

UK teaching unions complete rout of pensions fight

Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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To understand how the UK's Conservative/Liberal Democrat government is managing to push through the most drastic cuts in public spending since the 1930s, it is necessary to look no further than last weekend's conferences of the education unions.

The annual conference of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) opened with much talk of the need for a “fight-back” against the government. Faced with a multitude of attacks on education—from cuts in pay and pensions, to the effective privatisation of state schools, through their transformation into academies and “free schools”—NUT leaders vowed resistance.

This was just hot air. No date for industrial action was set, with the conference agreeing only to “aim” at organising a “one-day national strike before the end of June”.

But General Secretary Christine Blower ruled out any action over the exam period—which makes up much of the new term—saying only that the NUT would “discuss with other unions ... what timing makes sense and which regions make sense”.

Widespread opposition amongst parents and teachers to government measures to force schools to convert to academy status is to be dissipated along local and regional lines.

Even then, the aim is not to stop what the union admits amounts to the “complete destruction of state education”. A ballot of teachers at Downhills primary school in London, who are fighting academy status, will be restricted to the question of pay and conditions under the new regime.

A major issue before the conference was government changes to public sector pensions, with workers paying higher contributions and working longer, for less on their retirement.

The NUT met in private session on the matter—with

good reason. The motion adopted committed the union to nothing. In the vaguest terms possible, it said that the NUT will “seek to build a coalition of unions committed to further strike action in the summer term and beyond to defeat the Government's proposals”.

The NUT tops know full well that the unions are hostile to such action.

The national one-day strike on November 30 against the pension changes involved more than 2 million workers across the public sector.

No one was more shocked by the response than the union bureaucracy itself, which set about sabotaging resistance. Almost immediately the Trades Union Congress called off further action for negotiations with the government. Together with the majority of unions, it worked to divide public sector workers into separate “scheme-specific” talks, behind which they have effectively signed up to the changes.

Then a joint national strike planned for March 28 by the four remaining unions—the NUT, the University and College Union (UCU), the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) and the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)—ended in a rout.

The EIS and PCS decided not to strike, while the NUT overturned the mandate for a national strike on that day, restricting it instead to a token 24-hour stoppage of its members in the London area alone.

Conference talk of further action is intended as a sop to teachers, many of whom opposed the union's winding down of action. The strength of opposition was indicated by teachers at one London school, who refused to go along with the union's sell-out. (See “London teachers' union branch denounces betrayal of pensions dispute”)

The NUT's real stance was made clear when the conference threw out an amendment to the main

resolution, which had called for a joint strike with the PCS and the health section of UNITE on May 10.

Meanwhile, over at the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) meeting, conference agreed to do nothing until the autumn, if then.

NASUWT General Secretary Chris Keates said, “If the government commits to engaging constructively with the NASUWT there should be no need to move to further industrial action ...”

The capitulation of the teaching unions is being deliberately concealed by pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party.

Blogging on the NUT gathering, Martin Powell-Davies, NUT national executive and a leading member of the Socialist Party, wrote glowingly of the fact that the conference agreed to “consider a further programme of targeted local or regional strikes in the summer term.”

Building this up as supposed proof that the NUT is still engaged in a fight, he published a further comment, headed, “STOP PRESS”, announcing that “14 NUT Executive members have requisitioned an emergency meeting of the National Executive in late April to discuss the strategy and action calendar for the pensions campaign.”

Nick Grant, another National Executive official and a leading SWP member, let the cat out of the bag as to the remit of this “emergency” meeting. Writing in the *Socialist Worker* he said it would “discuss implementing a motion on pensions passed at the union’s annual conference last week”.

“The motion asked regional union officers *to consider local or regional strikes* over pensions next term culminating in a national strike in June.” This could mean “*some* teachers could strike alongside health workers” on May 10” (emphasis added throughout).

This is a farce. In reality, the government’s pension changes have already gone through. On April 1, the higher contribution rates took effect. The changes mean that an inner London teacher with 10 years’ experience will lose an extra £49 a month, rising to a loss of £123 a month by April 2014. A teacher with similar experience working outside London will lose an extra £30 a month from this month, rising to £74 a month in

April 2014.

Instead of stating this honestly, the pseudo-left hail an “emergency” meeting—at the end of the month—to discuss a non-existent campaign and a non-existent national strike! In the meantime, teachers may or may not be called out on an ad hoc basis, all so that the pseudo-left groups can disguise the fact that the unions—which they hail as the only basis for organising opposition—are going along with the government.

The pseudo-left groups are not simply putting a gloss on a bad situation. They are covering up for their own role in this betrayal. The NUT National Executive is controlled by two pseudo-left blocs; the Campaign for a Democratic Fighting Union and the Socialist Teachers’ Alliance—with the SWP and the Socialist Party playing the lead role. According to reports, the motion for united strike action in May was defeated with the support of some on the “left”.

As the Socialist Equality Party insists in its manifesto for the local council elections on May 3, “The trade unions are not workers’ organisations, but industrial policemen for the bosses. Faced with the most severe cuts since the Second World War, they have not lifted a finger in defence of jobs and services. After a few token gestures, they are signing up to cuts in public sector pensions, while job losses and wage cuts go unopposed up and down the country.”

Our campaign is directed at encouraging a political rebellion against the labour and trade union bureaucracy, through the formation of rank-and-file committees of action in every workplace and community and the building of a new socialist party.

We stand for an independent movement of the working class to bring down the coalition government and replace it with a workers’ government that will reorganise society on the basis of social need, not private profit.

We call on all workers and youth who agree with this programme to support and participate in our campaign and join the Socialist Equality Party.



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