

Tens of thousands of teachers demonstrate in Glasgow for better pay

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Tens of thousands of teachers marched in Glasgow, Scotland, on Saturday to demand higher pay and reject a derisory “final” pay offer of 3 percent from employers for the year 2018-2019.

Members of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) are demanding a pay rise of at least 10 percent in response to their remuneration falling by nearly a quarter over the past decade of austerity measures imposed by the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration in Scotland. For the past seven years, teachers in the United Kingdom have been subjected to a 1 percent maximum pay rise cap fixed by the government—with the cap only being scrapped this year in Scotland.

The demonstration was far larger than the EIS anticipated, showing the desire of teachers internationally to fight back against decades of pay cuts. The march won the support of not only teachers but also that of parents and their families. Protesters marched from the city’s Kelvingrove Park to George Square. So large was the march that as the first marchers arrived in George Square, others were still waiting to set off from Kelvingrove, over two miles away.

The march took place despite the systematic suppression of the teachers’ fight by the unions.

In March, EIS members voted to throw out the 3 percent pay offer and gave the union leaders a mandate to call industrial action. This took place as thousands of teachers in unions across the UK and internationally simultaneously voted to strike over pay and pensions. In the UK, teachers at conferences of the National Education Union (NEU) and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) voted during this time to walk out. In the seven months since, the unions have done nothing but

suppress these demands.

The EIS, opposed to a fight to mobilise teachers and other education staff, instead launched a petition writing campaign aimed at persuading Scottish MPs to back a 10 percent pay deal.

The petition gave 10 reasons why MPs should support a pay increase, with the fourth being an indictment of the unions, which have collaborated in forcing teachers to increase productivity for less pay.

It states, “Scotland’s teachers have delivered. Despite cuts in teacher numbers and resources, teachers have gone the extra mile to protect pupils at a time of significant curricular change and new qualifications. Workload and stress have soared – whilst pay has been declining. Teachers are delivering more, for less.”

After 25,000 signatures were delivered to SNP Education Secretary John Swinney’s office, EIS President Alison Thornton reiterated that the main aim of the union was to prevent the eruption of industrial action. “We are happy to hand over our postcards here today and these will provide Mr [sic] Swinney with plenty of reading material for the summer period. Whilst it is unfortunate that the Deputy First Minister was unable to accept the cards personally today, we will be taking him up on his offer to meet with us in the near future to discuss the pay campaign. The EIS remains committed to seeking a negotiated solution in order to remove any prospect of a formal dispute and would urge the Scottish Government and local authorities to return to the negotiating table with a substantially improved pay offer in the next round of talks.”

The suppression of the independent struggle of teachers is at the heart of why the EIS called Saturday’s demonstration. It was timed to coincide with yet another ballot initiative they have called on the

same 3 percent offer already rejected in March. The ballot opens on October 30 and will close on November 20, with nothing being organised against the attacks for the entire duration of the vote.

While the EIS is calling on members to reject the offer, it is using the anger of teachers as a bargaining chip for more negotiations with the employers, with their objective to impose another sellout deal. The ballot paper makes no reference to strikes or any action being organised in the event of another vote to reject the offer.

Prior to the demo, EIS General Secretary Larry Flanagan said, “Thousands of Scottish teachers will march through the streets of Glasgow to send a clear message to the Scottish Government and COSLA [Convention of Scottish Local Authorities] that they must improve their pay offer to teachers.”

The demobilisation of teachers is taking place through the unions and leading figures of all the main parties, including the governing Scottish National Party. Also speaking at the rally was Scottish Trades Union Congress president Lynn Henderson, Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard, SNP MP Chris Stephens, Carole Ford for the Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scottish Greens education spokesman and MSP Ross Greer, and Liam McCabe from the National Union of Students.

Leonard, who is a supporter of Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, offered no alternative for teachers, instead calling on them to rely on the good graces of the SNP—which is insistent on continuing budget cuts. “It’s time for Mr. Swinney to put a fair pay deal on the table to provide teachers with the respect and due recognition they deserve,” Leonard bombastically declared.

In a statement, Swinney claimed that teachers would receive a larger pay deal of between 5 and 18 percent, but this was based on the conflating of a low pay increase with incremental pay that teachers were due to receive anyway.

Not only are the unions ensuring that the struggles of education workers are isolated from one another; everything is being done to prevent a unified offensive of public sector workers who are facing a common assault on their pay, terms and conditions.

Teachers in Glasgow demonstrated just days after around 6,000 mostly female local government workers

took strike action in pursuit of equal pay. They were supported by many of their male co-workers who refused to cross picket lines in solidarity. The male workers, including every refuse worker in Glasgow, walked out in support even as the SNP government threatened them with the use of the Conservative government’s anti-strike laws.



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