

Scottish lecturers expand strike for pay claim

Our correspondents
18 January 2019

Further education lecturers across Scotland struck Wednesday in pursuit of a “cost of living” pay claim. Lecturers are demanding a 2.5 percent increase, which merely covers for inflation, against an offer from the employers group Colleges Scotland of a well-below-inflation 0.9 percent.

The action follows a vote in December of Educational Institute of Scotland-Further Education Lecturers Association (EIS-FELA) in which 90 percent of those voting supported industrial action. Turnout overall was 52 percent.

Thousands of lecturers and supporters picketed their own colleges, and a number of buses were laid on to a rally held outside the Scottish parliament. The one-day strike is scheduled to be followed by further strike days on February 5, 6 and March 21.

WSWS reporters spoke to a number of pickets at Glasgow City College about their dispute and what they thought about the EIS making no effort to coordinate the lecturers’ dispute with a parallel pay dispute involving teachers in Scotland—many of whom are also EIS members. Last year, 30,000 teachers marched through central Glasgow in support of their pay claim.

Steven Murphy said, “The issue in the dispute is the pay award, especially when you see the differences between lecturers’ and the principals’ awards. They are receiving large year-in year-out increases and large increases in pension contributions. All we are asking is a fair reward.

“Managers are coming in who have never been teaching staff and are getting paid for more. There is such a disparity between managers and teachers, and neither of them know what the other does. When you have someone at the top getting 20 to 30 times what someone else at the institution is getting, what kind of values exist there?”

“They claim the dispute is disruptive but they could

have put a stop to it. I think they think today is a good day to be saving some money. They are also testing the water to see if there was a large turnout.”

Asked about the EIS refusal to unify teachers, lecturers and local government workers, Steven said, “There is a slight danger that our dispute will be overshadowed by the teachers’ one simply because, when you saw the turnout for that day [when 30,000 teachers marched through Glasgow], we are a smaller story. I do agree, however, there should have been a mobilisation for a similar cause and conjoined efforts. To show greater strength there could have been a more coordinated campaign.”

His colleague Graham Thomson agreed: “Teachers and local government workers should be an inspiration to each other, there seems to be an opportunity and a need to make this argument about fair pay.”

Lindsay McLean said, “All we want is a cost-of-living pay rise. We are part of the public sector as well. We haven’t had a cost-of-living pay rise since 2016. It’s not fair. They are saying we are being paid more than the minimum wage, so we shouldn’t really be getting a rise at all.”

Niall Murray was not aware of the teachers’ dispute but said, “I would be supportive of school teachers. I stand by teachers nationally and internationally.”

Some students also attended the picket to demonstrate their support.

Rory said, “I’m a student at Glasgow City College. Lecturers are giving us the benefit of their expertise. Lecturers can’t teach to the best of their ability unless they’ve got a fair pay deal. It’s important to me that students show their support on a national strike day like this.”

In another related dispute, workers at Edinburgh’s Queen Margaret University voted 64 to 36 percent to support strike action against management plans to sack up to 40 staff—around 10 percent of the workforce.

Rather than take up any struggle, the University and College Union is advising the university's management to make cuts elsewhere.



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