

UK teaching unions signal no resistance to cuts

Jo March
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In announcing their “joint strike strategy,” the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) have given a clear signal to the British government that they intend no serious resistance to the devastating attacks on pay and conditions and the education system.

The timetable of rolling regional strikes is not planned to start until June 27 in the North West of England, just weeks before the summer holidays. It is expressly designed to have as little effect as possible, while allowing the union to claim that they are mounting some kind of response to the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition’s attacks. This is despite ballot after ballot of union members confirming overwhelming support for strike action.

The rest of the country will join rolling actions before autumn half term, they claim, leading to a one-day national strike before Christmas. Whether this paltry action happens remains to be seen, as the last “national” strike was reduced to a London only protest.

This is to be accompanied by an extension of the “action short of strike action” begun in October 2012, which has led to some schools deducting as much as 15 percent from teachers’ pay.

Teachers’ pay and conditions are under full-scale assault including: loss of “portability”—currently teachers carry their pay scale from job to job, but schools will now be able to offer jobs at whatever scale they choose; the removal of national pay scales; all pay progression being linked to appraisal; the introduction of performance-related pay in which head teachers can adjust pay depending on teachers meeting unrealistic outcomes, such as every pupil making two sublevels or more of progress each year.

To ensure that head teachers implement the new pay

guidelines, policing of how schools use them will be carried out by the inspection body Ofsted, with schools liable to fail an inspection if they are not using the procedures as the government intends.

Conservative Party Education Secretary Michael Gove has declared his intention to remove the working time limitations of 195 days and 1,265 hours, entitlement to 10 percent Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time and the protection of “rarely cover” (for absent staff).

These attacks come on top of the increase in pension contributions, raising pensionable age to 68 and the decrease in pension payments as the scheme shifts from final salary to career average pension in April this year.

The massive resistance from public sector workers to these changes, which culminated in the largest strike seen in Britain in 30 years involving 2.5 million public sector workers in 20 different unions on November 30, 2011, was dissipated as the unions scrambled to make agreements with the government to prevent opposition spreading beyond their control.

The teachers’ unions have also refused to take any action against the expansion of the Academies and Free Schools programme, which lays the basis for the wholesale privatisation of education in the UK.

In a letter to the Education Secretary, the teachers’ unions complain bitterly at the ministers’ refusal to allow them to help in imposing the changes, writing, “A resolution should have been achieved by now had you chosen to enter into genuine negotiations with us.”

They add that “we have been left with no choice but to put in place plans to escalate our industrial action”. But instead of posing any kind of threat to the government and its anti-working class policies, the letter continues, “The NASUWT and the NUT are committed to committing our resources to genuine

dialogue in order to resolve our disputes with you. We firmly believe that further escalation of the industrial action is avoidable...”

The unions have long given up any genuine struggle in defence of wages and conditions, posing the need to set up independent rank and file committees, joining with support staff, parents and local communities to resist all cuts to pay, conditions and services.



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