**Make 15 Dec a solidarity day**

**Universities to strike again in Feb**

Thursday 24 and Friday 25 November saw a national strike by University and College Union (UCU) members in Higher Education. A third day of strike is set for 30 November, with a national demonstration in London which will march to the office of the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), the employers’ representative in pay talks.

UCU is demanding “a meaningful pay rise to deal with the cost-of-living crisis as well as action to end the use of insecure contracts and deal with dangerously high workloads”. Many branches are also in dispute over cuts by employers to the USS pension scheme.

UCU says: “The UK university sector generated record income of £41.1bn last year with the 150 vice-chancellors facing action collectively earning an estimated £45 million…the sector can more than afford to meet staff demands.”

While that is true, some institutions are struggling financially in the competitive world of HE. The industrial fight for better pay must go alongside a political campaign for the marketisation of the sector to be reversed and for it to be generously funded as a public service, benefiting staff, students, and the wider community.

At 19 institutions the UCU branches were joined by their local Unison HE branch striking against the same 3% pay rise for 2022-23 that has been imposed on UCU.

A further 40 Unison HE branches will soon begin balloting to join the pay dispute, with the result due in early January. Without a substantially better offer on pay and pensions for 22/23 and 23/24 it is likely that the next steps will be more national strike action in February by UCU and by those Unison branches with a mandate. UCU also has a campaign of Action Short of Strike.

The rest of the labour movement and students should build support for the HE strikers, and UCU and Unison activists should cooperate together with the aim of shutting down campuses on strike days. Activists also need to discuss what strategy can win – that is likely to require escalating the action.

Meanwhile, at Birkbeck in London the UCU, Unite and Unison branches are now formally in dispute with the employer over failure to agree to rule out no compulsory redundancies in a cost-cutting exercise necessitated by recent poor management decisions.

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**Strike committees**

On 15 Dec, local union branches and Trades Councils should organise joint strike rallies in towns and cities. The organisation of rallies will be easier where steps have already been taken to establish ad hoc, cross-union strike committees, linked to local Trades Councils. Where such steps have not been taken, organising towards joint activities on dates like 15 December which see multiple strikes can help jumpstart that process.

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**Nurses will strike 15 and 20 Dec**

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is calling strikes on 15 and 20 December. The RCN is bringing out only a portion of the Trusts that passed the turnout thresholds in their ballot. It is setting up a Strike Committee for every Trust which will decide on emergency cover.

Unison, a bigger NHS union, ended its pay-action ballot for NHS staff on 25 Nov, but we don’t know the results yet. Action ballots for GMB ambulance workers in 11 Trusts close on 29 Nov, and for Unite ambulance workers 30 Nov. Unite is currently balloting a “second wave” of NHS workers, with results due late December, and says it will ballot further “waves”.

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NHS workers, feeling a duty for emergency cover, need solidarity even more than other workers. In the 1970s and 80s other workers struck to support health workers’ battles. Current Tory anti-union laws make that unlawful. But determined action can defy those laws, and has done; and there is no legal problem with “de facto” solidarity, calling strikes in other disputes to coincide with health workers’ action and organising joint demonstrations. And we should push Labour to take up its conference policy to scrap all those Tory laws.

There is talk of a “de facto” one-day general strike – simultaneous action by many groups of workers – on 1 February.

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At 19 institutions the UCU branches were joined by their local Unison HE branch striking against the same 3% pay rise for 2022-23 that has been imposed on UCU.
Royal Mail postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) struck again on 24 and 25 November, with further strikes planned on 30 November and 1, 9 and 11 December. Despite some frustration with perceived recent missteps by the union, that led to a series of previously planned strikes being called off, the action has remained solid and impactful, and the dates called in December represent an attempt to use postal workers’ industrial leverage at a crucial time of the year. Royal Mail attempted to use private couriers from the Ryde app to help break the strong, but a number of Ryde couriers refused to cross CWU picket lines.

The CWU’s fight consists of two disputes being fought in parallel, one over pay, and another over terms and conditions. The union ran two separate ballots. Royal Mail are determined to link any pay rise to acceptance of changes to terms and conditions, which include massive job cuts and a move towards what the union has called a “gig economy” model, which Royal Mail believes is necessary to compete with app-based courier companies. Many postal workers say the fight over terms and conditions is of greater immediate significance than the fight over pay.

Stop the cuts! Kick the Tories out!

The Tories are making new cuts and promise recession in 2023. If we step up the strikes and other struggles towards winning victories and making Britain “ungovernable” for the Tories, we can tip them into an election as in 1974. But the Truss fiasco has paradoxically increased the pressure on the Labour leaders to stick even closer to neoliberal rules to “reasure the markets” (i.e. the big capitalist operators in the bond markets spoooked by Truss’s experiments).

Industrial battles must be combined with an effort to mobilise the unions and the Labour rank-and-file to turn round Labour politically, towards taxing the rich, public ownership of the whole energy sector and of high finance, and restoration of the NHS.

Without that we are preparing the way for worse in future, as the failures of the 1974-9 Labour government prepared the way for Thatcher.

Strikes

Since 20 Oct: Quorn factory workers in Billingharn (Unite) on indefinite strike
Since 14 Nov: Workers at Jacob’s Bakery factory in Aintree (GMB) on indefinite strike
Various dates in Nov: Non-academic higher education workers at 19 universities (Unison) strike
30 Nov-1 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike
30 Nov-1 Dec: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike
Various dates in Dec, tbc: Civil servants in the Home Office, Department for Transport and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (PCS) strike
1-3 Dec: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south/west London and Metroline garages (Unite) strike
2-5 Dec: Workers in HM Courts and Tribunal Service (PCS) strike
5-18 Dec: Workers at housing charity Shelter (Unite) strike
8-9 Dec: Bus drivers at Metroline garages in London (Unite) strike
9 and 11 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike
9-10 Dec: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south/west London (Unite) strike
13-15 Dec: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike
13-14 Dec: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike
14-15 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike
15 Dec: Nurses (RCN) strike
15-16 Dec: Bus drivers at Metroline garages in London (Unite) strike
16-17 Dec: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south/west London (Unite) strike
16-17 Dec: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike
16-18 Dec: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike
20 Dec: Nurses (RCN) strike
23-24 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike
3-4 Jan: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike
3-5 Jan: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike
6-7 Jan: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike
6-8 Jan: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike
11-12 Jan, 15-16 Feb: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

Firefighters ballot

Firefighters in the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) voted to reject their employer’s 5% pay offer by a 78% majority, on a 78% turnout. The FBU has now announced a 5 Dec – 23 Jan ballot for industrial action.

Ballots

Until 29 Nov: Ambulance workers across 11 trusts in England and Wales (GMB) ballot for action over pay
Until 8 Dec: London Underground workers (RMT) re-ballet in their dispute over jobs, pensions, and conditions
5 Dec-23 Jan: Firefighters (FBU) ballot for action over pay
Until 9 Jan: Teachers (NASUWT) ballot for action over pay
From 9 Jan: Junior doctors (BMA) ballot for action over pay
Until 13 Jan: Teachers and school support staff (NEU) ballot

About AWL

We are a socialist group active in the labour movement and in campaigns in Britain, fighting for a revolutionary alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership and workers’ democracy.

To find out more about our ideas and activity visit workersliberty.org, email awl@workersliberty.org, or phone 020 7394 8923.