

THE UNIVERSITY WORKER

Rank and File Strike Bulletin: Week 3

What is this?

The University Worker is a rank-and-file bulletin produced by academic workers. This strike is the biggest in the history of HE - we need to win.

Help us distribute!

There will be 61 picket lines across the country. We want to be on all of them. Download the PDF from notesfrombelow.org and print some out.

Open Letter to UCU Leadership

An open letter calling upon the UCU to continue strike action was disseminated in advance of this week's talks and was signed by over 600 academics- this can be found here: bit.ly/2FNBVa3.

Sample Branch Motion

This specific motion was passed by Goldsmiths, but lots of branches are passing similar motions: Leicester, Newcastle, UCL etc.

"This meeting notes the strength and unity of the strikes and resolves to stay out until the employers commit to retaining the existing pension scheme."



5,000 workers and students marched in the snow in London on Wednesday of week 2. 500+ also marched in Sheffield.

What is the 'Rank and File'?

A trade union is only as strong as its membership is organised. This strength comes from the rank and file of the union - that is the membership exclusive of its leadership. We are the rank and file: all the academic and administrative workers who have spent the week on picket lines in the snow.

The leadership and bureaucracy differ from us in terms of their function in the union, status, conditions, and importantly through their relationship with the employers. Unlike us, there is a preoccupation with organisational and financial stability of the union - something that is at existential risk during this dispute.

The current fight is one about the future of higher education, but also the future of our union. For the first time in years, the leadership have to show that they are fighting.

Why are we negotiating and what might happen?

The leadership has decided to go into negotiations while keeping the strike action going. They are now acting as a mediator between the rank and file and the employers. Our power does not lie in the negotiating tables, but on the pickets lines and in the streets.

We need to keep reminding the leaderships that the UCU Manchester delegate conference in Winter 2017 established that the membership wanted the union to refuse to accept

Student Occupations at Southampton, Liverpool and UCL

Students have been organising in solidarity with the strike since the start. But it's been particularly encouraging to see students upping the ante and applying pressure to their VCs by occupying university spaces. Follow @occupation_hub on twitter to see how the movement grows...

International Solidarity

Solidarity messages have been sent from across the world to UCU strikers. Including: Unite @ Fujitsu, United Steelworkers Texas, United Steelworkers District 6, UniGlobal Union, Die Linke. SDS (Germany), Casa del Popolo San Romano' in Rome (ITA), GEW education union Kassel, Germany, and from striking teachers in West Virginia.

West Virginia Teachers on Illegal strike

Teachers in West Virginia have been on strike over a rise in the cost of health insurance for workers with families.

20,000 teachers and 13,000 school service employees have joined the picket lines. They've occupied the State Capitol building. It is illegal for teachers to strike in the state.

Workers have directly referenced the West Virginia Coal Wars, a series of insurrectionary miners strikes between 1912-21.

any negative changes at all to USS.

Sally Hunt recently said that 'we have a mandate from you to retain a decent pension'. No Sally, you have a mandate to maintain the USS pension as it is, no backing down. If anything, we now want to fight on much more than the current terms.

Negotiators have already proposed a significantly weakened form of defined benefit on Tuesday wk 2 of the strike, and now we're told we are going to ACAS. ACAS will demand further concessions from UCU, leading to an even weaker form of defined benefit. But the fact that the union has gone back on the will of the membership and started negotiating a weak defined benefit isn't even the worst of it. They have actually gone and committed to further investigations of other options - including collective defined contribution. Why investigate collective defined contribution? The rank and file won't have it. We want to maintain defined benefit. Rather than giving away more ground to the employers, **we should only be negotiating on the terms of our victory.**

How can we react?

We have been told for years that we just have to wait for the pensions fight. Now the fight is here, we are winning, and we need to keep the pressure up. The negotiations can feel deeply disempowering, we do not know what is being discussed or why.

In a situation like this **we need more leverage**. We need to move from only striking at work to really making the strikes work. **This means building for mass picket lines outside our buildings, pushing action short of a strike as far as possible, and talking seriously about escalating action.**

The union has previously proposed an exam boycott. **We need to identify the points of maximum disruption in our work to shut down not only the buildings of the university but also its operation. The time is now.**

One part of this is maintaining the pressure on the employer, but the other is on our leadership. **We need more motions from branches calling for further action, and more open letters that raise the confidence of the rank and file to put forward demands.**

Our leadership may have gone into negotiations, but it needs to be our actions that win this dispute.