

REBEL EDUCATION WORKER

Issue 1, March 2020

*Rank and file bulletin for
workers in schools, colleges and
universities, whether teaching,
admin or ancillary staff*

Victory is possible... but it's in our hands

As we enter the third week of strikes the determination of UCU members remains undiminished, despite the bad weather and the hostility of enemies both without and within. Pickets up and down the country have been keeping buoyant by using energetic tactics such as marches around campuses and noise/music blockades. This local creativity, often in conjunction with supportive students is what sustains the strike and maintains morale. But the question remains, how are we to win this fight? Can the four fights be won through the present war of attrition? Do we need to escalate the struggle and if so, how? Marking boycotts are one clear means of escalation but so far there has been little talk of making such a move.

We have to consider how we have been forced to take action alone. UNISON and Unite's failure to win ballots seriously undermined the fight. Despite 66% of UNISON's Higher Education members voting for strike action, the failure to reach the 50% threshold meant that their 50,000 members have been crossing picket lines since the beginning of this strike. Unite's members have been doing the same after they managed only a 32.1% turnout for their pay ballot, albeit with a 73.3% vote for strike action. Both unions called for a Yes vote but on the ground mobilisation was patchy and in some areas very limited.

The impact of the non-involvement of these Higher Education workers cannot be underestimated. Without the kind of workers that these unions organise, the administrative staff, the technicians, the in-house cleaners, the security and maintenance staff, the University grinds to a halt. We have, without them, been unable to do this. There needs to be, amongst these workers, a rank and file movement that can overcome the inertia. The move towards disaggregated ballots by UCU has resulted in a significant number of branches exceeding the turnout threshold, if other unions are serious about mobilising for strike action they need to re-consider their industrial strategy.



A rank and file insurgency, inspired by the Pension fight of 2018, has seen the election of a new, left, General Secretary, Jo Grady. This has, in turn, encouraged new activism and the growth of the union. But it will not, of itself, win the fights we are engaged in. Whilst we have less fear of being 'sold-out', as we did under Sally Hunt, we are only as strong as the ability of the rank and file of the membership. The more confident, the more ambitious and the more autonomous that rank and file is, the more likely we will be able to fight and win. And the more organised. The rank and file revolt still has a long way to go and it cannot proceed if it regards the struggle as a sectional one, confined to our union or even to only unionised workers.

In Scotland, the EIS union has joined the strike, fighting for improved pay. This could have meant a more co-ordinated approach to action, with bigger pickets, more energy and demonstrations but alas, despite fraternisation on the picket line, the addition of the EIS has not significantly added to the momentum with union chiefs not discussing the possibility of joint rallies until the first day of the strike. It is down to the rank and file to reach out to each other across union lines. Workers in academic institutions are often isolated on campuses, physically in those universities that sit outside the towns and cities, but also socially. This can, in part, be overcome by taking our activities into the cities, into the streets where conversations can be had with other workers.

This happened on the first day of the strike in Glasgow when EIS and UCU members supported a city centre demonstration against Glasgow City council cuts. Building links between the fights, which are actually all one fight, is crucial and we cannot wait for the union machinery to initiate that or worry if they will sanction it either. The management will not move if the strikes remain passive, if they don't find ways of escalating, of extending.

In order to escalate this fight we will have to create strike committees that involve everyone on strike, regardless of union, and all those who are ready to support our actions. We need to reach out to other groups of workers, take our struggle into communities, workplace and the streets.

Not just staff but students too...

Students at the University of Stirling formed a solidarity network in support of UCU strikes and occupied the management building. This resulted in heavy-handed retaliation from management, suspensions, etc. The struggle continues. More info from www.facebook.com/UoSsolidarity/



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