



Academies

We must continue the fight

What kind of education do we want?

Action short of Strike, what Next?

Pay and Pensions—The fight so far

By Patrick Murpy, NUT National Executive member (pc)

Pay and pensions action

As NUT Conference assembles in Liverpool there is no doubt which is the crucial debate: where are we and where do we now go in the campaign to defend our pensions and pay from the most serious attacks in decades. Whatever the outcome, every serious activist will need to build for action with energy and purpose. But at Conference we have one last chance to shape the Union's action plan and make it more fit for purpose. We must take that chance.

What's wrong with the current plan?

In principle strike action which involves both NUT and NASUWT is more effective than action by one union alone. But that's not the only, or necessarily the main, factor in whether any particular action is effective or not. At least as important are the timing, the level and intensity of action and the synergy between the action and its professed aims. The problem with the existing plan agreed by the two sets of union leaders is that it falls down on all of these factors.

Timing: the changes to our national pay

system, which will abolish national scales and introduce individual pay, come into effect from September 1st. Schools will be adopting pay policies in line with these new

arrangements next term. We were aware of these plans last summer and they were announced as firm proposals by the Chancellor in December. Despite all this forewarning there will have been no national action at all before individual pay comes into effect. In fact the first national strike is due some three months after national pay scales are abolished.

The standard response to this blatantly obvious problem is to assert that "we couldn't have defeated the proposals on our own by September in any case". For the most part people who put this argument have played a key role in **ensuring** we couldn't defeat the proposals by opposing action at every opportunity since the plans were announced in December. So, in part, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. The longer the delay in taking action, the less pressure



on other teacher unions to join us and the less chance of building enough pressure to force a retreat. And there were perfectly achievable retreats which could have been won by earlier action, such as the protection of our entitlement to be retain our current pay point when moving to a new school. In any case it's one thing for members to be mid-way through an action campaign when the new system comes in. It's quite another to expect them to take their first action after the event.

We needed to start this action campaign as soon after the proposals were announced as possible and certainly in time to press for significant retreats before it came into legal force. We can still call earlier national strike action and Conference should support calls to do so.

The action: there is, of course, a strong case for combining national and more localised action, as part of a rolling programme. Done properly as part of a coherent plan it can deliver more persistent pressure on the government while reducing the pressure and loss of pay for members.

But done properly means high intensity action over a compressed time period and it means putting national strike action to the forefront. To start a campaign of strike action against a confident anti-union government with a regional strike at the end of a school term is really unlikely to cause them any worries. Having gutted our pension scheme and suffered barely a scratch the prospect of a first national strike on pay (and pensions) sometime before Xmas will not have the Gove or Cameron quaking in their boots.

Rolling action should start and end with national strikes. There is still time to decide that the NUT will take national action first and even to turn June 27th into a national strike.

Our aims: the public aims of our campaign are to seek withdrawal of the pay proposals pending negotiation with unions, a re-opening of the pension talks and discussions on working conditions. If we had built, and were still building, on the impressive momentum that developed around the pensions dispute we could seriously hope to have the govt under some pressure on all of these areas. If we were really serious industrial logic would determine the timing and place of strike action in the campaign to win these things. We would not suspend all national strike action for two years despite no concessions or movement. We would not allow the second major attack (on pay) to be introduced unchallenged. But industrial logic is not the driver of our strategy here. Persuading the NASUWT to take strike action with us has, over the last year, moved from being a means to an end to almost an end in itself. Now that we

have their very hard-won agreement to joint action it will not be immediately obvious what that action is really about.

During many of the Executive debates about action over recent months a new argument emerged which underlines this lack of focus. Those of us who became increasingly frustrated at the failure to mount any visible resistance to the imminent pay changes were told that our impatience was misplaced. There was no reason to treat September as any kind of deadline, this would be a very long haul lasting at least two years and the real timeframe was up the next general election. This is a "strategy" we have seen across the trade union movement over the last 20 years and it has always been an abject failure. "Forget about developing an action plan driven by the needs of a specific industrial issue", it says, "that approach belongs in the 'too hard' box. The answer is to get rid of the government that does all these bad things". That can only happen in a general election. What's important is to time any industrial action so that it causes the government political embarrassment in the run-up to said election. A bit of general political campaigning round the edges might be organised to help this overall effort.

This excuse for a strategy can be given a very left-wing and radical gloss too. "You impatient types are in fact setting your sights too low. You want to win a mere industrial dispute. We, on the other hand want to kick out the government". But that is no more than a gloss. While members are dragooned into this long game they are forced to watch as their pensions rights are eviscerated and their pay scales torn up. The new pension and pay arrangements become established fact and very much harder to challenge. Union policy shifts markedly towards winning the best deals within the much worse terms and conditions. And even if the bad government does fall there is no

guarantee whatever that its replacement will do anything to restore the conditions our members once enjoyed. In the specific cases of national pay and the Hutton proposals there is every reason to expect Labour to leave the new arrangements in place.

So we have a strategy that fails on every possible level. And this failure is rooted in the simplest of mistakes- a refusal to let the concrete industrial dispute determine our plan of action.

The case for returning to national strike action as soon as possible after the final pensions 'Heads of Agreement' in December 2011 was that this was the only way to keep that dispute alive and stiffen the resolve of those unions who refused to sign up. We failed to do this despite clear membership support. The case for urgent and early action in response to the pay proposals was that we needed to mobilise our forces and attempt to draw others in before the new arrangements were set in stone. It's too late now to describe anything we can do as urgent or early. But the case for adding to the joint NUT-NASUWT action plans by calling national strike action next term in the run-up to June 27th is also based on the logic of the actual disputes. As argued above, members need to feel that their action, their loss of pay, their attempts to close their school, is linked to a real goal and a timescale appropriate to that goal. To stop, to protest at, or even to win concessions from the current pay proposals means calling serious national action before those new arrangements are in place in all schools.

That will be presented as unrealistic and even disruptive of the agreement with NASUWT. In fact it is the simple business of designing an action campaign to meet the needs of a particular dispute that members can understand.

Two thousand NUT local associations agree to sponsor fringe meeting!

By Patrick Murphy,

NUT National Executive (pc)

In a dramatic development last week it was announced that two thousand NUT local associations had agreed to back a key fringe meeting at this year's conference. The meeting is to take place on Friday night and will be addressed by Nelson Mandela and Doug McAvoy. Both speakers plan to heap praise on the NUT leadership for its hugely successful campaign to defend teachers' pay and pensions and denounce as 'wreckers' those who refuse to celebrate this success. In a preview of his speech Mandela has revealed that he will compare the Union's campaign with his struggle against apartheid. 'It took us over 40 years to throw off the shackles of the hated apartheid regime', he says "whereas I can see the NUT pension and pay campaigns winning in half that time. It really is inspiring".

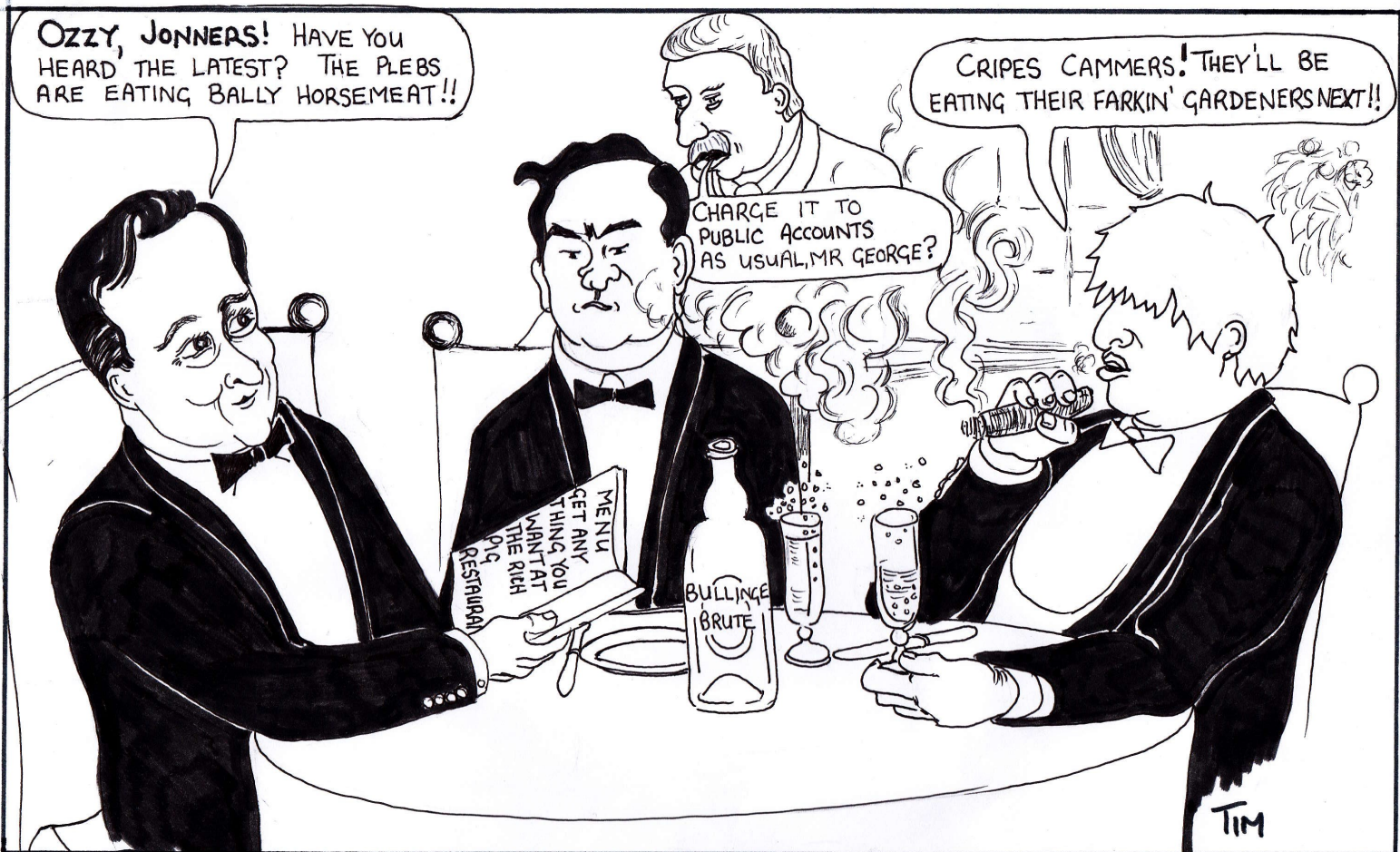
McAvoy has promised to use his time on the

platform to make his peace with all his previous opponents from the left of the union he once led with such force. "I couldn't be prouder of them" he said, "they have mastered the difficult art of maintaining the appearance of a genuine campaign while members pay and conditions worsen around them. For the whole of the 1990s I tried to make them see the wisdom of this approach. I must admit I never thought that they would develop this skill. On Friday I intend to give credit where credit is due."

In the week before Conference we contacted a number of delegates from the supporting associations to gauge their excitement at these developments. A typical reaction came from David Archer of Ambridge Association who said "what meeting? I've not been told about any meeting." When we called Deirdre Barlow of Salford she seemed unsure what we meant by sponsorship. "Are we giving any

money or just adding our name? I do attend all my association meetings and I don't remember ever being asked. Still I do tend to get tired what with all the marking and planning. But still, Nelson Mandela eh? How could you not be impressed?"

Finally we contacted the organisers who didn't seem keen to talk to us. One question we really had to put was how they got sponsorship from ten times as many associations as actually exist. After struggling a bit with that Walford division secretary, Ken Alexander, insisted that there was so much excitement about the NUT-NASUWT action plan after the press release that hundreds of new associations sprung up overnight to join the action. Director of Communications for the NUT, Harry David, assured us that all of the new associations would be approved by the officers of the Union meeting as a committee of urgency before the opening day of Conference.



LANAC MEETING TONIGHT

What strengthening amendment should be put to the Priority Motion ?

FRIDAY 29 MARCH 6.15 pm upstairs at 'The Liverpool' Pub, 14 James St., L2 7PQ

(by Liverpool James Street station, ten minutes walk north, past the docks)

LANAC are hosting this meeting to provide a forum for delegates who think, like us, that Conference needs to debate a strengthening amendment to the Priority Motion.

Have your say - join the debate

Ideas for Freedom 2013: Marxist ideas to turn the tide

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

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Book online at workersliberty.org/ideas

Once converted the fight must continue

Gemma Short, Rotherham Academies action Officer (PC)

Whilst it's true that in some academy conversion schools NUT membership and organisation in the school remains strong, this is increasingly not the case in the majority of academies. Increasingly as a union we are seeing schools convert with little opposition from within the school, whether because staff are scared or are unconvinced of the arguments. Clearly we should be continuing to organise wherever possible a fight against academy conversion amongst school staff, and convince members of the arguments against academies. However as academies pose a massive threat to the terms and conditions not only directly of our members in those schools but of the profession as a whole, we need to be prepared to do the hard task of organising in academies. Our union is not prepared for this task. Our structures have mirrored the structures of local authorities for a long time, rightly so as the local authority was the employer, largely terms were negotiated on a local authority level and this afforded us the opportunity to organise larger numbers of members. Even

discounting the freedom academies have to change policies and working conditions, all schools are now being given opportunity to change appraisal policies, pay and a myriad of other once national conditions. This is Gove's solution to the one problem he has faced with academies, the fact that many of them have not yet felt the need to or pressure to change conditions perceptively. Many of us are grappling with how to organise in local associations when we have a burgeoning number of employers, all of whom could potentially change conditions differently, and are. Many local associations are now dealing with 10 or 20 different appraisal policies across their schools since Gove gave schools unprecedented freedom on how to format their policies on 'managing performance'.

Motion 36 recognises the problem that academy clusters and chains pose in terms of organising members, and rightly proposes in point IV developing academy cluster and chain branches of members. Traditionally unions have organised their structures based on where the employer is, rightly so. If increasingly our employer is our school, not our LA, or the place where

policy affecting our jobs is decided is at a school level that points towards our union needing a level of organisation at a school level which it does not currently have. Rep density varies wildly from region to region. However even in regions where it is higher it is a poor measure of school level organisation. Whilst we have many brilliant reps and challenge reps to be active as part of their training, we have many reps who are merely a conduit for posters from the union to reach the noticeboard. More active reps are increasingly facing victimisation, not helped by the fact that the school rep structure usually means they are the sole figurehead of the union in the school. We must start, at least, to develop the idea of school based branches of the union. Especially in larger schools there is the potential to have a department based rep structure, with reps from each subject department or faculty meeting to help organise the membership. Clearly, for the mean time at least, this would not and should not replace the local association structure, but it would give our members a fighting chance at opposing changes to terms and conditions at the school level.

Workers' Liberty Exclusive: The Embargoed Strategy ... Read it here first!

March 2013



Dear colleague

NUT & [REDACTED]

- **First strike date set for** [REDACTED]
- **Rest of the country to strike** [REDACTED]
- **National strike before** [REDACTED]
- **Also plans for** [REDACTED]
- **Michael Gove can avoid strike if** [REDACTED]

As you know, the NUT and [REDACTED] to put together a joint programme of action that can defend teachers and the education system from the barrage of attacks we face on pay, pensions and working conditions.

As a result we have announced [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The actions we are planning can help turn the tide—but we are going to need your support to do so.

We hope you feel suitably inspired by these developments and very much hope that you will actively join the campaign.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Christie Blessie'. The signature is written in black ink on a white rectangular background. Below the signature is a horizontal line.

ASOS - What can be won

By Jean lane,

Tower Hamlets Unson (pc)

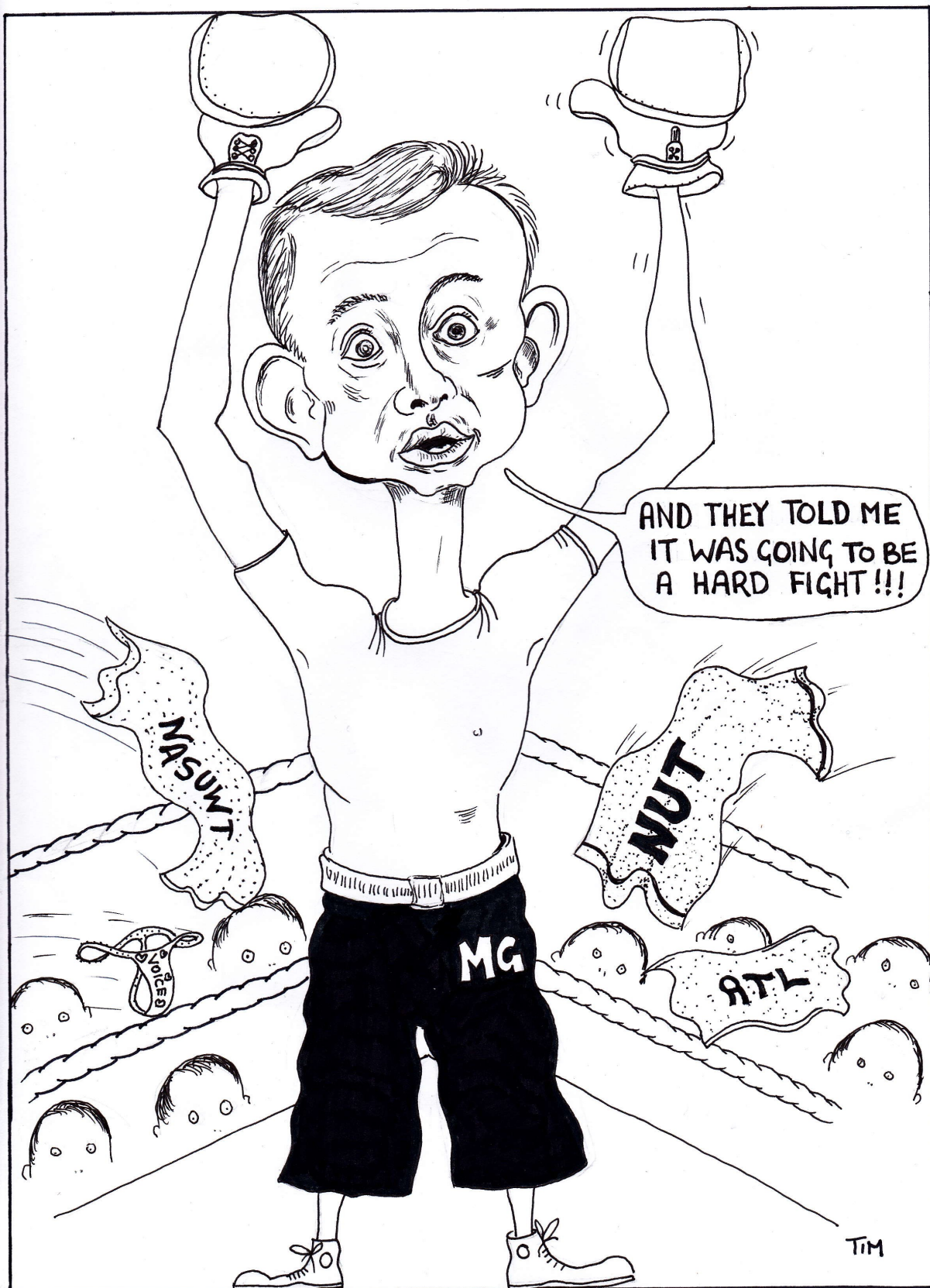
When the NUT decided that Action Short of Strike should take place around the country last October against increased workload, two schools in East London acted. Stratford Academy teachers refused to take part in excessive monitoring. As a result, headteacher, Andrew Seager, decided to dock their pay saying that teachers had affected the achievements of students and therefore should suffer an "appropriate pay reduction". The teachers stepped up their dispute to strike action and won their pay back. Since then talks have been taking place about the original dispute. Management were successfully forced to back down over the docking of teachers pay and on the imposition of excessive monitoring.

Similarly, teachers at Bishop Challoner School prevented a mock Ofsted taking place in their school by threatening strike action. This head teacher has responded by victimising the NUT rep. He was placed on an informal capability procedure and disciplined for telling teachers about union meetings during lesson time. Consequently, the NUT members held an indicative ballot for strike action. Despite this being held over half term, and with the rep off sick with stress, the members returned a massive 40 – 4 vote for strike action against the victimisation of their rep and the wider bullying that

is taking place within the school. This was on a two-thirds turnout. Teachers at Bishop are due to ballot proper next term, with the backing of East London Teachers Association, if the head does not back down.

Bullying of teachers is on the increase as Gove steps up the plan to privatise education and drive the unions out of schools.

Both schools show what needs to be done when management bully teachers. Step up the action! They also show that, when we do, we can win.



What kind of education do we want?

By Dan Higginbottom, Rotherham NUT(pc)

It's pretty much a given that any teacher you talk to is currently not happy with either the way in which we're required to teach or the content we're expected to teach. A barrage of contradictory and counter-productive policy is constantly fired at us, from interference with the curriculum content (rarely, if ever, properly consulting the teachers who have to deliver it) to a regime of constant testing which seems designed only to alienate a generation of learners and discourage any enthusiasm for education.

There are alternatives. There are better ways to teach.

Education is not about finding 'our place' in society. It is not a process of classification and compliance. Education should be there to illustrate not what we should be but what we **could** be, given the opportunity. It is the right of every child to have access to a well-funded, creative learning environment, embedded in the local community. School should be a challenge; not the empty challenge of struggling to achieve arbitrary grades on meaningless and ever changing scales, but the life-affirming challenge of expanding perspectives. We shouldn't teach lists of facts; we must teach interpretation, creativity, synthesis. If that means stepping away from an education that values compliance and obedience above all else, that's a risk we may have to take in order to teach something that really matters; freedom of thought.

Our current education system does not value learning for learning's sake. As teachers we are asked to show what students 'are meant to be learning' and how we know they have achieved this. As every human being will experience and interpret things in different ways – could someone explain to me how we can first tell them what to experience and then measure what they have experienced. Children in the UK are some of the earliest school starters in Europe, from this early age we attempt to box, direct and ultimately measure their thinking. In very few places in our curriculum do we have space for independent enquiry and creative thinking. Add to that deficit of freedom to think a healthy dose of curriculum content irrelevant or alien to working class children and a dollop of high pressure testing at an early age and you turn off from 'academic' education all but the most resilient. All the better for ensuring working class kids go down the narrow vocational route.

Increasingly, we see the withdrawal of funding and support for subjects viewed as 'unnecessary', presumably in the eyes of the employers and 'business leaders' who can be relied upon to spout predictable complaints about standards in schools every year or so. Yet it's noticeable that no-one seems have complaints about the output of private schools, where the pupils still have access to the full curriculum, 'unnecessary' subjects and all. Here's the core of the

matter; we call the system we work within 'education', not 'Training'. The only conclusion it seems possible to draw is that in some way, the 'average' working class child is more usefully employed developing office skills than experiencing a full spectrum of educational experience.

So we see only too clearly, the two-tier education system. Working class children are increasingly restricted when it comes to 'learning for learning's sake' – school is driven by employment statistics, by careers options, by an easily accountable end result. The battle for the C/D borderline pupils, for the 'four levels of progress', the appalling use of quotas of pupils 'allowed' to pass, all make it horribly obvious that that two-tier system is already here and the vast majority of us are teaching or learning on the lower level.

What can we do?

Just as the Union must work to defend the rights and security of teachers, so it must work to create something better for the pupils in our care. Every child has a right to true learning, to a genuine freedom of education, not the limiting and meaningless process of employment training. A well funded, democratically operated local school, a true comprehensive learning process that's open and accessible to all, and which builds on the long tradition of education as the means to working class freedom.

Lucy Meadows —Lessons must be learned

Gemma Short, Rotherham Academies action Officer (PC)

At conference this year many members will be remembering Lucy Meadows. A primary school teacher at a school in Lancashire, a well-liked teacher and a new activist to the NUT who was interested in getting involved with her union. However Lucy and her school have been subjected to hateful treatment by various sections of the press over the last few months, and unfortunately in March Lucy was found dead. Results of the post-mortem have not yet been released but it is believed that Lucy took her own life. Lucy was trans and had over Christmas taken the step, thankfully with the support of her school, of living as her chosen gender within her job. It would be

crass and disrespectful to link Lucy's apparently suicide solely to the press treatment of her. However the facts of the press treatment of Lucy are shameful, horrifying and wrong. The lead huntsman in the chase was Richard Littlejohn of the Daily Mail who wrote a comment piece entitled 'Not only is he in the wrong body, he is in the wrong job'. As a union we must send a clear message that teaching can be the right job for anyone regardless of their gender status. Littlejohn also tried to link Lucy's gender to issues of sex education and children, suggesting children were not ready to deal with issues of the 'birds and the bees'. Littlejohn neglects to understand that gender is separate from sex, and he patronises our children by suggesting that

they cannot understand a person's feelings and wishes. As a union many of our members will have faced similar arguments when being open as LGB in schools. Children are often more capable than most at being accepting and compassionate, without question, in such circumstances. They have usually not yet internalised the gay jokes and transphobia present in society, and we as teachers can do something to help them counter that as they grow up. It is the likes of Littlejohn and co that could potentially mean children do not accept or understand. At NUT conference, subject to the wishes of Lucy's family and colleagues, we will be remembering Lucy with a minutes silence. I hope we will also be remembering that trans issues form part of our union's work.

Animal Farm—A Prequel

By Andy Parsons

Academics have been left stunned and excited by the recent discovery of a long concealed draft of the opening paragraphs of a prequel to Orwell's 'Animal Farm'. The document, believed to date from around March 1942, was discovered between the pages of a battered, well thumbed early edition of Marx's 'Das Kapital' (chapter 25 on capitalistic accumulation), hidden behind a potted aspidistra in the attic of a worker's terraced house in Wigan. We, at the Daily Mail, are proud to be the first to publish this extraordinary literary find.

It had been another long, hard winter at Manor Farm; heavy snow, strong winds and bitterly cold temperatures were still making life unpleasant for the animals at the end of March. Farmer Jones was reluctant to leave the warmth of his cosy farmhouse to distribute even the meagre rations which were barely sufficient to stave off starvation, and the situation out in the farmyard and fields was growing increasingly desperate. One particularly miserable afternoon, as the animals huddled together in the dilapidated barn and bemoaned their parlous condition, a vain and hoary old goat named Jughashvili began to hold forth at great length about how much better things had been in his youth. As the other animals had heard Jughashvili's ramblings, in a similar vein, on many occasions they paid little attention to what he was saying. Unusually though, on this occasion, the old goat came up with a plan of action and proposed himself for the role of 'spokesgoat', with the task of achieving better rations and working conditions through negotiations with Farmer Jones. Following several hours of convoluted verbal peregrinations from Jughashvili most of the other animals had lost the will to live, but a group of sheep woke up at the point when he finally made his proposal and supported it without question.

That summer was long and hot, and the ensuing harvest was one of the most

plentiful the animals of Manor Farm had seen in many years. Farmer Jones was able to spend the profits of their labours on luxuries previously unheard of at Manor Farm, not least on case after case of fine wines, ales and spirits. All of which made Jughashvili the goat's task of negotiation much easier as the permanently inebriated farmer agreed to increase the animal's rations and improve their living and working conditions forthwith.

This happy situation persisted through a winter which was less harsh than the previous one so that when Farmer Jones announced, in one of his rare moments of relative sobriety, that he had run up huge debts and that he could no longer afford to keep his animals in the style to which they had become accustomed, the animals believed that they had accumulated sufficient resources to see them through to the summer and the next harvest. But the next day Lachrymae, the farm cat, who had taken to sharing Jughashvili's new stall in a specially built lean-to adjoining the farmhouse, visited each group of animals with a message from her patron. Seemingly on the verge of tears, she informed them that their hard earned supplies of food and bedding had run-down to the point where rations would have to be reduced the levels of a year ago, and they would have to work even harder through the coming summer.



The rest of the animals would have resigned themselves to making the best of a bad situation were it not for the intervention of a young rat by the name of Whistler. Whistler, like all rats, had the freedom to roam anywhere in the farm and had observed that Jughashvili and Lachrymae were salting away more than they could possibly need in the way of food and bedding behind a false wall at the rear of their stall. Late the next morning he took advantage of one of Farmer Jones' more lucid moments to inform him of what had been going on behind his back.

A week later, when the fuddled farmer stumbled over young Whistler while attempting to negotiate the farmyard he informed the rat that Jughashvili's actions had been quite legitimate; the old goat had explained that the other animals agreed to him taking a greater share, and some of the sheep had corroborated his version of events.

Whistler was not deterred by this turn of events. Instead he gathered together as many of the other animals as would believe his story and led them to the stall where goat and cat were enjoying the fruits of their deception. And as the animals pushed their way into the stall, hardly able to believe the sight which greeted them, they could hear Farmer Jones out in the yard bolting the stable door

How Chicago Teachers won

Tina Beacock is a socialist long active in Chicago, and now a retired member of the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU). She spoke to *Solidarity* about the recent Chicago teachers' dispute.

Chicago teachers struck between 10 and 18 September. The union reports that the strike won wage rises, and in addition: "This fight produced many wins - from the right to appeal a rating, to language that gives teachers control over our own lesson plan format. Equally important, we stopped many harmful 'reforms'.

"The district was forced to give up on merit pay, made to abandon a 7 hour 40 minute teacher day, and gave ground on test-based evaluation". Chicago's Mayor Rahm Emanuel (who was previously Barack Obama's chief of staff) made a concession in his plan for a longer school day, which originally would have meant teachers working 20% extra time with no increase in pay. Now, the agreement requires that laid-off teachers will be re-hired to cover the extra time.

"When CORE was elected to office in 2010", Tina said, "it inherited a top-heavy organisation. From being a small activist group of teachers and allies which could call marches of hundreds, it was now faced with running the largest union local in the state - some 26,000 members".

CORE, a rank and file caucus within the CTU formed in 2008, had won control of the union, but as a result many of its leading activists had become full-time union elected officers and staff.

Like many other US unions, the CTU has a higher ratio of full-time officials to members than unions in other countries: about 50 full-time staff for a membership of 26,000 teachers and support staff, serving 400,000 students. Most support staff are in the CTU, but some are in other unions, such as the SEIU, which had settled before the CTU struck. [In England, the NUT has about 240 full-time staff, and 120 members on full facility time, for 325,000 members]. "Decisions in the union are made by monthly meetings of delegates from the

600 schools in the system.

"Unlike previous CTU caucuses, the CORE leadership pulled in people from other caucuses into campaigns, committee leaderships and union staff jobs. They ran workshops on how to organise a contract campaign. They used PD [teachers' training courses] to invite speakers like Diane Ravitch, a critic of high-stakes testing.

"The CTU leadership carried out a plan to educate and mobilise the ranks of the union. It made sure that every school had union delegates, and they also organised mobilisation committees in every school in addition to the delegates.

"To do this, they set up an organizing department, to involve the broadest number of members. They organised actions with community organisations, other unions, and Occupy Chicago against TIFs (tax give-aways to corporations by the city).

"They used a more democratic kind of organising. They used tools from the Labor Notes toolbox, launching a contract campaign which included tactics like red T-shirt days".

[Labor Notes is a cross-union rank-and-file newsletter published in the USA, which also organises conferences and publishes pamphlets. It has long been supported by the socialist group Solidarity].

In the face of anti-union laws requiring a vote of 75% of all members to be able to strike, and 90-day waiting periods, the CTU called a strike authorisation vote in May - and got a resounding 98% yes (90% of eligible voters).

A May 23 rally and march, a week after NATO demonstrations in the city, mobilized over 6,000, almost one union member in four. Mayor Rahm Emanuel, formerly Barack Obama's chief of staff, was stunned. When a mediator came back with recommendations the teachers get a 15% raise, he ignored the mediator.

"During the strike, there were bulletins and rallies every day. This level of mobilisation had a major impact, raising morale and getting people to work with each other.

"Students mobilised in support of the teachers at the Board of Education, and there were students and parents on all the picket lines. There was visible support for the CTU everywhere in the city. CTU members initiated actions, like picketing aldermen who'd opposed the strike; hundreds of members converged on the Hyde Park site where Penny Pritzker's Hyatt just took a giant TIF grant and robbed our schools of millions of dollars.

"The strike bulletins documented the flowering of solidarity all over the city; a google-map on the union's website showed the national and international support. Travelling around the city in CTU red, you were saluted as part of a popular army.

"For members, the union has become something they do, not someone they call.

"School restructuring, privatisation, and closures are one of the big issues behind the dispute. In the name of 'reform', Chicago has been leading the national attack on teachers and public education since the 1995 law which curtailed basic union rights and handed Mayor Daley control to appoint the School Board.

"One part of this pincer movement was the federal No Child Left Behind law, passed in 2002, which mandated that schools and whole cities lose funding if they did not turn around schools, and reach the goal that all students in each school would test at or above average. [Democrats and Republicans cosponsoring this law were not tested on their knowledge of the word 'average'.]

"The new law passed under Obama's aegis, Race to the Top, is if anything worse - it compels states to compete for federal funds, based on how thoroughly they implement various measures including 'teacher accountability', paving the way for merit pay. The introduction of standardised testing of students, like statistical control in manufacturing, gives a criterion for whom to fire.

The Chicago Board of Education has been closing schools for low test scores longer than in other cities, and Chicago

has more charter schools [like Michael Gove's free schools] than any other city except New Orleans [where after Hurricane Katrina, teachers at 75% of the city's schools were terminated, and now the majority of students are in charter schools].

"This has resulted in the shrinking of union membership from 35,000 in 2002 to 26,000 today. Schools can vary in size up to 4200 at Lane Tech, but most are smaller, with an average of 1500 students in high schools and 200-500 in elementary schools. Now schools are getting smaller partly because of the insane testing.

"If you don't pass the tests in 8th grade [age 13-14], you just don't get to high school. Every school has an incentive to reject students, in order to keep up its test averages and avoid turnaround. Now you have student push-outs, not drop-outs.

"Since 2002 the city has been closing down schools for bad performance, firing all the staff, making them re-apply for their jobs.

"After I was terminated when the city closed the school I was working at, I had two and a half years working as a substitute teacher. I was never placed in a new regular job. That's not atypical for many veteran teachers.

"The racist character of this assault is clear, too. As schools with low scores, schools where it is most challenging to teach, have been closed and teachers dismissed, the number of Black teachers has declined from 45% of the workforce in the 90s to 19% today. This occurs in a system where 92% of the students are children of colour. Some displaced teachers became CORE activists".

The previous time the old guard leadership of the Chicago Teachers' Union was

ousted by a militant opposition didn't turn out so well. That was PACT, a militant reform movement but not a class-conscious one. It campaigned for union democracy – and to be equal partners in reform, not its target.

"Debbie Lynch of PACT won the union presidency in 2001, partly because PACT organised against the 1995 Amendatory Act, which prohibited negotiating over everything from class size to teacher discipline, and eliminated seniority. In 2002 the Board of Education led by CEO Arne Duncan started closing schools for bad performance, not just for falling rolls. Debbie Lynch negotiated a bad contract in 2003. She agreed to classic black-box bargaining – don't tell the members anything - and accepted the lie that parents and the public couldn't be won to support the teachers. The old guard regained control of the CTU in 2004".

But CORE had a different approach.

"CORE organised lots of demonstrations against school closures - demonstrations of maybe 500 or 1000 people. Its meetings drew in community members and union activists interested in schools as well as teachers, creating some interesting combinations.

"CORE was started by Jackson Potter, who lost his job when his school was closed. When he and Al Ramirez made a video about school closings, they reached out to other class-conscious activists in the CTU and started organising against school closures. This group included newer teachers who'd been hired to give their all to teaching, quickly disillusioned by their treatment at the hands of Chicago Public Schools [CPS], as well as more senior teachers, some with experience in PACT.

"CORE includes activists with a class-struggle perspective. The CTU's actions

have been energetically backed by supporters of the socialist group Solidarity, and of the ISO [International Socialist Organization, a group previously linked to the SWP in Britain but excluded by the SWP from its international network in 2001].

"You have to do thirty-four and a half years as a teacher to get a full pension, but half of starting teachers quit after five years in the classroom. Teaching can be wonderfully rewarding - and, without the necessary support, incredibly stressful. It's telling that one significant gain of this strike was, a provision to stop bullying – of teachers by administrators.

"The CTU victory will have a far-ranging effect, first of all by throwing a wrench into the wheels of the bipartisan neoliberal educational "reform" agenda. Both Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan were quick to voice support to Emanuel against the greedy teachers' strike.

"Rahm Emanuel's attack on teachers, and the appearance of union-busting Michelle Rhee at the Charlotte Democratic convention, could not make clearer the bipartisan nature of these attacks. While a majority of teachers in Chicago, as elsewhere, are politically mostly Democrats, the clash with Rahm Emanuel has produced some rethinking about labour's political choices.

"At the Saturday rally, the chant "Karen for Mayor" was heard [Karen Lewis is the president of the CTU]. And others carried signs that said, Democratic Party, where are you? and Obama, where are you? Statements from the White House affirmed that Obama was neutral on this strike in his home town. "

The strike by itself did not resolve all the issues it raised. First and foremost, the Mayor and CPS CEO Jean-Paul Brizard have continued to declare their intentions to close 100 schools this year. Demands for smaller class-sizes, social services and other supports in the schools, and art, music, and libraries for all, have raised hopes without yet winning concessions.

"Still, the CTU made a dramatic change in the balance of forces in this city - through mobilisation and education. People have been comparing the Chicago struggle with Wisconsin [where a Republican governor slashing union bargaining rights for state workers led to months-long massive protests]. The difference is that in Chicago we haven't been defeated. This might be the struggle that begins to turn the tide, that sets the stage for a new momentum of struggle".



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The long and the short of ASOS

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**By Liam Conway, Joint Division
Secretary, Notts NUT (pc)**

The Action Short of Strike Action (ASOS) has certainly generated some battles at school level, especially in schools where union membership is significant, there are good reps and management hasn't listened to reason. In other places where management is relatively benign conflict has been avoided and most of the demands in the phased action accepted. One of the most positive aspects of the ASOS is the role it has played in recruiting school reps. In one school in Notts management announced at a staff briefing that they would not be following the NUT/NASUWT action guidelines because there were no reps in the school. Within a day there was an NASUWT rep and two NUT reps. The joint NUT reps are now active at local association and division level, one taking up the post of President of Central Notts NUT.

On a wider level the action reveals how important it is for the Union to be organised from the ground up. If we are not effectively organised and combative in the workplace it will be hard for the Union to be combative across a division or at a regional and national level. Recruiting reps and establishing a culture of union power and influence in every workplace has to be a prime objective of the Union at national and local level. This is not an argument for fighting every battle school by school but ensuring that the union is organised in a way that can deliver effective and decisive action in all

circumstances, including national action, for example to defeat Gove's pay and pension proposals.

However, there is a weakness in the ASOS approach that was also clearly exposed in our anti-academies campaigning and action. The obvious first problem is that for every school where we have gained successes there are many others where at best we are unsure how effective the campaign is and at worst members are isolated and lack the confidence to win the concessions in the joint guidelines. It hasn't helped in some instances when the NASUWT have been saying that they are not joint guidelines and refusing to hold joint meetings with the NUT at school level.

The anti-academies campaign of the Union has seen some tremendous local action across the country with one or two notable successes where academy conversion has actually been stopped. In other cases we have organised significant strike action and revitalised membership in schools. However, many of those strike campaigns have ultimately been defeated and the academy conversion implemented. More worryingly still is the huge number of schools that have converted to academy in the tide of conversions following the 2010 General Election. On the academies front, at secondary level at least, with notable exceptions like the City of Leicester, the Union's fire-fighting approach has failed to stop the avalanche of academies in recent years.

In secondary schools the focus is now on building the union in each academy, finding active reps and ensuring the school signs up to local agreements, including facilities agreements. Without a fight for comprehensive education and national and local authority level the anti-academies campaign almost had defeat built into it. The same can be said of the ASOS approach. Many times at NUT conference we have discussed the need for a national contract for teachers, sometimes identified as a charter for teachers, with limits on working hours, meetings etc etc. Now the Government is preparing to smash up the fig leaf of a national contract we have in the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document. Evidence from the FE sector clearly shows that without a national contract conditions can rapidly worsen at workplace level. Without a serious national fight for nationally agreed conditions of service, like in the academies campaign, it will become increasingly difficult to defend the line at local level.

Nevertheless, given the absence of such a campaign, it is vitally important to use what levers we can to make gains in both union organisation and conditions of service in every workplace where such gains can be won and to look to improve our organisation and combativity in workplaces where the Union is currently weak.



Fringe Meeting

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Speaker

Kevin Bennett—Warrington labour councillor against cuts

Liam Conway—Workers Liberty Teachers

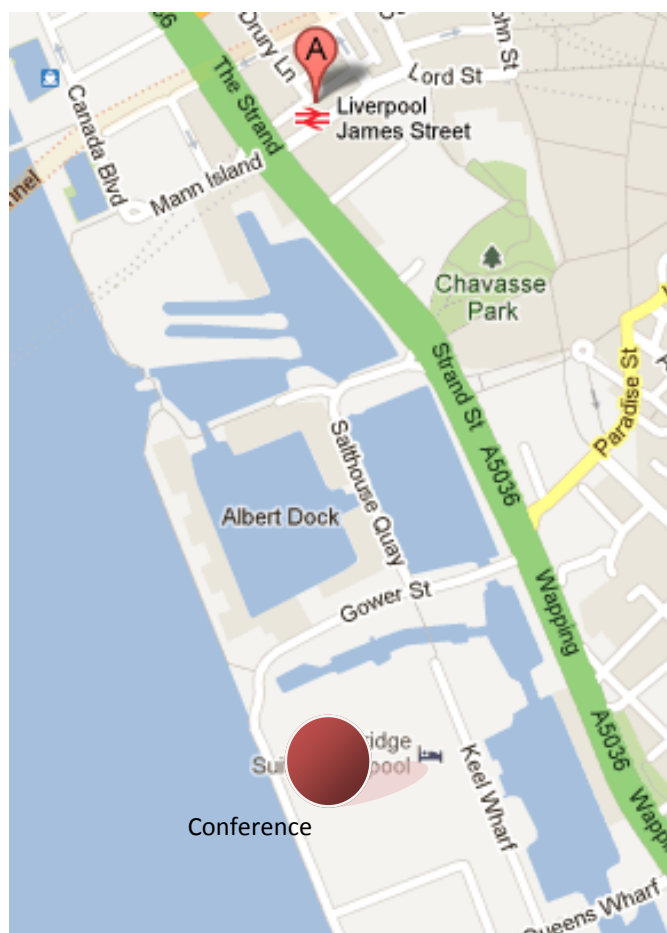
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