

DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

1. We welcome the report from Michael MacNeil on national bargaining in England arising from motions passed at April's Special Sector Conference (UCU 589). What follows is intended as a contribution to the current debate on collective bargaining.
2. In UCU 589 Michael summarises the types of national bargaining which exist in England (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have separate arrangements); where FE pay bargaining fits; some suggestions for how to take the discussion forward, including the elements that need to be addressed; and a proposed schedule for further discussion.
3. For some years after Incorporation in the 1990s our predecessor union Natfhe faced a very difficult situation with no proper national bargaining mechanism. In addressing the shortcomings in the current situation as it has since evolved we need to ask first;

'What should be our target in terms of a national bargaining mechanism?', and second;

'What strategy and what action do we need to take in order to achieve this?'

4. Some members have questioned why we are involved in single-table bargaining given that most of the other unions (except, rarely, Unison) lack industrial muscle and while they often initially reject insulting offers they do not take action with us.

However, we believe that the disadvantages of separate or multi-table bargaining outweigh the advantages. We believe UCU should continue to endorse single-table bargaining.

Separate bargaining provides many more opportunities for the employers to divide and rule and tends to increase the perceived divisions between unions.

- 5. In response to the first question above, we suggest we want a national bargaining mechanism that commits the employers' side to binding outcomes and effective universal implementation by all constituent organisations in the employers-side body.**

At the moment, as we know, a declining proportion of constituent colleges, jealous of their independent status as 'businesses', fail to implement pay awards in a full or timely fashion.

- 6. The key question we face, therefore, is how we can achieve binding implementation and specific advances like restoration of pre-recessionary pay levels, parity with schoolteachers, and restoration of national pay scales for all.**

7. In devising an effective strategy we should bear several truths in mind:
 - a) Campaigning on pay is one of the few ways in which we can lawfully organise national action and so reinforce a sense that we are a national union with national demands.
 - b) We should recognise that achieving pay increases or even pay protection for members through national action increases members' confidence and branch organisation and makes it more possible to resist local attacks on conditions.

- c) **The rate for the job is always the top of a pay scale.** Any other point on a scale is the employer getting us on the cheap.
- d) **The cost of strike action (i.e. 'lost pay') has always been rapidly recouped by the increased offers we have won** – and this uplift should be calculated over the rest of a workers' working life and their pension entitlements in retirement, and not over a particular annual income period. Even a fraction of a percent increase in an eventual settlement will recoup the loss quite quickly.
- e) **There is no magic non-strike bullet.** This is not to say that non-strike (or ASOS) sanctions are pointless, since they may play an important role in a campaign, but any really effective ASOS will almost certainly attract punitive pay deductions by an employer. These can rapidly outstrip direct pay losses from a strike. A union **MUST** therefore develop a robust response (e.g. credible threats of escalating action and national solidarity action, not merely recourse to the courts) to counter this if it is going to use ASOS.
- f) **It is a myth to believe that universal national pay scales and a general national pay uplift can be achieved through local or 'targeted' action.** It may be possible to pressure a local employer to implement the national benchmark, but any national benchmark will have to be established by effective *national* action and this must therefore be a priority.

Local or 'targeted' action can therefore *only* deliver under an umbrella of national pay and conditions deriving from national bargaining - and national action where necessary.

- g) **There is a reciprocal relationship between local and national action.** Local action can help develop confidence, recruit to the union and develop the necessary local organisation making it more likely those members will back a national call for action: but national action gives a sense of scale and helps to break down sectionalism and localism. It can give confidence to members to fight back locally as well when issues come up.

- h) **We should have no truck with those who argue that the way forward on pay is through local rather than national pay bargaining.** This would rapidly end any semblance of national bargaining and expose all but the very strongest branches.
- i) Nevertheless, if targeted action delivers improved local offers, we should establish a **ratification panel** to determine whether any local offer is close enough to the national benchmark to warrant recommending acceptance. Local branch negotiators otherwise might be tempted to take offers which in practice would undermine the national benchmark. The decision should not be left solely to the local branch.

* UCU LEFT FRINGE MEETING *

BUILDING A CAMPAIGNING UNION BUILDING NATIONAL ACTION BUILDING THE FIGHTBACK

Chair: Liz Lawrence
UCU PRESIDENT ELECT

Speakers:

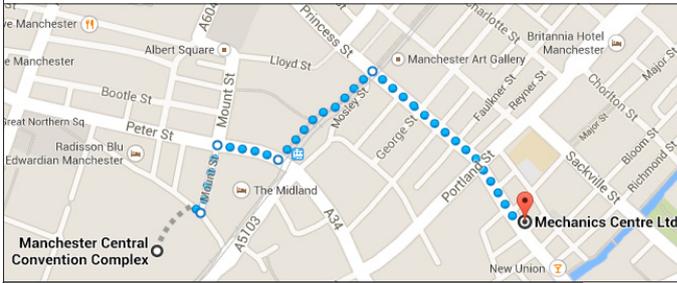
- * **Mandy Brown**
LAMBETH COLLEGE UCU, UCU FEC
- * **Lesley McGorrigan**
LEEDS UNIVERSITY UCU, UCU HEC
- * **Carole Duggan**
JUSTICE FOR MARK DUGGAN CAMPAIGN
- * **Egyptian Solidarity Initiative**
- * **Care UK UNISON Striker**
- * **NUT speaker**

Thursday May 29

MECHANICS INSTITUTE

**103 PRINCESS ST
MANCHESTER
M1 6DD**

MEETING STARTS 7.30PM



* www.uculeft.org * www.uculeft.org *



UCU Left Conference

UCU Left will be holding a conference in October.

Discussions will include:

- * Where now for the pay campaigns
- * Fighting casualisation
- * Defending public education

For more details contact:

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