



UCU Strike Bulletin

Produced by members of Workers' Liberty active in the University and College Union

workersliberty.org // awl@workersliberty.org // [@workersliberty.org](https://twitter.com/workersliberty.org)

The longer the picket line, the shorter the strike



An old labour movement saying goes, "the longer the picket line, the shorter the strike."

In other words, the more effective and impactful your action, and the more workers who are actively involved, the shorter any strike is likely to be, as your boss will back down more quickly.

That's the spirit with which we should approach our next round of strikes, beginning on 20 February. Picketing should be an empowering, and enjoyable, process, and picket lines should aim to actively convince anyone trying to cross them to change their mind. A strike is not just a "protest", it's not merely a symbolic action intended to express our displeasure at something our employer is doing (or not doing!). It's a necessarily disruptive act, leveraging our power as workers over the production process to achieve our demands.

Striking is often a sacrifice, and local branches and the national union must ensure accessible hardship funds are available to guarantee that no-one, especially lower-paid workers, are forced to choose between their principles and putting food on the table.

Acknowledging that striking can be a sacrifice, however, is one thing; penning anonymous articles in the national press to bemoan the fact that, unfortunately, and of course with a terribly heavy heart you understand, you won't be able to participate in the strike; and does it have to be *quite* so long; and do we *really* need to be on strike at all, when it comes down to it? Such people also always seem to want a free pass, and demand that no-one makes them feel in the least

bit guilty or ashamed, or holds them to account for this attitude.

Scabs should be held to account. Actively choosing to work through a strike, undermining your colleagues, and weakening a dispute organised to improve your terms and conditions should indeed be a source of shame.

We're not striking for the sake of it; we're striking to win concrete concessions from our employers. The sooner we win those, the sooner the dispute will end. So anyone who wants to see it end sooner rather than later would do better to join their nearest picket line rather than walking across it.

There has been a debate more widely amongst the union membership about whether our two separate disputes, the USS pensions dispute and the wider dispute over pay and conditions, should be de-coupled, with proponents offering little more than technocratic reasons (e.g. the disputes may end at different times, or that they're being negotiated between different bodies).

None of these should convince us though, given what these strikes are about more fundamentally – an attack on the basic rights of workers in universities, a drive to marketise and privatise the higher education sector.

Without a long-term stable pension, university workers are being forced out of the sector through fear of poverty in retirement – and without a decent wage or a stable contract, there is little more convincing them to stay. Higher Education institutions have been using both of these battering rams to smash working conditions for decades; ignoring how these are rooted in the same attack would break the solidarity built between those involved in these struggles which have so far been taken together.

Basic class solidarity means it is our duty to fight the oppressive structures – that embed gender pay gaps, strip us of our pensions, and force us to work longer, with less, for less – all with equal force.

SEE THE "FOUR FIGHTS" THROUGH

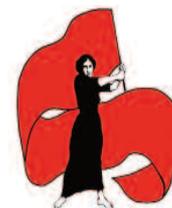
There is a concerted effort by some on the right wing of the union to undermine the "Four Fights" (pay and conditions) dispute in particular, claiming it doesn't have clear objectives and asking what would be an acceptable deal.

This is extremely disingenuous because they know full well that in the past UCU has negotiated national framework agreements, e.g. on a single national pay spine in the early 2000s, and this is what the union is aiming for now. So far the employers have offered only "guidance" and a much-mocked "resource pack" which goes nowhere near addressing the substantive issues around casualisation, workload and equality. They have also made no improved offer on pay. Sticking with the strikes gives us the best chance yet to get employers signed up to a real commitment rather than recommendations they can wriggle out of. We know that some VCs are admitting to staff that the widespread use of fixed-term contracts could be reduced by creating pools of permanent researchers who rotate between projects.

They need to start acting on that.

About Workers' Liberty

This bulletin is produced by members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty active in the UCU. We are a socialist group active in the labour and student movements 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 our website at workersliberty.org, or email awl@workersliberty.org

Link up with the climate strikes!

February 14th saw the latest national youth climate strikes by the UK Student Climate Network (UKSCN). These have been happening in cities across the world for over a year. Even where the numbers involved have fluctuated, the consistency with which the walkouts have happened should give us hope; school students aren't taking climate change activism lightly.

The actions that took place this month were varied; from stalls petitioning for action on climate change, through to bolder events such as marches and sit-ins. In London the monthly large-scale marches have brought tens of thousands onto the streets, demanding real solutions to problems posed by climate change; a radical green new deal, the abolition of all anti-union laws, and – framed as the core demand in February's strike – open-borders, and an end to deportations that only this month saw 17 Jamaicans forcibly kicked out of the UK: <https://bit.ly/39E6xsk>.

These anti-racist, internationalist positions naturally flow from the fight against climate

change. Globally millions of people have already been displaced from their homes due to famine, drought, desertification, and rising sea-levels; with the ever-worsening state of the environment, the numbers of those affected is only set to increase. By 2050, some predictions suggest there could one be over 1 billion climate refugees.

This raises two crucial demands of the trade union movement: that we continue and extend our fight to reverse the damage caused to global climates, and that we urgently guarantee climate refugees with safety and security. In humane practical terms, this means opening borders and providing safe, legal routes for climate refugees to escape this barbarity. These arguments have been laid out in more depth by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement: <https://bit.ly/2tYn18O>.

That the UKSCN activists have taken on internationalist demands is hugely encouraging; their struggle is opening-up political horizons, despite a horrendous loss for the left in the general election.

The next school climate strikes will take

place on Friday 13 March which coincides with one of our scheduled strike dates. UCU and UKSCN activists should start planning now to make March even bigger than September, and discuss how we can link these movements into a mass fight-back for the future of higher-education, inevitably tied into the future of our planet.

Class Struggle Environmentalism

A day school for socialists, labour movement activists, and climate activists, including workshops on:



Marxist ecology for beginners - Building local, changing the global - How do we fight the fossil fuel industry? - Climate struggles in Australia - Debate: should we phase out all animal products?

10:30-17:30, Saturday 14 March, Park View School, West Green Road, London N15 3QR
More: bit.ly/14-3-20

The Story of Solidarność

In 1980-1, a mass workers' movement, 10 million strong, developed in Poland, then under the totalitarian rule of a Stalinist bureaucracy.

It developed tactics we can still learn from today, including a practise of broadcasting negotiations between union officials and employers live to occupied shipyards, to ensure maximum transparency and democratic accountability of members over the union. This new book tells the inspiring story of those workers and the movement they built.

Buy copies online at workersliberty.org/solidarnosc



IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2020: Remaking the labour movement

An annual festival of socialist debate, discussion, and education

18-21 June, central London

For more info, and to buy tickets, visit workersliberty.org/ideas

Workers and students unite

By a Student Left Network activist

Last term, after joining staff on picket lines and demos, occupying our universities and blockading management offices, students supporting the strike got together at the Student Left Network's national meeting in Sheffield.

We decided to launch Student Strike Solidarity to escalate and spread support for this term's strike and its demands, on our campuses and nationally. We now have social media, a website, model leaflets, and a WhatsApp group for discussion. We have regular online meetings and plan another national meet up soon.

In the run up to the strikes we have been calling for students to take action on Wednesdays to build student support for the strikes. During the strikes we will be supporting picket lines and organising occupations, blockades and other direct action against university management in support of the demands. We will also be demanding no victimisation or intimidation from management of striking staff or of students protesting in support of the strikes. This will include campaigning for senior management to cancel student attendance monitoring for all lectures on strike days to prevent international students' visa precarity being weaponised against the strike.

Student Strike Solidarity will also push for more action from NUS. Reforms passed at last year's conference has made the



organisation even less democratic and political and even more bureaucratised. This year, students won't even have the opportunity to vote on motions at all. NUS should link up student unions into a national campaign against marketisation and the current wave of cuts and for a free, public, fully-funded education system.

Get in touch with Student Strike Solidarity at solidaritystudent@gmail.com or via [facebook.com/StudentStrikeSolidarity](https://www.facebook.com/StudentStrikeSolidarity)

• www.studentstrikesolidarity

UCU NEC ELECTIONS



In the ongoing UCU NEC elections, Workers' Liberty members active in UCU recommend votes for RHIAN KEYSE (Women Members) and MIKE FINN (UK HE).

Both were central to the protests over democracy at last year's UCU Congress, and are solid independent left voices with a genuine commitment to rank-and-file activism.