

# Scotland: Union suppresses teachers strike as lecturers fight on

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The Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS) union, which claims to represent 80 percent of teachers in Scotland, accepted a deal last month with the Scottish National Party (SNP) government to call off a planned strike ballot.

Larry Flanagan, general secretary of the EIS, presented what he said was an “improved deal” and “a significant success”—a 13.5 percent wage increase with “additional commitments.”

The deal in fact falls wildly short of teachers’ demands. Wages have dropped by more than a quarter over the last decade. It amounts to a backdated 3 percent wage hike from last April, a 7 percent increase this April and another 3 percent increase next April. Since inflation is running between 2 and 3 percent, the deal does almost nothing to redress the 25 percent drop in wages suffered by teachers over the last decade.

Nevertheless, 98 percent of members voted for the deal on a turnout of 76 percent. NASUWT members, a small proportion of teachers in Scotland, have rejected the government’s proposals and gone ahead with a strike ballot.

The vague “additional commitments” made by the Scottish government include promises on workloads, “professional development” and “enhancing the teacher leadership programme.” But these do nothing to address the basic issues surrounding the conditions teachers face.

On multiple occasions during the dispute, teachers rejected the government’s paltry offer of a 3 percent increase. In response, the EIS opened multiple ballots on the already rejected 3 percent offer. These ballots would last approximately a month, dragging out the process and ignoring the many mandates for strike action already delivered by Scottish teachers.

On October 27, 30,000 teachers, students and family

members took to the streets of Glasgow to demonstrate their willingness to fight back against decades of attacks on their pay, terms and conditions.

The deal gifts the Scottish government time to confront other groups of education workers and professionals.

Flanagan made this point explicitly, stating, “This proposal, once formalised through the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, will insure a period of welcome stability ...”

SNP Education Secretary John Swinney made the same point, hailing the deal as supplying “the stability we [the Scottish government] need.”

At the same time as the EIS pressured teachers to accept a sell-out deal, Scottish college lecturers, also EIS members in the further education section (EIS-FELA), voted overwhelmingly for further strike action. Lecturers rejected a 2 percent pay increase, to be implemented over three years, which would not cover inflation rates. The strikes are in pursuit of a “fair cost-of-living increase” in line with declared public sector pay policy.

Strike action is set to continue on May 8, 15 and 16. This follows lecturers’ strikes in January and a series of one-day strikes in March calling for an immediate implementation of a 2.5 percent pay increase, which only just covers inflation.

EIS-FELA has called for “implementation of actions short of strike action” in the interim period. This includes withdrawing action that is not contractually obliged, such as refusing to record students’ results in employers’ result systems.

The refusal to call immediate strikes or appeal to broad sections of public sector and education workers is consistent with the EIS-FELA’s policy of dragging this dispute out as long as possible to disperse anger and

demoralise the lecturers, while keeping them divided from teachers and other public sector workers.

John Gribben, director of the Colleges Scotland employers' association, noted, "The numbers of lecturers out on strike has waned with each passing day of action ..."

The EIS-FELA are open about their dedication to avoiding industrial action and blocking a broader movement of education workers across Scotland. Pam Currie, president of EIS-FELA, stated, "We are taking this strike action in the face of an intransigent management side who have rejected our attempts to reach a negotiated settlement on pay including numerous offers to suspend industrial action ..."

In this context the role of the unions becomes very clear. The EIS and EIS-FELA, like Colleges Scotland and the Scottish government, are terrified of teachers' and lecturers' disputes intersecting with other public sector workers in Scotland and beyond who seek the end of decades of austerity measures.

EIS-FELA's refusal to call for a joint movement of teachers and lecturers and to instead accept a sell-out deal for teachers is aimed at isolating these strikes and wearing down workers' resistance with an endless series of minor actions.

The same tactic is at work in the recently announced strike ballot by the Unite union of workers at the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). As long ago as February, 89 percent of Unite members at the SQA supported industrial action up to and during the examination period later in the year. The dispute, which has been going on for over a year, arose from a restructuring process and "modernisation" which called workers' job roles into question.

At no time, of course, did Unite or the EIS, or EIS-FELA consider unifying the struggles of this closely allied group of workers. But there is a powerful base for a widespread strike movement of teachers, lectures, education workers, public sector workers, pupils and parents in opposition to all aspects of austerity, which is dangerously impacting education.

A new curriculum has been enforced in Scottish schools, for reasons of cost, that cuts the number of classes that a fourth-year high school pupil can take from eight to six. Recent press reports note that the number of music teachers in primary schools across Scotland has fallen by 42 percent in only seven years.

Ten local authorities have no primary school music teachers at all.

Pupils and parents at Tain Royal Academy in the Highlands were compelled to make a video exposing the dire conditions faced by teachers, pupils and school staff while a replacement school is being built.

Nor is the emerging opposition from education workers, teachers, parents and pupils confined to Scotland. Rather it is an expression of an international rebellion by education staff and professionals against the decades-long assault on their working conditions. On April 8, over 80 percent of Poland's 400,000 teachers engaged in an indefinite nationwide walkout that continues today. In states all over the US, teachers continue to protest their dreadful working conditions, lack of resources and expanding charter schools.

For Scottish teachers, lecturers and staff to advance their interests they must unite their struggles with those of fellow education workers and the rest of the working class entering struggle internationally. To do this teachers and lecturers must break free from the stranglehold of the trade unions and form rank-and-file committees to independently take their struggle forward.



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