

# Dave Gibson

Colin Waugh

**O**n page 23 we reprint from the May 2001 issue of *PSE* an article by Dave Gibson, at that time assistant secretary of the NATFHE branch at Barnsley College. Having retired from his job as an English lecturer about two years ago, Dave died of cancer in July 2017.

I was at Barnsley as a part-time lecturer in Core Skills/Key Skills (Communication) from 1991 to 2002, and for much of that time was on the branch committee and a delegate to Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Council. As a result it was my very great privilege to know Dave.

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Dave's article gives a good idea of the kind of situation that existed at Barnsley and many other colleges in the years after the Major government took FE out of local authority control in 1993. They did this at least partly as a way of dealing with the aftermath of the collapse of Thatcher's so-called Community Charge, ie the poll tax. One effect of this move, euphemistically called 'incorporation', was to stimulate unprecedented levels of union struggle, as lecturers tried to resist the drive by principals, coordinated through the College Employers Forum (CEF) by the corrupt former ASTMS official Roger Ward, to impose new contracts. These contracts involved sharply deteriorated conditions of service. For the two years after incorporation, NATFHE recorded the highest level of strike days of any union nationally.

There had always been a certain amount of bureaucracy in colleges, and in some a degree of low-level corruption. But incorporation released both bureaucracy and corruption on a hitherto unimaginable scale in colleges across the country, as senior managers and principals competed to enrich themselves from public funds. One of the main ways in which they sought to do this was through scams centred on franchised 'courses', and, as Dave explains here, Barnsley College under its then principal, David Eade, was one of the highest profile examples.

Along with other branch officers, Dave led a sustained, vigorous struggle against this, and Eade tried twice to sack him for doing so.

The history of what went on in FE colleges in that period needs to be written in full, from a standpoint that would make known to actual and potential UCU branch activists now what Dave and others did then.

Dave was a member of the SWP and his activity continued both within NATFHE and the UCU to his retirement, and then in many other campaigns. I spoke to him most recently in October 2016 at the Barnsley Festival of Labour History, which he co-organised through the Trades Council. It's not easy to come to terms with his loss.