

After N30 - what next? This is not a protest! This is a campaign we intend to win

Escalation and no compromise!
These are our lives with which
the Government is playing. This
is a magnificent response to the
Government's attempted theft of
public sector pensions.

Teachers, borders staff, technicians, social workers, librarians, garbage collectors, painters, electricians, lecturers, researchers, janitors, cooks, secretaries, researchers, ... the list is almost endless. This is a clear signal to the Government that we will not tolerate our pensions being savaged:

- * our pensions are not in financial jeopardy so we will not tolerate them being raided to pay for bank bailouts;
- * we will not tolerate the breach of our contracted terms on age of retirement;
- * we will not pay a penny more than we contracted for, or accept a penny less in benefits; and
- * we will not consider a switch to 'career average', with all the losses this would entail, on empty rhetoric about 'fairness' and 'equity' from a Government oozing hypocrisy and privilege from every pore.

The Government strategy

In the face of this level of opposition, and with the prospect of escalating action in the New Year, the Government's strategy is divide and rule. It is desperate to drive a wedge between the unions that have mobilized for the strike on November 30th.

Till now, the Government sought to isolate public sector employees from those in the private sector. Now it is seeking to divide one set of public sector employees from another. It is desperate to get one or two public sector unions to break ranks, and to accept a compromise.

A compromise solution?

Its strategy has failed. All of the unions, from the PCS to Unison, from the NUT to Unite, from the UCU to the ATL, ... have said "too little, too late!" The Government has claimed that the unions were very close to a compromise deal – a deal that the Government would take off the table if the strike on the 30th went ahead – but all of the unions' leaders know three things:

- * compromise would give up part of a pension that is in members' contracts, and that the sacrifice would only be to

pay for the bankers' crisis;

- * compromise would be unacceptable to the vast majority of those striking on the 30th;
- * any trade union leadership that would seek to sell a compromise to its members would only manage to compromise its own very survival.

Defending our pensions is not like fighting for a wage increase. In wage bargaining, compromise is the norm, with a settlement reached between the existing rate and the claim. In pensions battles, by contrast, any compromise means that the pensioners lose. It is not really a 'compromise'; any 'compromise' is a defeat. It means that we lose what we already had.

One union after another has denounced the Government's lies.

The way forward after N30

The Government is not going to abandon its plans because of a one-day strike. When the UCU first took action alone, it was to encourage other unions to join in the campaign sooner. When the NUT, ATL, PCS and UCU took action together on 30th June, we did not think that this day alone would be able to stop the attack.

Now, with a generalized fightback across the public sector, we should not suddenly become subject to the illusion that one day is enough.

The Government is worried, and on the back foot. It is watching the action carefully, desperate to detect any weaknesses in our ranks. We need to convince the Government that we are not going away after N30. This is not a protest, after which we will go home with a shrug. Every Minister needs to know that we are in this to win.

Escalation

To do that we need the earliest possible agreement between the unions on how the action is to be extended and escalated after Christmas. We need:

- * another one-day strike in January;
 - * rolling regional action across the country
 - * a 48-hour general stoppage in February.
- Trade unions' Executives need to debate escalation and a timetable as soon as possible.



The USS scheme

In the pre-92 universities, working to rule is creating a new front over working hours. It is not creating movement on the pensions scheme, however. We need an escalation of action here as well, and a plan for effective strike action.

In France and Spain and Italy, the attack on pensions was beaten back. In those struggles, the decisive factor was widespread industrial action, combined with enormous popular mobilizations.

- * **the campaign must commence immediately in the new year with another nation-wide strike;**
- * **it must continue with appropriate regional or other staggered action, through to February;**
- * **this first phase should culminate in a 48-hour strike in February.**

Reclaiming our colleges and universities - the future of post-16 education

Those of us in FE and HE must not lose sight of the greatest threat to our jobs and careers, and to students' educational opportunities. That threat is the Government's White Paper on post-16 education.

On top of paralyzing student debts of £50-60,000 for a 3-year degree, with fees of £9k pa, and the abolition of the EMA, the Government's White Paper now proposes deregulating the sector so that 'for-profit' companies buy up provision in a generalized privatization.

Student access to university will henceforth be determined by the size of their bank accounts.

Privatisation

The White Paper entails the devaluation of UK higher education via its marketing as a commodity to consumers, and deregulation of degree awarding powers.

It proposes the abandonment of teaching experimentation and responsiveness in favour of 'beauty contests' based on entertainment value. It proposes an attack on all accountability in FE colleges by attacking student and staff representation so that colluding colleges can offer cut-price, second-rate 'degrees', while employing staff on inferior contracts.

The White Paper represents, in effect, an attack on the very idea of a university or of a university education, except for a small minority. It is about rationing education by price.

Against this, the UCU must stand for the extension of a minimum of resources and contractual terms in the delivery of all degree work, whether in universities or colleges; resistance not just to compulsory redundancies but to all job losses and course closures; refusal to cooperate or collude with privatized operations; regional strategies of resistance and solidarity; and for the reclaiming of our universities and colleges for their academic and educational purposes, and their democratization.

Equity and fairness

The UCU needs to build a campaign of resistance out of its spring conference on the White Paper, bringing this issue to national prominence through high-profile demonstrations and a lobby of Parliament.

UCU needs to join with the Campaign for the Public University, with the committed professoriate and senior staff, with all in the professions of teaching and research, and with the student movements and the NUS, to make these proposals unworkable. We need to stand together with all in our communities for the defence of education against the principles of the market, and for equity and fairness.

NEC Elections

In addition to supporting Mark Campbell for General secretary UCU Left is also supporting a number of other candidates in the NEC elections, which open on 6 February .

VICE PRESIDENT (FE): Angie McConnell

TRUSTEE: Alan Whitaker

NORTHERN IRELAND HE: Brian Kelly

NORTH EAST HE: Liz Lawrence,
Gavin Reid, Veronica Killen

NORTH EAST FE: Graham
Mustin, Umit Yildiz:

LONDON AND THE EAST HE: Mark Campbell,
Jim Wolfreys, Jane Hardy

LONDON AND THE EAST FE: Sean
Vernell, Mandy Brown

WALES HE: Liza van Zyl

NORTH WEST FE: Darren Bradshaw

UK ELECTED MEMBERS HE: Jane Hardy,
Jelena Timotijevic, Lesley McGorrigan

UK ELECTED MEMBERS FE: Richard McEwan,
Steve Boyce, Jenny Sutton, Umit Yildiz

WOMEN MEMBERS HE: Marion Hersh

WOMEN MEMBERS FE: Alison
Lord, Jenny Sutton

CASUALLY EMPLOYED MEMBERS
FE: Regine Pilling

Reclaiming Education

by Mark Campbell (Candidate for UCU General Secretary)

The Government's White Paper will affect further and higher education equally. Unless successfully resisted, it will force the market on the post-16 education sector. Some colleagues may think that by staying silent they will save their courses.

Any such idea of safety in passivity is mistaken. I appeal to all to stand up for education. I want all who want to fight for education, and against the market, to unite in a determined defence of education as a public and social good.

Reclaiming our institutions

We need to reassert academic and scholarly control of our colleges and universities. We need to insist on public service not only as the reason why we came into education but also why we stay. We need to insist that our educational institutions serve the communities of which they are an integral part.

We have become too accustomed to a language of 'aims' and 'objectives', of 'module descriptors', of accounting criteria to determine the quality of course provision, and of a meaningless 'peddababble' on outcomes and achievement. We have the absurd prospects of managers determining the academic curriculum in relation to the requirements of local commerce, of information managers reinventing libraries as social spaces unencumbered with books, and of research administration subverting the academic role of supervisors.

Our union has as yet done too little to resist the drift, despite the admirable research and propaganda material produced by our staff. Now it is time for us to say, 'No more', and to reverse the trend of the last two decades. We need the democratization of education.

We need our reps to be involved in their local communities, and our members in universities to challenge for representation on faculty boards, academic boards and on Senates. We must seek the overhaul of institutional procedures.

We need a union that does not think that this battle is lost already, one that will dovetail its defence of members' jobs and conditions with this educational initiative to reclaim the institutions – to win them back from the rampant managerialism that has overcome them.



Jobs and conditions of service

We have learned the lesson of timidity on the question of jobs. Where we fight we win; where we seek compromise we disillusion our members and supporters, and we harvest defeat.

Beyond that willingness to act there is the question of what we are acting for. Are we fighting to preserve the jobs and the support on which they depend, or are we only fighting against compulsory redundancies and for better severance terms? This is a sharp question that confronts us.

We need to unite our defence of members' interests with a defence of educational provision as the key element in the defence of employment security and the terms of employment. We can no longer hope to secure our sectional interests without embracing the need to defend the jobs and conditions of all, and the service provided to students and the wider community by the FE and HE sectors.

The union we deserve

We need well-organised branches, and well-trained officers. None of this can be achieved without debating priorities which serve the interests of all members.

We need to preserve our capacity to debate the implementation of regional policy in our Regional Committees. We need to involve the largest possible layer of members in the union's democratic structures to determine policy – in attending Congress, and HE and FE Sector Conferences. Our National Executive Committee must reflect all of the union's constituencies, and have a procedure that prevents the dominance of any at the expense of the others.

This is how we pull all sections together in a common fight. There is no Chinese Wall between organization and combat effectiveness for a trade union in this new and austere climate. Every argument about organization is an argument about what the UCU is for, and about the imagination and willingness to fight.

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