

UK teachers: “Something needs to change in the way we oppose the government”

Our reporters
19 October 2013

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed teachers after the London demonstration.

Many described the conditions that had led to their strike, speaking of having reached a critical point.

Keith, from a school in Barnet, said, “I’ve come on strike because enough is enough. We have to do something. The changes in pensions, pay and conditions haven’t been negotiated. They’ve been forced on us without any type of dialogue.”

His school had been forced into academy status by the government’s policies, after being put into special measures by an Ofsted inspection. “They have a political agenda,” he said. As a result the school was “significantly” worse off.

“We were promised that we would keep more of our budget after academisation,” said Keith, “but we actually have less. Also, when you come out of the local authority you have to buy into their services, which cost a lot more.”

Teachers from Wellington Primary School in Tower Hamlets said they were there “because we believe in education. What is going on is destroying our faith in what we are doing and if we don’t make a stand the future looks bleak.”

Sophie asked, “Who wants children taught by teachers who are so stressed they can’t do their job properly? Expectations are raised all the time. It’s a tough, tiring job and we just want teachers to be respected for it.”

Rebecca said, “Gove and the government make decisions not from an educational background. Everything is based on data.”

Sophie continued, “We are both in early years. Our prime areas are Personal and Social Education, communication, physical development. What will happen to these if teachers’ pay is based on children

achieving targets in Maths and Literacy? The league tables mean that teachers are already teaching to the SATs tests, now teaching to targets will stop teachers addressing the needs of children.”

Rebecca added, “The government wants to impose longer hours for less pay. I never went into teaching for the money, but we are already working more hours than most people I know. It’s not just about now; it’s about the future. How are we going to attract good teachers?”

Jo, from Edward Wilson Primary School in West London, said Performance Related Pay “leaves you very open. Suddenly head teachers are responsible for your pay rises. I don’t feel that the head in my school would be unfair, but some could be vindictive or get rid of teachers because they are too expensive.

“It is also unfair to the children, and will result in changes to the curriculum if the teachers’ pay is dependent on children reaching targets in Maths and English. Schools with challenging children will end up with whatever teachers they can get and the schools with the best results already will hire the best teachers.”

“When I started in the profession I knew what I was getting into and what the wages were ... there was a good pension and job security, but gradually those things are being chipped away. The role has also changed massively; the responsibilities have grown way beyond educating children in schools, more and more social care is being piled on teachers and the pay does not reflect this. It is physically and emotionally demanding and the government can’t just keep moving the goal posts.”

Helen, from a primary school in Islington, explained, “We need the safety of the local authority. I am from a special needs background. We need a body to regulate how these children are being supported.”

Tim from Harringay said he opposed PRP because he

didn't want teachers competing for pay rises and not focusing on the children. "I'm music co-ordinator and music and arts are already a low priority. PRP will force them further down."

Tom, from Kingston, explained that government changes meant that in early years they have to focus on a "typical child." Children are expected to be at a certain point at a certain age.

"One hundred percent of the children in my school are below this 'typical child'," Tom explained. "In my school we have a lot of children with special needs—they bring down our data. It is an unfair picture but it makes our school look bad compared to a school which won't take on these children."

Kevin, from a Hackney secondary school, said, "I don't like the way we are moving away from the focus of the children. They are the ones who lose out when it is made harder for teachers to do their job." PRP, he said, "is a divisive policy which will create an environment of teachers competing against each other and having to jump through hoops. It will particularly affect the younger teachers."

There is dissatisfaction with the limited character of the political response by the unions.

Kevin asked, "What sort of force would we be if all the unions came together?" He had no illusions in any future Labour government: "If Labour come in they won't change anything. They will just say that it is not their fault."

Tim said, "Really a couple of days of action in three years is rubbish."

He continued, "The NUT represents us. They shouldn't *ask* Gove, they should *tell* him. They are just trying to show some opposition rather than saying 'we are here to win'... I feel like we have been moving in this direction for 30 years and nothing changes. The left parties are like flies stuck in a room banging their heads on the window. Something needs to change in the way we oppose the government."

Some schools had reached out to parents. Helen from Islington said they had leafleted outside the school "to let the parents know why we are striking; that it is not just about pay. When they understood what is happening most of them supported us. I support the action because it is important to stand up, but a national strike would have hit harder. "

Julie, from Barnet, agreed: "I don't think it's

enough. It's very conservative. We should strike consecutive days until the government gives in."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact