

Workers' Liberty

Teachers

NUT Conference
Liverpool
Monday April 1
Bulletin number 2

Build a rank and file Chicago style

Since the emergence of the Local Associations Network at last year's Conference in Torquay the term "rank and file" has been bandied around quite a bit in the Union. Often it is being used to mean no more than ordinary members at the grassroots, those at the chalkface rather than paid officials or national leaders. That is an important aspect of the term. But it has a more specific and important meaning, especially when linked to the idea of organisation.

Rank and file organisation is not, in our view, simply the coming together of like-minded individuals from the base of a union to promote a particular cause or programme. Instead it is the systematic organisation of ordinary members based on the workplace and the branch but independent of the official union machine. Workers, including teachers, need rank and file organisation of this kind because of the inevitable pressures which push union officials and leaders further away from the concerns expressed at the

workplace, even where those leaders once had a good grasp of those concerns. Rank and file organisation, if it is really representative and really rooted in the union, can respond very quickly to calls to action by the Union. It can also mobilise to persuade the union to act with more determination and speed where leaders lag behind members.

It is early days still for LANAC but that is the sort of role we think it should aspire to play in the NUT. Members do not need another faction or grouping but they do, in our view, need an organisation which can give real voice to those parts of the Union who want a fighting, militant NUT and are prepared to be independent from the official machine no matter who leads it. The rough models for this would be the Minority Movement in the British trade unions in the 1920s or the Caucus of Radical Educators (CORE) which played such a key role in transforming the Chicago Teachers Union into such an effective member-led organisation.

The NUT needs such a rank and file organisation. Maybe LANAC can be the basis for developing one. We hope so and will work to make it happen.

Tell the members

At Annual Conference 2012 the LANAC amendment to the Pensions motion, although gutted of the real strategy needed, committed the executive to announcing a calendar of action for the dispute. This did not happen, as no more dates at all were announced. However we have now been promised that, unlike the London regional strike, the program of regional rolling action, agreed with the NASUWT, will contain continue after the North West strike. This is the same dispute, under the same ballot, so the commitment to an announced calendar of action agreed at 2012 conference still holds and should be applied.

Our executive should announce the dates of the next strikes, including the planned national strike. Despite claims to the opposite by the leadership, LANAC supporters realise that this dispute will not be easily won, though it would have helped if the action had started as soon as Gove announced his intention to smash up national pay rates. The agreed rolling action could, to a limited extent, be an effective use of the Union's limited resources. However, we need to build pressure from below to add national strike days, step up the ASOSA campaign and respond to the Government as it reacts to our strategy. We should give a lead to the NASUWT in taking the action beyond its current limits rather than allow them to constrain the action within a framework that cannot hope to defeat the Government.

Today LANAC meets to discuss how the rank and file of the union can organise to make the strike a success but also hold the union to account on delivering more action.



LANAC meeting, Monday 1st April, 8pm, The Radisson Hotel

5-term year campaign in Nottingham...

NUT Action Committee fails the Chicago test!

In many ways the excellent campaign waged by Nottingham City NUT in conjunction with the *Parents Against the Five Term Year* (PA5TY) group represents something of the spirit of the Chicago teachers and their inspirational organising and action.

This combination of determined teacher trade unionism and close links with parents and community campaign groups speaks of the social movement trade unionism detailed in Lois Weiner's fringe meeting speech and in her book 'The Future of Our Schools'.

On page 10 of her book, Lois writes "[o]ften union officials tell reformers not to 'wash our dirty linen in public' ... The only way we will persuade teachers and the public that unions can be different – better – is by coming clean about problems."

So here we go: the NUT strikes and PA5TY campaign succeeded in quashing plans for a five term year but did not secure outright victory on the length of the summer holiday and autumn half-term. The shortening of the summer break and lengthening of the half-term are still major issues for parents and teachers for all the reasons that the five term year was a problem.

Despite repeated consultations, indicative ballots, action plans, visits to the action committee, phone calls etc... Nottingham City members and the parent campaigners have been left hanging for six months with no word on whether more action will be permitted. Nottingham City delegates expected to meet with the action committee over conference, but have instead been told that no meeting is necessary and that members must now be re-balloted.

It has taken six months for the action committee to come to this decision and as yet, they have not given a satisfactory explanation for it.

As one Nottingham City delegate puts it

"We fought a really good campaign and won something massive in beating back the 5-term year. However, the local authority was determined to tamper with the summer holiday and because of this teachers and parents want to take more action to beat this back. Unfortunately, the NUT National Action Committee - despite repeated meetings and requests from Nottingham City - would not sanction this further action." (Susi Artis, Assistant Secretary, Nottingham City NUT)

Ideas for Freedom 2013 Marxist ideas to turn the tide

**A WEEKEND OF SOCIALIST DISCUSSION
AND DEBATE HOSTED BY WORKERS' LIBERTY**

Friday 21 - Sunday 23 June, 2013

University of London Union,

Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY

Book online at workersliberty.org/ideas

Defend our Union reps with Union action

Much has been said at Conference about the bullying culture present in many of our schools - a result of a range of reasons we are unfortunately all too familiar with.

Too often, it is our school reps who are victimised. Often the chosen method is through capability procedures.

Observe the member, and judge the lesson to 'fail' on any number of spurious grounds. Recently, a member reported that his lesson was failed because the teacher didn't notice a student chewing gum!

Therefore Motion 53, 'Appraisal and Capability' (Tuesday) is one feature of the defence of our school reps as well as teachers in general.

But what happens when NUT Reps are victimised? The members will feel vulnerable and some will conclude that they might be next in the firing line. Therefore members in school will surely expect:

- The full weight of the union to be mobilised, including:
- The local Association/Division to convene an emergency meeting of NUT members at the school to explain that their Rep is being victimised and that the best response is a collective response, and that this means strike action if necessary.
- The General Secretary to attend the meeting of members to reassure them that defence of the Rep is the priority for the union.

The victimisation of any NUT Rep has to be seen as an emergency issue, a collective issue, and definitely not an individual casework issue. Anything less is an abdication of basic trade union principles.

Pat Markey, Sec: Northampton NUT