Striking teachers speak out during two day walkout in Scotland

Our reporters
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WSWS reporters spoke to teachers manning picket lines during two days of strike action in Scotland on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Glasgow

NASUWT union member Knightswood Secondary in Glasgow **Louise** explained the conditions that teachers at the school face. “There is less money, and we are dealing with kids that have lot of high tariff needs, in terms of support. It is not just about pay. Covid has magnified this.

“We deal with some kids that have an exceptional number of needs, in terms of getting them the right support, from outside the school as well. Education budgets have been strained for years, but if you magnify the number of kids needing support and you don't increase that budget it places extra pressures on you as a teacher. Schools across Glasgow are dealing with the same issues. As classroom teachers, our pay does not reflect what we are expected to do.

“During Covid it became clear how many hats you have to wear. We are in there more hours than we should be, we are working at weekends. we mark at night.

“Mainstream media presents us as being really militant, but the message we need to get across is that teachers, nurses, GPs, ambulance drivers, paramedics, whatever, we are not being selfish, it is about restoration, so that we can have a standard of living that is not being eroded and attacked all the time.

“It is your right to withdraw your labour. It is a fundamental human right. If something was going to push us into a general strike it would be that.

“We don't face the same issues that people in Iran, say, face. I teach history, and I often joke that we are soon going to have workhouses back. We are making poor people responsible for being poor. It is going back to the “deserving poor” concept. Food banks would have been completely unacceptable 30 years ago in this country and now it is taken for granted this is how we deal with problems. We use charity to deal with social problems and that is not how it should be. We set up a welfare state following World War Two. We can find money to fight wars, we can find money for a new gold carriage for King Charles, but we can't find money for basic human rights. It is a disgrace.”

Stacey said, “We don't have an additional support unit specifically within our school, but the need is there, so classroom teachers are having to spend their times meeting that. Some time ago we were offered more non-contact time to prepare for these lessons. That is something that has been dangled in front of us, but we have not had that to prepare for the needs of these pupils.

“Through Covid and the years beyond that, public sector workers have been running on goodwill and I think the good will is running out. It is time to get our pay restored and have proper conditions for teachers and all public sector workers. We've done a lot over the past few years and it should be recognised by pay restoration, not just to pre-Covid times but over the last 10 years. An inflation level increase might attract new teachers to the profession, but what about maintaining teachers that have been here long term? We need to retain the teachers we have got, because teachers are leaving the profession in large numbers.

“It is a graduate job and we should have a graduate wage to reflect that. I think we are moving towards a general strike, if it can be coordinated. If you look back at Covid-times, who the key workers were and the impact they had on society. During lockdown it was the postal workers, the teachers, the railway drivers. They all need pay increases in line with inflation.”

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Kimberley added, “We are striking about conditions across Scotland. Another thing is the work and hours we are having to put in regarding the SQA [Scottish Qualifications Authority] on top of the needs of young people. When you count the number of hours we are supposed to do, it is physically impossible.

Neil said, “Over the last 10 years classroom teachers have lost on average £48,000. We are wanting pay restoration to the level it was 10 years ago.”

At **Thornwood Primary, Rosie** said, “It's not just about the pay. It is also about working conditions, the conditions in the classrooms, conditions for the teachers and the pupils. It is all through the schools, all through Glasgow, all throughout the country.

“There is a lack of resources, lack of funding, lack of staff, lack of training. We are dealing with lots of ASN [additional support needs] issues, behavioural issues. These are not local to Thornwood, it’s all over. It means that we have upwards of 32 children in our classes, depending on which stage you teach. In Scotland there is GIRFEC [getting it right for every child], but if you have 33 children in your class and there are so many needs and you are just one person, it often feels really disheartening. You feel you can't get it right for every child.

“About a week into Covid all we heard was that teachers are fantastic. Then it was ‘Why are they not back in the classroom, why aren't they teaching?’

“I don't know why we are not getting paid at the rate of inflation or above it. Especially when you see everything that is coming out just now about all the MPs, all the funding and sponsorship and pay rises that they get.”

Inverness

A team from the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) spoke to striking teachers outside Charleston Academy in Inverness. Among the issues discussed were the anti-strike laws being proposed by the Sunak government.

One teacher said, “It'll do our job for us as laws are made by those who don't want change.” The teachers strike had public support as “90 percent of cars going by are tooting. I think the general strike is coming.”

He described teachers' conditions as “Worse than those of our graduate counterparts. There is totally a crisis in teaching. There are teachers going to food banks... how are we attracting the best and brightest to our profession?”

He explained there had been no meaningful progress since the McCrone Agreement and the devolution of teaching to the government in Edinburgh. The McCrone Agreement reached in 2001 offered teachers a 35-hour working week, limited classroom time and offered a 23 percent pay rise over three years.

The teacher pointed out that the government and employers were “playing sectors against each other” by saying “If they take 5 percent you should take 5 percent, but 24 percent is where we should be. I don't buy the notion that if everyone gets a pay rise inflation goes up.”

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