economy and Critical Management Studies**

Posted on January 28, 2021 by Oleg Komlik

On January 18 — the first day of second semester — senior managers at the University of Leicester (UK) notified dozens of academic staff members and professional employees that their jobs are at risk of redundancy. In the midst of the deadly pandemic, the University, whose motto “So That They May Have Life”, blatantly threatened the livelihood of its most committed and aspiring workers which, for about a year, have been facing exhausting workload.

One part of this “Shaping for Excellence” plan — yes, this is how the managers are calling it — aims at ‘disinvestment from research and scholarship in Critical Management Studies and Political Economy’. This incredible objective threatens at least 16 School of Business academics working in these fields of study. The Economic Sociology and Political Economy global community is shocked by this troubling and disgraceful scheme, strongly condemning it and unequivocally calling to abandon it. This scheme raises serious questions about the process for selecting those potentially affected by the redundancies. It appears that it is on the basis of the content, not the quality of their academic research and teaching, or anything to do with their performance.

Moreover, 8 of these 16 School of Business’ faculty members happen to also be union branch representatives. It is shameful that the University of Leicester, that is branding itself as “Citizens of Change”, is targeting elected trade union officials, many of whom also have international and transdisciplinary reputations for their outstanding scholarly contribution.

The University of Leicester School of Business has been globally renowned for its critical research, reflexive and socially minded management training, and the excellence of the researchers working in those fields. Indeed, this school was instrumental to the development of these disciplines within UK and EU higher education in general and within business education in particular. If the redundancies occur, then it would throw into doubt the integrity of the School, the quality of its programmes, and competency of the University’s leading figures.

In the midst of the chaotic pandemic and enormous economic crisis no serious business school should be settling for “business as usual”. Rather, they should be forging new theoretical paradigms and practical tools for more equal and empowering value creation instead of inserting neoliberal indoctrination about the pursuit of profit. They should be equipping students with the critical perspectives and interdisciplinary knowledge to tackle traditional business assumptions and replace them with ones that better serve the holistic needs of the economy, society, and environment. Indeed it is precisely these broader insights, encompassing Critical Management Studies and Political Economy, that are already being asked for and will be certainly asked for in the post-pandemic era by advisory boards, governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations.

Therefore, the ES/PE community firmly requests to abandon this scheme: its timing is brutal, its process is shady, and its substance is more than questionable. It goes directly against the University’s proclaimed commitment to “championing academic freedom” and puts its very essence in danger due to neoliberal-managerialistic myopia of yesterday — instead of embracing path-breaking thinking leading to sustainable tomorrow.

The ES/PE community stands in solidarity and supports the University of Leicester branch of the University and College Union in their just struggle against job cuts, defending livelihood and research of their members as well as protecting critical education, professional growth and intellectual development of their students.

Please sign this letter of condemnation addressed to the University and circulate this post widely if you want to lend your voice to stopping this assault on academic freedom and political economy scholarship.