

October 2013



School Worker

Teachers' strike bulletin

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Build in workplaces!



On 1 October, members of teaching unions NUT and NASUWT strike for one day in about one third of the country – including Yorkshire, the Midlands, and the Eastern region of England.

This follows a one-day regional strike in the North West on 27 June. The plan is for the two unions to hold a third regional strike in London and the south on 17 October, followed by a national strike before the end of the Autumn term. At that point all members in England will have taken two days of strike action though there will have been four days of action. Beyond November it isn't at all clear what the plan is.

The action aims to stop government attacks on teachers conditions, including the worsening of pension rights, the substantial deregulation of national pay, and the plans announced by Michael Gove to lift all limits to the working day and the school year. The demand of the strikes and the action short of strike action that runs in parallel with it is that Gove agree to open serious talks with the two unions and, crucially, suspends each of these changes pending the conclusion of these talks. There is not the slightest hint of movement from him despite the 27 June action and the looming strikes across the country. On the contrary,

he has announced further attacks on our conditions since the action plan was announced.

The North West strike in June was well supported and it seems likely the same will be true of October's strikes. It is undoubtedly a positive thing that many hundreds of thousands of teachers will be taking a public stand against measures which not only attack their conditions and rights in the most basic way but are designed to make schools cheaper places to run for future privateers. Already around half of all those who enter teacher-training courses are not working in a classroom five years later. By far the biggest reason given by those who leave is unacceptable workload. A demoralised, exhausted teaching force who we struggle to keep in the job is bad most of all for children and parents. Fed up teachers can leave the job; for the children, the school remains.

The high stakes in this dispute are hardly reflected, however, in the seriousness and coherence of the union leaderships' campaign.

The last national pension action took place nearly two years ago in November 2011.

(Continued over)

Workers' Liberty is a revolutionary socialist organisation active in the British labour and student movements, fighting for a working-class, socialist alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership, radical democracy, and workers' control. Our members who are teachers are active in the Local Associations Network National Action Campaign (LANAC), building grassroots organisation in schools around the country. For more information, see our website – www.workersliberty.org – or email awl@workersliberty.org

Gove announced his attack on pay in the summer of 2012 and yet there was no strike at all until a year later, and even then it was a regional rather than national strike and was, predictably, given no national media coverage. The date for the promised national strike has very pointedly not been named by the two unions and there are very real and understandable fears that it will either be pushed into January or won't take place at all.

Wales was to be called out on the October strikes too but members there have been stood down on the basis of talks and some unspecified (but almost certainly very minor) concessions on workload promised by the Welsh education minister. Given that two of the crucial concerns of the dispute are paying more to work longer for a worse pension and the end of national pay, this suspension makes no sense at all. The Welsh government has no power whatever to affect the pay and pension proposals.

JOINT ACTION

One of the dispute's main strengths is also the source of its weakness.

NUT, the biggest teachers' union, reached an agreement with NASUWT, the second biggest, last year which promised more effective non-strike and strike action on all these fronts. The idea of such an alliance is a no-brainer in most schools. Together the two unions represent 85-90% of teachers and have the power to close most schools. The members of each are more likely to come out if they are doing so jointly with members of the other.

NASUWT is, however, one of the most tightly-controlled unions in Britain with no tradition whatever of dissent or independent rank-and-file organisation. The result is that campaigns and disputes are run entirely at the whim of its General Secretary, Chris Keates. If you want joint action with NASUWT you either organise it the way she wants or, as has been done in the past, you organise it alone and gamble on it being sufficiently popular to force her and NASUWT to join in.

UNWILLINGNESS

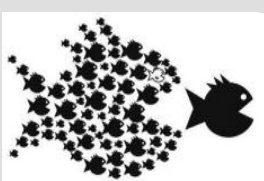
The inaction between 2011 and 2013 was down to an unwillingness by the NUT leadership, including most of the left, to contemplate action without NASUWT.

The slow pace of action since then reflects the ability of the NASUWT to shape the strategy of the NUT. They are able to do this because of the caution, timidity and lack of boldness of the "left-led" NUT.

There is nothing wrong with trying to get the maximum forces on board for a strike, but all the indications over the last two years are that the minor business of developing a plan that has some faint hope of actually winning has simply fallen by the wayside. If this campaign can be rescued, it will be through a substantial escalation of the current action, the growth of stronger organisation at school level, and the active building of serious action on workload action in schools and local branches.

There is no getting away from the need to build effective unity between the two biggest teacher unions but the way to do that without undermining our ability to fight now is to build joint action committees at school level, challenge management on the immediate issues that affect members and involve support staff workers as well. The joint action campaign may well not beat back Michael Gove but it is a priceless opportunity to build more effective workplace organisation and unity.

We should mobilise energetically for the strikes, continue to look for a way to turn them into a strategy that can win and build in the workplace to make sure we are stronger, more united and less dependent on the union tops next time.



**Local Associations
National
Action Campaign**

ORGANIZE!

LANAC was founded at a meeting of over 100 delegates in Liverpool in June 2012. It aims to provide a framework for NUT Associations to organise together to build workplace strength, maximise and spread effective strike action, and offer an alternative strategy to the union leadership. For more information, including on how to get involved and affiliate your Association, visit www.nutlan.org.uk