

Trade unions isolate London teachers and lecturers strike

Our reporter
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On Wednesday, members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and University and College Union (UCU) took 24-hour strike action in London to protest cuts in pension rights.

The stoppages were to have been part of a day of national strike action involving over half a million workers in several trade unions, including the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), the fifth largest in the UK with 290,000 members. Instead the action was isolated and restricted to London only by the education unions, while the PCS called off all action.

The UCU said the strike had affected 46 colleges and 16 universities in the capital. The NUT has 55,000 members across London's 2,500 schools and said that the affect of its strike would vary from borough to borough.

The department of education said that one-fifth of schools were completely closed and two-fifths had lessons cancelled.

The government is imposing major attacks on the pension rights of all public sector workers. Under its plans, all teachers will still pay 50 percent more on average for their pensions. Those teachers more than 10 years from their current pension age on 1 April 2012 will have to work longer for a full pension. Many will have to work to 68 years of age or longer. A move to peg pension amounts to the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) will slash the value of all teachers' pensions.

Prior to the strike, the NUT was first to announce that the strike would be restricted to London. The UCU followed suit. The PCS then said it would not call a national strike, as the NUT had downgraded its action to a London-only event. All the unions have a significant presence of the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party members on their executive bodies.

It was they who argued for limiting the strike to

London in order to cover for the rank betrayal of their union executives.

They also made sure that PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka was invited to address a rally of teachers and lecturers following a march through central London estimated at 6,500, outside the Department for Education.

Serwotka said he would fight for a wider strike in April, with "as many unions as possible"—a pledge that means very little given that he has promised such action month after month, only to use the betrayal of his fellow bureaucrats as an excuse for his own.

Christine Blower, general secretary of the NUT, raised the prospect of a full privatisation of public education within three years when her union has done nothing to oppose the rolling policy of setting up Academies and Free Schools that is preparatory to such a move.



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