

UK teachers unions accept performance-related pay

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As part of a regional strike in the northwest of England, 4,500 teachers marched through the streets of Manchester in northwest England on June 27 to protest the coalition government's attacks on teachers' pay, pensions and conditions.

The strike was the first of a series of regional days of action called jointly by the two main teaching unions, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT). Similar rallies were held in Liverpool, Preston and Chester. The action affected 3,000 schools.

The aim of the strike and rally was to diffuse the growing anger of teachers, not to launch a fight back against the government's attack on education.

The rally was held in an 800-seat conference room, leaving the majority of the demonstrators outside. Those who managed to gain entrance and were able to listen to the contributions, over the din created by whistles and plastic hand clapping devices, would have found nothing of substance from either of the two main speakers, Christine Blower of the NUT and Trades Union Congress (TUC) Public Services representative and Labour Party member Kevin Rowan.

Rowan made continuous references to the TUC's supposed support for teachers, declaring it was "absolutely ready to support public sector workers," adding, "We will not hesitate to support coordinated industrial action whenever and wherever that industrial action takes place."

However, all that was offered up was an appeal to attend a protest outside the ruling Conservative Party conference, to be held in Manchester in September, to tell the Tories what they are doing is "unacceptable."

NUT leader Blower said even less, promising to leave the "rabble-rousing" to the end of her speech. This

consisted of reading out a list of branches that had attended the demonstration and the good wishes from various trade unions and Labour Party branches.

"Having growth in the economy" would allow for "a proper pension system" and education system, she said, adding "we are not the enemies of progress."

Like the rest of the public sector, teachers already face having to work longer and pay more towards an inferior pension. Education Secretary Michael Gove is also proposing to shorten school holidays, lengthen the school day and abolish planning and preparation time, conditions which are already in place in the government's flagship Academy schools, along with performance-related pay.

Teachers will face yet another new initiative come the autumn term with a revised national curriculum, something that they have yet again not been consulted on.

Teachers have shown time and again their readiness to take action to oppose the government's attacks. Joint action by 20 different public sector unions on November 30, 2011 brought 2.5 million workers out on strike to oppose the attacks on pensions. This opposition was then wound down and sabotaged by the trade unions, with each union making separate agreements with the government.

Encouraged by the role of the trade unions in the pensions struggle, the government is steaming ahead with the changes it wishes to implement.

Indispensable in this are the two main teaching unions. The fraudulent claim that the unions are waging a fight is belied by their stance on the introduction of performance pay.

The slogan "no to performance pay" is being quietly dumped for fair pay and no linkage between performance management and incapability (the

procedure whereby the performance of teachers is declared inadequate, leading to dismissal.)

Blower did not even mention the issue of performance pay at the rally. On the NUT website the union boldly declares one of 10 reasons why teachers should oppose the plans of Gove, being, “He [Gove] wants performance related pay for all teachers even though evidence shows it doesn’t work, doesn’t suit schools and will lead to decisions based on funding pressures or whether your face fits.”

Despite such protestations, the unions have sent a model pay policy into schools for the governors to adopt, which explicitly accepts performance related-pay in principle.

Previously teachers progressed up a six-point pay scale annually, so pay was a reflection of experience. From September 2014 the pay of each teacher will be determined on an individual basis, according to the progress of pupils as measured through the narrow prism of national curriculum levels. All children are expected to progress at the same rate, and, if they don’t, this is explained as the fault of poor teaching. Many teachers are being set up to fail their performance management criteria under the OFSTED schools inspectors, and teachers as a whole are facing a future stuck on low pay.

The NUT/NASUWT model pay policy states baldly, “Decisions regarding pay progression will be made with reference to the teachers’ performance management/appraisal reports and the pay recommendations they contain.”

The explanatory notes state, “The NUT/NASUWT Model Pay Policy recognises that a teacher’s pay progression must be linked directly to the outcomes of the teacher’s performance management/appraisal process,” and that “all teachers at the school may expect to progress to the top of their pay range as a result of successful performance management/appraisal review.”

In other words, performance pay is not a major problem if only the unions are involved in its implementation.

A WSWS reporting team discussed with teachers the fraudulent campaign of the unions, raising the need to build rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade unions, in order to mobilise genuine opposition to all the government attempts to overthrow teachers’ pay

and conditions.

Martin, a young teacher from Trafford who was able to get into the meeting, at first thought the rally was “inspiring” but agreed that more should be done. He agreed both the main speakers offered nothing other than more protests. Regarding the unions’ request to fill in postcards to send to Michael Gove he said, “To be frank he won’t see any of them, so it’s a bit futile.” He didn’t agree with the unions’ claim that teachers still had to win over parents, stating, “Once they know the issues involved and what the future for their children represents they are mostly supportive.”

Special needs teacher Alice from Salford expressed great concern about the cuts in public spending and reorganisation in education. Regarding the struggle over pay and working conditions she said, “We missed a big chance when we were all together during the pensions fight. Even those that have stood out against a deal have accepted it in reality, and yes I do think we need better organisations than the unions. We need to bring the community into our fight. It’s not just about teachers’ pay and conditions.”

Tracey, a primary school teacher in the northwest, explained how punishing a teacher’s workload was and how detrimental this was to children’s education. “Some nights I’m up until 11:30 planning,” she explained. She added that she had no idea that the unions had incorporated performance pay into their model pay policy.



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