

The University WORKER

W
E
E
K
4



Strike day 10 at UAL CSM
Teach out with The Voice of
Domestic Workers

The last three weeks of strike action have had a powerful impact on the sector as a whole. Not only have both employers' representatives groups, who had previously refused to continue negotiations, been forced back to the table by our action, but our own side has been transformed.

Teach outs, union picket meetings, and debates amongst striking colleagues have brought politics and strategy back to the centre of our communities. We have seen action taken on a wide variety of issues.

From actions for international women's day and anti-casualisation actions to migrant solidarity and the upcoming national day of action against PREVENT on the 11th March, the strikes have allowed us to go well beyond the immediate demands of our action and to collectively debate and rethink the future of the sector all together. The energy unleashed by stopping our always growing workload through striking has opened up our abilities to reimagine our workplaces collectively. It has been exhilarating.

While these achievements are important, and the return of employers to national negotiations, demonstrate the power of our action, it is also clear that we are up against the very logic of employers' mindsets who increasingly see education as a marketised, increasingly profit driven, sector, financed through growing fees and cheap teaching-only staff. This logic will need greater energy still to shift.

Last week's email from our General Secretary as well as a number of reports are worrying. They

show that despite claims to the contrary on social media in previous weeks, negotiations have not yet led to satisfactory outcomes. There has been some movement on pensions but the risk of decisions being taken after the strike is over through an employers consultation, when our collective pressure has dissipated looms large. Moreover, national pensions negotiators have pointed to the very limited nature of the proposed changes in what appears to be an attempt to propose surface changes while refusing to fix the structural problems.

In addition, the GS claims she is happy to settle for a paltry 3% pay increase, while our other three fights would be relegated to 'goodwill' agreements with no practical outcomes, kicked into the long grass of future local negotiations.

This is an issue and points to two further problems:

- 1 We will need even more pressure to move employers to meet our demands.
- 2 The lack of involvement by our leadership of the union's membership, has relegated us to silent bystanders rather than active participants in our own dispute.

It is therefore crucial to use the next 5 days of strike to take action.

Certain branches, such as Sheffield UCU, have already passed motions at picket line union meetings calling in further action in the summer, including marking boycotts. All of us should do the same: contact our branch leadership, call meetings on the picket line, and vote for a program of sustained action in the summer.

This will allow us to influence our own leadership as well as, and crucially, to make clear to employers that we are not going away. We are in this fight to win it.

In addition, further action will need to entail rebalancing nationally, as our mandate for strike action will run out next week (thanks to British draconian anti-union laws). We should use our time on the picket lines to start making the argument now with colleagues and allies for why this will be necessary and build activist Whatsapp groups to launch the campaign on Monday, in each institution, as soon as we return to work on Monday.

We did not strike for 14 days and lose so much pay, to settle for a subpar agreement, pie in the sky promises, or a minimal response to over a decade of below inflation pay increases (I.e. pay cuts). We are in this to win this.

Strike till victory.



Cambridge, Exeter, Imperial, RCA, and UCL now OCCUPIED. Photo: Cecilia Wee

Birkbeck workers vs. the Monarchy

Strikers @BirkbeckUCU arrived bright and early this morning in anticipation of Princess Anne, Chancellor of the University of London, making a visit to Birkbeck's 200th anniversary breakfast. Royal security tried to move us away from the back entrance, where the princess would be discretely escorted in, but we held our ground, with our fearless law lecturers reminding security of our rights.

As the entourage arrived, we held high banners that quoted George Birkbeck's advocacy for working class education ('Now is the time for the universal benefits of the blessings of knowledge!'), and implored Princess Anne not to cross the picket line. She shot us back a glare of unadulterated aristocratic contempt and replied, 'You're joking.'

Undeterred, we re-assembled at the front of the building to prepare for her exit. But before we got to chanting, an ally was spotted in the distance: Birkbeck alumnus and fellow John McDonnell MP.

'Where are you going John?'

'I'm just headed to the SOAS picket line!'

'That's great! Before you go, could you say a few words to us here?'

McDonnell took the microphone and gave a rousing speech, reminding us of PCS cleaners's successful dispute during the Royal Wedding, and pledging his absolute solidarity: 'We'll be on every picket line, every demo, and every form of activity that we democratically decide, and by whatever means necessary we've got to win this dispute, and we will!' He promised to send the princess a UCU membership pack.

By this point our crowd had doubled. Princess Anne made her exit as we furiously exclaimed our new chant: 'Equal pay: No joke! Precarity: No joke! Pensions: No joke! Workload: No joke!'

A well wisher added in: 'Off with her head!'

Warwick

Sunny skies bolstered the mood on the picket line as we entered the third week. We had a strong showing of numbers at the front of the campus, but the real action was near the road. There's nothing like an approving honk to make you feel instant satisfaction that your effort of holding a mildly cumbersome 'Honk your support' sign has all been worth it. Sometimes it's the simple things.

Warwick pickets and students were treated to two teach outs: a talk on 'Democratising Political Education' by Naomi Waltham-Smith, and panel discussion on 'Decolonisation /Decarbonisation' hosted by Warwick SU Environment and Ethics Officer and the Warwick Decolonise Project. Local MP Zarah Sultana joined to share insights from Parliament and thoughts on the government's 'response' thus far. The panel stressed that small-scale solutions are not enough; the climate crisis has its roots in capitalism and colonial extraction, and poor people in the Global South are feeling the hardest effects. As Naomi emphasized in the final teach out today, political education can play a vital role in mobilising people to tackle these issues with ground-up solutions. But we have a long fight ahead. *La lucha continua.* ●