

UK: Lecturers and students speak on struggle to fight savage pension cuts

Our reporters
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Daniel, a lecturer, was on the picket line at University College London (UCL) spoke to the World Socialist Web Site. He said, “We are striking not only to defend pensions of other lecturers who are under better terms and conditions but also, and mainly, because we are fed up with being casualised. We have to go where the jobs are, at universities around the world. Two years ago, I was lecturing in Idaho in the US, then I found a post here. But every year the management renews our contracts and makes us in practice re-apply for our own jobs.

“My wife is also a lecturer and found a job this year in Germany. We have a seven months old child. I must commute between London and Germany every week and can only afford to do this because I have two jobs in London, and I live at the house of my mother-in-law. Otherwise I could not do it.”

Ellie also lectures at University College London. She said, “I have worked here for the past five years and I only get paid nine months out of 12, effectively having no holiday or maternity paid leave.

“Moreover, management dominates everything regarding the running of universities, increasing our workload in teaching. There are fewer lecturers per students, and there is the assigning of normal administrative tasks to lecturers. This saves on administration costs and staff. We also have to deal with student performance and our own performance.

“We are against the marketisation of education and universities being turned into places of high debt for student youth with casualised lecturers who spent years studying hard for their qualifications.”

“Most students support us, especially my French students who have a conscious political understanding of (the need for) defending higher education from further privatisation.”

Nathalie, a lecturer in the Slavonic and Eastern European Studies at UCL, said, “Post-1992, casualisation was introduced to the universities as part of the privatisation of education. There was the introduction of higher fees and loans to students who wanted to gain a degree from studying in higher education.

“The consequences of this process today have many aspects. One of them is the fact that most lecturers are only paid for their teaching time, without holiday or maternity/paternity paid leave.”

Fin, a student in Slavonic and Eastern European Studies in the second year of his degree, was on the picket line alongside the UCL lecturers. He said, “I am against the privatisation of education, loans to pay for tuition fees, the casualisation of our lecturers and the attack on pensions. I am standing on the picket line with them to show support.

“My parents support me financially and I also took on debt to maintain myself in London and be able to study. But at the end of the degree we all come out worse off financially than when we started. It’s not fair, we are the future, the next generation. Our right to education and to a decent job should not have a price put on it.”

At a rally of lecturers and students in Glasgow’s George Square on Friday, reporters spoke to two students, Ryan and Lewis.

Asked about striking lecturers unanimously rejecting the attempt by the University and College Union (UCU) to sell out the strike earlier this week, Lewis, a student at the University of Glasgow said, “ I think they were completely right to reject it, in many ways it was a joke of an offer. To give up so much, 30 percent, is such a significant amount, especially as people are living to be older. You become so reliant on a pension, it’s such a lot to give up.”

He added, “It’s a big strike. 300,000 days lost; there are more strike days lost than in the whole of 2015. It’s very significant.”

Ryan, a social work student at the city’s Strathclyde University, said, “I think it’s great that students are supporting this. I was discussing that with a couple of lecturers as well. It’s been a long time coming. Over the last 20 years, you’ve not had students engaged in politics like this with mass action, collective action.

“I think the student unions have been quite impotent. When the lecturers strike started it was weaker, but now you see students taking part, you see student occupations, people coming out today, pickets. It’s all really, really positive.”

Asked why he thought lecturers rejected the UCU agreement, Ryan said, “I see a great difference between the union leadership and the rank and file. The UCU leadership should be responsive to the rank-and-file membership, that accounts for any union. I am hoping they are responsive to their membership, because if they are not they will not be in the leadership for long.

“This is like drawing a line in the sand. If pensions are changed, they are going to come after public sector workers generally. We want to win every battle, but this is hopefully a turning point because the strength of feeling is more than it has been for a long, long time.”



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