

25/11/2022

The University Worker

A rank-and-file
strike bulletin

Open rank and file meeting: Monday 28th @ 7pm

Yesterday our strikes were well attended, and energy for action is clearly high, particularly in workplaces that are coming out for the first time in a while. We need to ask how this current leverage from the aggregated ballot is being used though? What do members want to do with this exceptional effective power they currently hold? What are our top end demands regarding the four fights and pensions? Members need to know what negotiators should be pushing for before those terms are set from above.

We're in the midst of a wave of sectoral industrial actions, a lot of the demands of this dispute are bypassing local and national employers, and instead being posed directly to the state. We are veering towards a political dispute over the soul of our public education system. How are we as education workers using the cumulative class power of this industrial leverage to make political demands over the current state of education? How are education workers using this class leverage to make political demands for our class? With UNISON and Unite branches out, with the NEU's live ballot, now is the time for bold action.

There has been much talk of escalation, but we need to make it a reality. If we are serious about winning this dispute (that we've been in for four years), it means wielding the strongest weapon we have: indefinite strike action. In order to get this, the rank-and-file of the union needs to coordinate across branches, and push from below.

We are calling an open rank-and-file meeting on Monday the 28th of November at 7pm for members to come and discuss the way forward. Sign up to the meeting at: www.tinyurl.com/ucumeeting2022

- The University Worker editorial collective



Report from UCL

UCL's picket lines this Thursday were the largest we've had since this wave of industrial action began in 2018. With different pickets across campus and visits from Unison, Unite, the IWGB and Mick Lynch, the atmosphere is certainly hotting up. On Friday, we'll be hosting a wider trade union solidarity demo outside UCL's main gates on Gower Street at 12 noon, alongside RCN colleagues from UCLH hospital, the CWU, RMT and many others. This is not a fight we can win on our own and building those inter-union ties is vital if we're going to challenge bosses and the Tory government to take the cost-of-living crisis seriously.

As the pickets closed on Thursday, discussion at the well-attended strike meeting turned to the future of our campaign. Many are already preparing for a marking boycott, and some colleagues suggested that we should threaten to not come back after the winter holidays. An indefinite walk-out would be a first in our sector and it remains to be seen whether members would support it. But for many - particularly workers at Birkbeck, Roehampton, Goldsmiths and elsewhere who have been threatened with huge waves of redundancies - it does feel like the future of UK higher education is at stake.

Report from Middlesex

A steady number of branch members on the picket today, despite the cold and rain. Stood outside the VC's office, students, and strangers were stopping throughout the day making donations to our hardship fund,

talking with us, wanting to know how they can support, with some sending emails to the VC. Cake and leaflets encouraged people to engage with us, along with curiosity, which kept spirits up, as did support from the TUC and other local unions.

UAL High Holborn cleaners to join striking academics on 30 Nov

Since OCS took over the cleaning contract at University of the Arts London (UAL), staff have reported missing and inconsistent pay, poor working conditions, and most of all, extreme and unsafe levels of workload.

The issue of workload has been particularly felt at the High Holborn site, where cleaners report that, due to staff vacancies not being filled, their workload has doubled and even tripled from what it was under previous employers.

The situation has become so desperate and detrimental to the health and wellbeing of workers, that staff report stress, physical complications, and in one extreme instance, being taken from work by an ambulance due to exhaustion.

These stories are not unfamiliar to cleaners working at other UAL sites. Cleaners, whose poor working conditions, low pay, and little to no protections due to outsourcing already shame the institution. Such issues have been further exacerbated by a new and unscrupulous employer that sees its staff as expendable.

Since September 2022, High Holborn cleaners have been on strike to demand additional staff at the site. A ballot for an all-out strike of UAL cleaners is currently underway, not only demanding an end to unsafe workloads but

for equal treatment with directly employed staff. On November 30, High Holborn cleaners will go on strike again with their academic colleagues in the University and College Union (UCU). The cleaners, represented by GMB Union, may work under different contracts to UCU, but they share similar issues - job insecurity, overwork, and a decades-long decline in working conditions.

For the first time, cleaners at UAL will join academics on the picket line. We will fight together, and together, we will win.

- Alex Brent, GMB South London Universities Branch Secretary

Striking teachers shut down Scottish schools

Today as UCU started their strike in higher education, teachers in Scotland began their own strike, organised through Educational Institute Scotland (EiS), the largest education union in Scotland.

Teachers in Scotland are striking for a 10% pay rise to meet inflation. In a last minute attempt to avoid strike action, COSLA, their employers, raised their offer from 5% to 6.85% for all but the top two pay bands. School workers stuck to their guns though, and the strike went ahead today, with all schools - bar a sparse few in the Orkney Islands - shut down. Two other unions, the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) and NASUWT, will join EiS members and strike on 7th and 8th December.

We need to think how we can link up with other education workers, like those on strike in Scotland, so that we can win together. Solidarity to striking school workers in Scotland!



Report from Brighton

Brighton's picket lines were heaving with people today. UCU and Unison members are on strike for three days; the 24th, 25th and 30th of November. Workers from every area of the university withdrew their labour. From cleaners to canteen staff, lecturers to administrators we showed the senior management team that without our work the university cannot function. We are the university, they are nothing but a badly organised managerial framework without us.

Pickets took place over three sites. Sometimes with picket lines you worry about numbers being spread thin. Not today. There were ample numbers to cover all entrances and exits. Students supported staff with hand made signs. Drivers blared their horns as they passed. We set up a breakfast BBQ in the morning and had a teach out at the local pub in the afternoon.

Sometimes people question strikers in a university setting. "Aren't you only harming our young people?" they occasionally ask. Personally I think it's the best education students are going to get. Progressive change only happens when people leverage their collective power against those exploiting them. Our students enter a workforce that is continually having its pay and conditions eroded. And from housing to energy bills, the cost of living is only going up. Our students are often already involved in setting up support systems. For example in the CORN community union and the relatively newer trade unions - such as UVW and IWGB. I see our strikes as supporting their struggle.

In the afternoon it was our students who delivered the teach out session. They devised a board game called Deliverights where you are a cycle courier and the aim of the game is to unionise your workplace. They based this on the testimony of IWGB members. As we sat and engaged in this radical form of play, I felt we were all learning more than we ever could in the neoliberal academy.

If we want to save higher education the only way forward is to escalate our action. The HE sector had a £3.4 billion surplus last year. That was made off the back of our members. Looking at the race, gender and disability pay gaps we see that it is a racist, sexist and ablest surplus. Examining our pay, workloads and casualised contracts we know it is an exploitative surplus. So our employers can either give back what is already ours or we go on indefinite strike in the new year. As the Moulsecroomb branch chair said at our rally: "this only ends when we win".

What Is The University Worker?

The University Worker is a rank-and-file bulletin made by university workers (both academic and non-academic). We want to use this bulletin to share what's happening at different universities, and build our collective power to win our disputes.

Help us distribute the bulletin!

There are 150 picket lines across the country. We want to be on all of them. Download the PDF from notesfrom-below.org, print some out and hand them out at your university!

Write a strike report!

Help us communicate between branches and write a strike report from your picket line. You can find a strike report form at: www.tinyurl.com/universityworker

Picketing is legal!

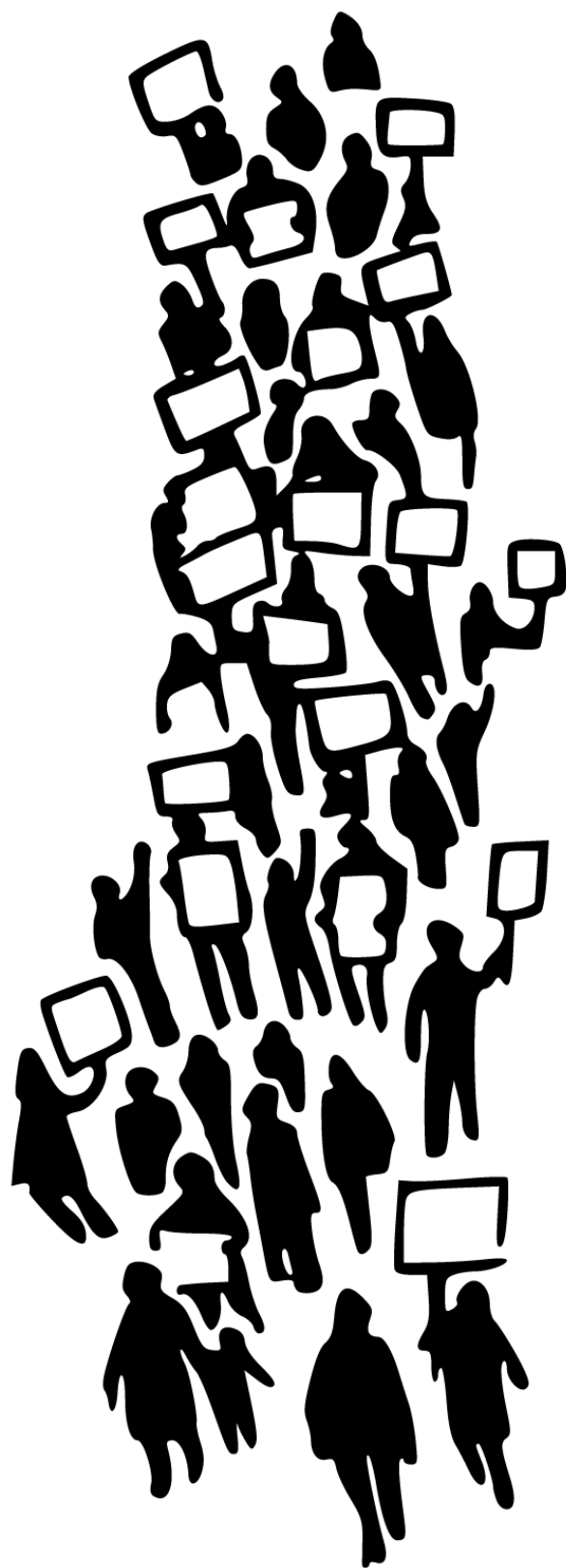
'It's illegal to have more than 6 people on a picket line' Sound familiar? It's wrong. This rule comes from a government written set of guidelines for picketing which are not legally binding. Pickets of over 6 people aren't illegal. Anyone can attend a support demo beside a picket, including students.

UCEA's current offer to university workers:



Meme inspired by UEL UCU's twitter account @EastLondonUCU

Join the UCU rank-and-file meeting on Monday 28th Nov



Register:

www.tinyurl.com/ucumeeting2022