

UK teachers union votes for national strike

A correspondent
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The first national teachers strike in Britain in 30 years could take place next month as the largest teaching union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), voted to reject the government proposals to link pay to performance.

On April 4, teachers at the NUT conference in Brighton voted for a resolution committing the union to a ballot on a one-day strike this summer "unless proposals to link appraisal to pay are definitively withdrawn". The NUT represents 190,000 teachers.

The first one-day strike could take place in the week beginning May 10, when 650,000 11-year-olds will be taking their national tests. Teachers also voted for a resolution calling for a general programme of strike action against the Green Paper containing Labour's education proposals, including performance-related pay.

David Blunkett, secretary of Education and Employment, was heckled during his speech at the conference. Teachers shouted "rubbish", "shame" and "bring back the Tories", saying that Labour's education policies were "worse than the Tories". Blunkett rejected the vote and said in his speech that the government's proposals were "non-negotiable" and that teachers who opposed the government were "sad, negative and depressing".

The conference also voted to reject any participation in the pilot scheme to introduce performance-related pay. The scheme is due to begin in September, a year before the government's new pay structure is to be introduced.

Christine Blower, a member of the NUT executive, said in her speech, "It is important that we pin our colours to the mast and say we have an absolutely clear policy--no link between pay and appraisal."

Many of the delegates spoke about how they now feared for their jobs and that the government was scapegoating teachers for the present low standards of

education in the UK. Martin Powell-Davis, a teacher from south east London, said 31 teachers at the local Hatcham Wood School now faced losing their jobs. "The government thinks you are the problem. This scapegoating of teachers has to stop. They say the way to deal with failing schools is simple--get rid of the bad staff, bring in new ones, problem solved. Rubbish. It is not only rubbish, it is dangerous rubbish. It is dangerous to pupils, who face being thrown into uncertainty, and it is dangerous to teachers, who face being thrown out of work."

NUT leader Doug McAvoy said, "My strategy is to get the Secretary of State to back off from the daft proposals in his Green Paper." He then opposed the heckling of Blunkett, stating that it was "perverse" and that teachers should criticise the government for what it was doing wrong, not what it was doing right.



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