



The Issue no.8 (October 2014)

Open Book

A bulletin by and for University of London workers

openbookbulletin@gmail.com

The pay freeze continues. Transform the labour movement!

The pay of FTSE 100 directors has risen by 21% in the past year. Meanwhile average wage increases have been just 2%, 1.6% in the public sector, below price inflation of 2% (CPI) or 2.7% (RPI).

Over half of the wage rises in the last year were below RPI. In a sample survey of wage settlements for six million workers between August 2013 and August 2014, 13% faced a wage freeze and only 8.3% had a wage rise above 3%.

We are in the longest period of wage depression since records began, as a TUC report found on 12 October.

However Britain's richest people are wealthier than ever before, with a combined fortune of almost £520bn for just the top 1000.

The 100 wealthiest people in the UK have as much money as the poorest 18 million – 30% of all people.

At the same time, the response of our trade unions has been hesitant and weak.

In the run-up to the 18 October TUC demonstration, it was expected that local government workers in Unison, UNITE and the GMB would take strike action on 14 October against the pay freeze, joining together with NHS workers and civil servants.

Instead, the strikes were called off. The basis for calling off 14 October was an offer of a 2.2% increase from January 2015 to April 2016. That offer means that many workers will not get even a 1% rise for the year April 2014 to April 2015. It comes nowhere near Unison's objective of at least £1 per hour increase or the Living Wage for all workers.

The offer also ties workers into a two year deal, excluding action in April 2015 when the election

may make political parties vulnerable on the pay issue.

Calling off strikes for such a deal was a wretched surrender, and signals to their members that the unions are not serious about fighting low pay.

The leaders of Unison, Unite and GMB should be held to account for their actions. Workers need to get organised!

Activists in local government unions are organising for a rejection of the offer. They will demand a return to industrial action.

Activists in the NHS are demanding further strikes there.

Pay rises that address the 8.2% lost by the average worker from 2008-2013 will not be won by sporadic national one-day show strikes.

Or by street demonstrations and press releases.

They will be won by industrial action which is designed to win, not just to signal protest. And not just by national strikes, but also by local action in hundreds of workplaces on hundreds of detailed local demands.

Workers at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton; in cleaning and catering at the University of London; and others have already won pay concessions by democratically-controlled, open ended strike schedules.

The decisive push can and will come from the rank and file. And then the job is to reshape our unions so that they aid our struggles rather than blocking them.

For workers at the University of London, now that unions have accepted an offer of 2% from August 2014, one means of clawing back some of the losses is the battle over London Weighting. This requires cross-union co-operation at Senate House, and strong workplace organisation to ensure our negotiators are accountable to the wider membership. (See next page).

London Weighting: cross-union solidarity needed

This summer, after many years of pushing from activists in the Service Sector Group, UCU and Unison have finally put together proposals for an increase in London Weighting.

Activists in the IWGB union, too, welcomed this push have been working with activists in the UCU to draw together non-unionised workers and members of all the campus unions into a joint campaign.

By having open petitions and open meetings without any union-specific affiliations, hundreds of workers have participated in meetings and discussions they would otherwise have done. Regardless of what union they are in – staff are organised and vocal.

That is the real basis of workplace organising, and the real strength behind collective bargaining.

However, the attempts to forge a joint campaign have suffered from obstruction by some Unison regional officials. In one London Weighting meeting, a regional official glared at the IWGB members in attendance and declared the meeting Unison ‘members only’; at which point IWGB activists, and a group of new-comers, were turfed out. This is no way to win the campaign.

Some in the UCU branch committee, too, have been unwilling to work with members of other unions.

In Bloomsbury, Birkbeck and SOAS Unison branches have worked closely with the IWGB and other union branches nearby.

Outside the University of London, the IWGB is welcomed on Camden Trades Council, where all delegates (including HE Sector unions) are eager for IWGB to affiliate. The UoL UCU and Unison branches, tellingly, no longer affiliate and cut themselves off from local activities with other unions, or even other branches on their doorstep.

Union members need to re-create this sense of cross-union action at Senate House too!

It is clear that the all-staff campaign has had an effect so far.

The University met with unions on 7 October to present its initial offer on London Weighting.

Here are the details of the initial London Weighting offer:

1. A backdated increase from 1st August this year in line with the national pay increase.
2. The application of any national pay increases each year in future and
3. Increases in 2015 and 2016 as follows:
 - £100 on 1 April 2015
 - £100 on 1st August 2015
 - A final uplift on 1st August 2016 to £2500 of the amount necessary following the increases set out above and the effects of the national pay awards over the periods from now to August 2016 and
 - Consolidation into basic pay at rate of £2500 from 1st August 2016

It's clear the University is seeing what it can get away with – further pressure and more staff action will be required in order to get a decent offer.

Open Book thinks that workers at Senate House need to unite around the following objectives:

- To call on our unions to reject this officer and demand a better one from the University;
- To continue building a vigorous all-staff and cross-union London Weighting campaign, uniting those in the workplace through petitions, open meetings and the sharing of the latest information;
- To ensure that the negotiations going on between the University, the UCU and Unison are accountable to the wider union membership. This means branch committees feeding information to their members through the unions' own channels, but also for union members to share information at open meetings with each other.
- As well as this, to hold all branch officers and officials accountable at committee and members' meeting.

The Open Book is a bulletin written by and for UoL workers, and published by Workers' Liberty, an organisation fighting as part of the labour movement for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy.

www.workersliberty.org