

Vote No to the UK education unions' pay deal sell-out!

Build rank-and-file committees to fight for a fully funded pay rise and billions for education

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Teachers across England must vote No in the ballots beginning July 18- July 28 on the government's pay offer of 6.5 percent for 2023-24. They must organise independently of the education union bureaucracies attempting to impose a sell-out by forming rank-and-file committees in every school to fight for an inflation busting pay rise and to overturn the chronic lack of funding and historic recruitment crisis.

Within hours of the wage offer being announced on July 13, all the education unions issued press statements calling for its acceptance. The Conservative government declared that it would accept the recommendation of the STRB (the teachers' pay review body) in a move clearly negotiated with the unions to end the longest running teachers' strike in over a decade.

The unions claim that the additional £525 million for this financial year and a further £900 million for 2024-25 consolidated will allow schools to implement the offer with no cuts to budgets, with a further £40 million in emergency hardship funds available for those schools struggling with budgets.

Teachers know this is nonsense. Most schools are struggling with budgets and have done so for years, with many at breaking point.

The cost-of-living crisis has seen a huge hike in energy and other resource costs, with schools forced to find money from their budgets for the unfunded 5 percent wage rise for teachers, and the £1,950 one off unfunded payment for support staff, in 2022-23. Over 50 percent of schools anticipated being over budget in 2022-23 and 90 percent are anticipating being over budget for 2023-24, according to a survey conducted in November by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

The offer represents a wage cut for 2022-23 of near 7

percent and a likely further cut for 2023-24, depending on the rate of inflation. Teachers have already suffered a wage loss of over 17 percent since 2010.

Claims by the education unions that the money will not come from frontline funding such as for Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND), buildings, maintenance and staffing are a joke. SEND provision is in crisis, with a 50 percent increase in pupils requiring the provision in the last 5 years; buildings are collapsing across the country and in need of desperate repair; schools are losing support staff and have lost over £10 billion in funding since 2010.

The money offered by the government does not come anywhere near the billions necessary to provide a decent education for children, a decent wage for teachers or to resolve the crisis in recruitment and retention as 1 in 9 teachers leave the profession, burned out by workload and stress.

Staff are having the agreement forced on them by the unions with little opportunity to discuss or review. Many schools have shut for the summer break already, with the remainder closing within the next few days. Online meetings were held by the unions beginning July 17, leaving teachers with just the weekend to work through the deal.

Why the haste to impose a deal that teachers have battled against for over seven months? Members of the largest union, the National Education Union (NEU), have been fighting for a fully funded, above inflation pay rise. They have taken eight days of strike action since February.

NASUWT and the NAHT failed to pass the threshold for total members voting and have been re-balloting, with NASUWT announcing July 12 that a 51.9 percent vote for

strike action had passed the threshold. The NEU's renewal ballot is due to end on July 28 alongside ballots by the NAHT and ASCL—all likely to meet the threshold. But the very next day after NASUWT members voted for co-ordinated action with colleagues across the profession, their executive announced support for the government deal.

The joint statements of the education unions have been met with a hostile and angry response from teachers on social media platforms. Comments on Twitter included:

- “The fact you’re trying so hard to convince us this is a good deal, only highlights that you know your members won’t think it is. You spent months telling us we deserve an above inflation pay rise... so why don’t we now?”

- “We need a union with a backbone. Provide it or lose the members you conned into believing you were campaigning for fully funded.”

- “A win? You should hang your head. Your shift in narrative is beyond disgusting and borderline suspicious. It’s terrible, under funded and under inflation. It should be rejected at all costs and we need a leader with a backbone who will fight these bastards not join them.”

The NEU's July 17 online Zoom meeting was a desperate effort to force a Yes vote. The chat function was blocked for the first time, with the excuse that there were too many people on the call. It was fully functioning during their meeting of over 400,000 members on January 21 during the Covid pandemic!

Joint Secretaries Kevin Courtney and Mary Bousted called on teachers to “bank” the offer, insisted that nothing more could be gained, and claimed they would “continue the campaign” while ending strike action. They threatened that if members rejected the offer they would be isolated as the remaining education unions would accept it. The NAHT and ASCL headteacher unions’ acceptance of the deal was cited as proof that schools could fund the offer.

Bousted and Courtney warned that rejection could mean several days of strike action, up to 10 days a month, with a loss in wages and no strike pay.

Bousted touted as a significant element of the deal the setting up of a “workload taskforce”. Admitting that the government’s proposal to reduce teacher workload by 5 hours a week was not sufficient, she stressed that “The unions will be invited, we will be part of the taskforce and we will work with the government for solutions that meets teacher’s needs.”

After months of being shut out of negotiations and ignored, the bureaucracy’s corporatist role and seat at the

table is now being reinstated.

In a similar vein, Courtney and Bousted insisted that the marginally better deals negotiated in Scotland and Wales were made possible because those governments “work with unions,” whereas in England, “we have a hard right government, and we won’t shift them any further.”

Some 30 percent of the NEU leadership is made up of members of pseudo-left organisations, including the Socialist Party. They have claimed for years that the election of “lefts” and “socialists” into the leadership would force the implementation of policies in the interests of members. This has included the promotion of Daniel Kebede, the incoming General Secretary of the NEU, a Corbyn supporter active in many of the campaigns of the Socialist Workers Party and other left groups.

The “Educators Say No!” group was set up immediately following the pay announcement by NEU “left” executive members and their supporters, holding an online meeting following the official meeting on July 17. The offer was not described as a sell-out and speakers noted their “respect for the leadership and no matter the outcome that will continue”. All that was needed was to exert more pressure on the government. They then admitted that if a No vote succeeded it was unlikely that the leadership would honour it or organise any action. This would have to be fought for.

Kebede then spoke, calling on teachers to accept the deal and to be “realistic... The truth is education needs at least £20 billion in funds, that is a 16.5 percent increase, to get to where it needs to be. This is not going to happen. What is needed is a multi-year approach.”

He then promised that as their new leader he would fight for pay restoration, beginning after the next NEU conference in Easter!

Nothing real can be accomplished by teachers unless they organise and fight independently of the trade union bureaucracy and its corporatist strategy. Rejecting the education unions’ rotten deal is a vital first step in building a new rank-and-file leadership to wage this struggle. Sign up to the Educators Newsletter today and contact the *World Socialist Web Site* with your thoughts on the deal and the situation in your school.



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