

UK education unions end strikes with below-inflation pay deal

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Britain's teaching unions have ended a months-long dispute over pay and education funding with a sell-out.

On Monday, the National Education Union (NEU), the largest schools union with around 300,000 teacher members, announced the end of its seven-month dispute after members in England voted to accept a pay offer of 6.5 percent. The NEU declared, "further strike action over 2023/24 pay will not now go ahead in the autumn term."

The NASUWT and NAHT unions announced the deal had been accepted later that day. The ASCL headteachers' union paved the way for the rout, having already accepted the deal in July.

In recommending the offer, the unions reneged on every pledge made at the outset of the dispute. The 6.5 percent pay "rise" is a real-terms cut, with inflation having been at double-digit levels for much of the last year. The government's measure of inflation, CPI, is still at almost 8 percent and the more accurate RPI measure is at 10.7 percent.

In the ballot, 86 percent of NEU teacher members backed the pay offer, on a turnout of 60 percent. The deal was also backed by 85 percent of support staff on a turnout of 40 percent.

Many workers voted to accept the deal reluctantly, knowing it was a betrayal. NEU members had already taken eight days of industrial action since the start of the year and their determination to fight on was made clear by the result of another ballot, also announced Monday. In that poll, 153,340 teacher members (95.35 percent) voted Yes to "take part in strike action in furtherance of this dispute".

However, teachers' lack of belief that the NEU would lead a successful struggle was made clear by the fact that, of 303,331 teacher members eligible, only a slight majority (53 percent) voted in favour.

The ballot results had the same character as last month's de facto vote of no confidence in the

Communication Workers Union (CWU) bureaucracy by postal workers, after the union had blocked all strike action for months. That vote saw 75 percent of postal workers voting Yes, and 24 percent voting No, on a turnout of 67.1 percent, passing an historic sell-out agreement.

The education union bureaucracy could not disguise its relief. Joint general secretaries of the NEU, Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney, declared, "Members have spoken very clearly and in great numbers..."

"The government should be in no doubt that we will hold its feet to the fire on delivering for teachers and support staff on workload and funding and continue to represent the profession in future STRB [School Teachers' Review Body] consultations."

These two will be holding no-one's feet to the fire. They are now set for a comfortable retirement, after years of coining it in as the leading figures in the NEU bureaucracy. Last year Bousted and Courtney jointly took home over £260,000 in pay (£219,848) and benefits (£46,982), while their members continue to eke out an existence on declining real-terms pay.

Incoming NEU General Secretary Daniel Kebede had also recommended the deal. Like Courtney, he claims a left-wing politics and is a supporter of former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

At the outset of the struggle, NEU members backed a strike ballot based on a campaign calling for a fully funded, above-inflation pay rise. In January, announcing a ballot result in which over 90 percent of its members in England and Wales backed industrial action—with seven days of strikes to be held in February and March—an NEU statement read: "The ballot is a result of failure by the Secretary of State in England and the employers in Wales to *ensure enough money is available to pay a fully-funded increase in pay for teachers which at least matches inflation, and which begins to restore lost pay* [emphasis

added].” This referenced the fact that teachers had suffered a wage loss of over 17 percent since 2010.

In its sell-out statement, the NEU sought to hail the STRB as an organisation which could be relied on to protect teachers’ pay, writing, “On 13 July, the Government published the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB) report on teacher pay. It recommended a 6.5% pay increase from September. Despite briefing that this would not be honoured, the Government has now agreed to fully implement the STRB recommendation on all pay points and allowances.”

The Tories have used the STRB to keep teachers’ pay down for years and were more than happy to endorse its recommendation. As the WSWS noted in its call for a rejection of the deal, “The Conservative government declared that it would accept the recommendation of the STRB... in a move clearly negotiated with the unions to end the longest running teachers’ strike in over a decade.”

The Tories have insisted throughout—exposing the lies of the NEU—that the deal will not be fully funded, meaning nearly half of the pay rise will come directly from school budgets already cut to the bone. Of the 6.5 percent deal, news site *Schools Week* commented, “Schools will be expected to fund 3.5 per cent from their own budgets, with the remaining 3 per cent coming from cuts to the Department for Education’s own budget.” *Schools Week* noted, “Government and unions are steering clear of saying the deal is ‘fully funded’, instead describing it as ‘properly funded’”.

Teachers opposed to the NEU’s sell-out must draw the lessons from the union bureaucracy’s sabotage. Every national dispute of the last year—including those of postal workers, rail workers, university staff, and health workers—has either been sold out or is in the final stages of a betrayal by the union bureaucracy.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union is also preparing an “online consultative ballot” for August 3 to 31, through which it plans to end another major dispute. This is based on a pay deal for 2023/24 of just 4.5 percent and a minuscule “extra 0.5% for the lowest paid.” In a sick joke, the PCS states, “This is more than double its originally intended figure of 2%.”

Spelling out the terms of its surrender, the PSC states, “Our first priority is to take targeted action in the small number of employers who have yet to agree to pay the £1,500 lump sum recommended by the government.”

How thoroughly the union bureaucracy is stamping out any opposition to the plans of the Tories and employers

was revealed this week by Mick Lynch, the General Secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union.

Taking advantage of the RMT’s all but closing down strike action on the railways in a dispute dating back more than a year, the Railway Delivery Group (RDG) representing all private rail operators last month announced the closure of nearly every railway station ticket office in Britain—a move expected to see thousands of jobs losses.

The RMT has refused to mobilise its tens of thousands of members in opposition, instead organising a harmless campaign giving credence to a bogus “consultation” process being organised by the RDG, including two days of action on August 9 and 16.

In a circular to RMT members this week, Lynch made clear, “Further to my message on Friday 28th July, please note that these are campaign days of action, focused on distributing postcards to passengers and drawing attention to the campaign, *and not any form of industrial action* [emphasis added].”

Education workers repulsed by the unions’ sell-out must respond by creating their own rank-and-file organisations. They must reject the corporatist strategy of the unions and adopt a socialist programme which fights for workers’ needs and the defence of public education against the ploughing of billions into the coffers of the super-rich and the war machine.

Leading this struggle is the Educators Rank-and File Committee, which was the only organisation to warn that the unions were preparing such a sellout and advance a strategy to fight back.

Sign up to the newsletter of the Educators Rank-and File Committee today and contact us with your thoughts on the sell-out and the situation in your school.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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