

FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO DISSENT

Staff walkouts shutdown UCU congress. Both morning and afternoon sessions were brought to a halt by the walkout of UCU employees.

The issue at stake was the right of UCU Congress delegates to represent members 'criticisms of the conduct of the General Secretary in the recent USS dispute. The Unite union claims that these criticisms on the floor of Congress would infringe the employments rights of the General Secretary.

A proposal from the chair to withdraw the motions of criticism fell by 144 votes to 123. The motions address the role of the General Secretary in getting industrial action suspended in the USS dispute. One was a motion of no confidence calling for the General Secretary's resignation; the other was a motion of censure. Those who voted against withdrawal included many delegates who had reservations about one or both of the motions, but insisted on their right to debate them and vote on them.

In effect, depriving Congress of the right to censure the General Secretary, or the elected leadership as a whole, would render them immune from criticism by the sovereign body of the union. This and future General Secretaries would then be at liberty to act in defiance of democratic decisions taken by members' delegates at Congress.

Had these motions been debated, congress could have arrived at decisions that allowed members voices to be heard.

The actions of the general secretary and the staff union turned this into a debate about who runs this union - members and elected representatives of branches or GS and the full-time and officials.

It was an attempt to silence the voices of all those UCU members in branches who expressed their disapproval of the handling of the biggest dispute in the union's history.

The sector conferences will go ahead. It's important that both sector conferences agree to launch a national fight on pay that can unite the whole union.

