

Trade unions collaborate in attacks on Scottish teachers

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The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) is working with the trade union bureaucracy to impose £45 million in wage and benefit cuts on Scottish primary and secondary school teachers and staff.

COSLA's latest pay proposal includes a two-year pay freeze and a reduction in maternity pay, a significant pay cut given inflating living costs and the hike in National Insurance contributions and Value Added Tax. The deal will also see an end to conserved salaries, which protects the pay levels of senior teachers and will impact around one in 20 teachers, who stand to lose between £4,377 and £10,806 of their yearly salary.

Temporary supply teachers are to be paid at a lower grade and for a maximum 25-hour week instead of the current 35-hour week, and they will receive only a third of the preparation time allotted permanent teachers. This amounts to a 40 percent cut in gross weekly income, which will fall from £655.20 to approximately £400. Temporary teachers are already not paid during school holidays and have no pension entitlement.

The pay deal has been drawn up in response to the 2.6 percent reduction to local authority budgets set out in the Scottish National Party government's 2011-12 budget, which according to COSLA will leave a £450 million shortfall. A large proportion of these cuts will fall on primary and secondary education services, as they account for around £5 billion of the £11 billion administered by local authorities. The SNP set up the McCormac review earlier this year to draw up a programme for the dismantling of teacher pay and conditions.

In its campaign for the May 5 Holyrood parliamentary elections, the SNP cynically positioned itself as a defender of the Scottish education system, promising to reduce class sizes, cut teacher

unemployment and boost adult literacy. Having secured a majority, the nationalists intend to deepen the wholesale attack on education they began during their first term in power.

According to the projections of the Centre for Public Policy for Regions at the University of Glasgow, public spending will be slashed by £3.5 billion by 2014-15, including a 14.1 percent real-terms reduction in local government budgets, and a 15.7 percent reduction to the further education colleges and university budgets. Colleges and universities have begun to withdraw courses and lay off lecturing and administrative staff, having had their combined £1.8 billion budget slashed by £200 million this year.

The Education Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest teaching union, advised its 50,000 strong membership to accept COSLA's £45 billion package of concessions in a ballot held at the end of April. A slim majority of 56.2 percent voted to accept the deal, with 43.8 percent in opposition. An earlier deal including concessions worth £60 million was rejected by 98 percent of EIS members.

Echoing the rationale of the SNP and COSLA, the EIS utilised the threat of mass unemployment and the financial crisis to intimidate teachers into accepting the deal. Ronnie Smith, general secretary of the EIS, said, "While it is always difficult to recommend a package which represents an overall cut in funding for education, the EIS is clear this offer was the best that could be achieved in the current financial climate while giving priority to protecting jobs".

COSLA stressed that only on acceptance of the pay deal would they honour the SNP administration's commitment to secure "places for all probationer teachers in August 2011; sufficient posts for all probationers who qualify this summer; and a reduction

in the total number of unemployed teachers”.

Education Secretary, Mike Russell, said “I believe it is the best possible deal and a deal that secures important commitments to further reduce teacher unemployment”.

This is wholly deceitful. The SNP have reduced the number of full-time equivalent teaching posts from 55,000 to 52,000 since 2007. This month, Dumfries and Galloway Council advertised locally for 45 secondary school posts and 25 primary school posts and received applications from more than 1,000 teachers.

The latest pay deal is expected to be ratified by the Scottish Negotiating Committee for teachers, with the EIS holding 13 out of 19 seats on the teaching side. The other seats are shared between three smaller unions, the Scottish Secondary Teacher’s Association (SSTA), the National Association of Schoolmasters/ Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and Voice, known as the Professional Association of Teachers until 2008.

Due to the overwhelming hostility to the deal amongst the memberships of both the SSTA and NASUWT—each held consultative ballots returning a 93 percent vote opposing it—both have been forced to take up a token oppositional stance against COSLA and the EIS.

Both unions are in agreement with the two-year pay freeze, and are limiting their opposition to seeking minor concessions on selected areas of COSLA’s proposal. SSTA General Secretary Ann Ballinger said in a press statement that the union was “highly critical of only some areas of COSLA’s proposal”.

Speaking to the *Scotsman* newspaper, Ballinger insisted that the union would at the most organise a work-to-rule in protest. She stated, “I would not rule out industrial action completely, but we are not convinced that is the best way forward”.

Voice has indicated that it will “continue to negotiate on the separate elements within the deal”.

The NASUWT also intends to avoid any confrontation with COSLA. In a letter to its membership dated May 2011, it advises teachers that “there is no alternative but for members to demonstrate their anger and to protect their pay and working conditions” through “taking action short of strike action, for example, working to contract and not exceeding their contractual hours, and where appropriate, strike action”.

At the most the SSTA and the NASUWT will organise localised one day protests, while seeking to present minimal concessions as a victory. This is a strategy designed to isolate and exhaust teachers.

While working with COSLA to impose the current pay deal, the trade union bureaucracy knows full well that much greater inroads into wages and conditions await teachers upon the conclusion of the McCormac review later this summer. The central objective of the review, into which the EIS, the SSTA and the NASUWT all input advice, is “to examine the cost and size of the teacher workforce in the context of the current financial climate”.

The result will be the dismantling of the 2001 McCrone deal, which secured a 23 percent pay rise, a 35-hour limit on the working week and 12 hours for marking and preparation, in exchange for teachers taking on greater responsibility and reviewed training and development.

COSLA’s input to the review, which was leaked to the press earlier this week, provides an indication of the extent of the cuts being planned. It calls for the 35-hour week to be replaced with a flexible working model of a contractual 140-hour block over four weeks, allowing management greater discretion over the length of the working week. It also proposes a reduction to the allotted preparation time in order to further cut back on the wage bill for covering supply teachers.

In addition, COSLA demands greater powers to “ensure best value and to scrutinise all elements of workforce management”.

It proposes that pay be linked to teaching standards, and permanent contracts for promoted staff be replaced with short fixed-term contracts renewable on review. It advises that all teachers undertake compulsory re-accreditation, essentially requiring teachers to gain “a license to teach”, through satisfactory completion of additional training while their wages and benefits are eroded.



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