

TPS STRIKE NEWSLETTER

TPS Strike Newsletter- Update from around Wales

On June 30th, UCU members in FE and post-92 HE institutions took part in a day's strike action across Wales alongside colleagues in NUT, ATL and PCS against changes to their pensions.

On 11 March, UCU members working in further education colleges in England & Wales and in 'post-92' universities voted by 72% and 76% respectively to take strike action; members had already taken a day's action on 24th March.



UCU members were striking against cuts to the Teacher's Pension Scheme, cuts the UK Government want to make to various civil service schemes in order to raise £2.8bn to help pay off the deficit.

The government has already arbitrarily changed the way that pensions are increased in line with inflation each year, using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to

calculate upgrades, instead of the Retail Price Index (RPI). The CPI excludes housing costs and is consistently lower than the RPI. In practice this means that pensions would be worth less and members losing tens of thousands of pounds in retirement. PCS has launched a judicial review into the switch from RPI to CPI which is due to be heard in the autumn.

Now the government is seeking to implement the recommendations of the Hutton Review, which would involve:

- ending all current final salary schemes and transferring staff for future service onto an inferior 'career average' pension scheme;
- raising the pension age from 60 to 65 to match the state pension, with the likelihood that this will increase further to 68, thus forcing people to work longer for a reduced pension;
- doubling or tripling the contributions that members make towards their pensions. For a typical FE lecturer this could mean paying an extra £88 per month. For a university lecturer it could mean an extra £124 per month; for a head teacher it could mean an £164 per month
- Government modelling shows future pensions will be designed to deliver between 20%-50% less than the current pension scheme for a full career in public service.

Therefore, as part of this coordinated action, pickets and rallies took place all over Wales. In this newsletter, we have compiled contributions from branches across Wales who have submitted articles on the action they undertook:

North East Wales (by Peter Jones, UCU Wales Vice Chair and Craig Lewis, NEC)

In North East Wales, workers from schools, colleges, tax offices, universities, the courts and many more government buildings maintained pickets as they took strike action in defence of public-sector pensions and public services.



UCU picket in North East Wales

UCU and NUT pickets visited PCS picket lines at the Wrexham tax office, the Mold Crown Court and the Job Centre. 200 members of all the striking unions attended a lively and noisy rally and handed out leaflets to members of the public explaining the case for decent public sector pensions.

The rally was addressed by speakers from ATL, NUT, PCS and UCU including UCU Cymru national president Eileen Tilley. All the speakers denounced the government's attack on pensions as a tax on public sector

workers designed to shift the cost of the financial crisis on to ordinary working people. ATL and NUT speakers demanded that the government stopped lying about "gold plated pensions" and started to negotiate seriously. Steve Ryan, PCS national executive member, said the government was in disarray and that with united action amongst public sector unions and more broadly with community groups resisting cuts we could win.



Peter Jones, UCU Wales Vice-Chair addressing the Wrexham rally

Peter Jones, vice-chair UCU Cymru, welcomed the magnificent display of unity and warned that now the fight had started we had to support each other and not do separate deals with the government. There was every chance that our strike would be the launch pad for even bigger action in the autumn right across the public sector with Unite, Unison and GMB all threatening to ballot for strike action if the government did not back down. Individual UNISON, NUJ, UNITE, GMB and NASUWT members also attended the Wrexham rally in a foretaste of things to come!



Crowd scenes at the rally in Wrexham

The June 30 strike has had an immediate success in exposing government lies over the funding of public sector pensions. It has changed the whole nature of the debate. Even the usually docile British media has been forced by our action to question Cameron's assertion that public sector pensions are unaffordable. In several newspapers and on national radio and TV ministers have had to accept that, far from being a burden on taxpayers, the cost of our pensions is set to fall by 14% over the next 50 years or so. They have also had to admit that they rigged the Hutton Review terms of reference to ensure that Hutton looked at how the cost of public sector pensions could be reduced in order to facilitate widespread privatisation of public services.

This supports the view taken by UCU that we are not just in a fight to stop our pensions being plundered we are also fighting to defend good quality post 16 education for the communities we serve.

The Wrexham National Shop Stewards' Network was key to ensuring that the four unions taking action were co-ordinated, and there was a particular welcome for ATL

members who were striking for the first time in their history.

There was a festive atmosphere as the sun shone brightly on the assembled crowd, and interviews were given to BBC Wales, HTV, the Daily Post and the Leader, as well as local radio.

At the end of the rally, many activists got together to begin the planning for the next stage of action.

Glyndwr University (by Deniz Baker, Branch Secretary and Peggy Murphy, Web Officer)

The day started early at Glyndwr with members beginning to assemble from 7am. Although we were disappointed that only 10 of us turned up to picket, we were heartened by the public response.

We had a presence at two of the entry points to the university and it was disappointing to note that a number of members chose to cross the picket line, however the majority of people stayed away. Leaflets were distributed and passers-by asked about the action.

Two photographers arrived and took photos. A member of the press interviewed Steve Byrne, the Chair of Glyndwr branch and there was a newspaper report about the action. At 11am we walked to the town centre to assemble for the rally at mid-day.

UWIC (by Dr Matthew Waring, Branch Chair)

We had a very successful day of action at UWIC with picket lines at each of the three campuses, from 7.00am to around 11.30am. Howard Gardens was reported to

be virtually empty and Cyncoed very quiet too. At Llandaff we had rather more administrative staff going into work, as it is UWIC's main campus.



Staff picketing at UWIC, Llandaff site

However, many UNISON staff who did go into work stopped to offer support and to take a leaflet. We were visited by colleagues from PCS and RMT unions who came along to show solidarity and support for our campaign. What was particularly striking was the level of support from cars passing by (we are on Western Avenue, a major highway through Cardiff) – the hooting and waving was very encouraging and suggests that the ConDems may have underestimated the level of support for the strike.



Staff at Gower College picketing

Cardiff Rally (by Llew Williams, Political Liaison Officer, UCU Wales)

Members from UCU were joined by colleagues in ATL, NUT and PCS in Cardiff for a march and rally which took place through Cardiff city centre and concluded at the steps of the Welsh Government office in Cathays Park.



Marchers gathered at midday to march through the city centre with flags and banners from all our four unions prominently on display as the march left Sophia Gardens and made its way through the city centre. The march itself included lecturers, teachers, civil servants, parents and children chanting and cheering.



UCU Wales banner on the march in Cardiff

Well over a thousand people took part in the march against changes in pensions in Cardiff, with many members of public applauding to show its support for the march as it made its way passed them through the city centre.



Guy Stoate, UCU Wales Vice President addressing the Cardiff Rally

The march arrived at the rally at Cathays Park where many speakers were lined up to show their support to the strike. Speakers included UCU's Guy Stoate, Mick Antoniw AM on behalf of Welsh Labour, Leanne Wood AM on behalf of Plaid Cymru, Katie Dalton on behalf of NUS Wales as well as speakers from NUT, ATL, PCS, Unite and the Wales TUC, addressed an increased audience from the original march.

The march and rally was very successful in highlighting the issues surrounding the TPS Strike to the wider public and many members of the public were very supportive of the action that was taken by UCU members.

Welsh Government Stance

Through intense lobbying by UCU, NUT, ATL and PCS, a stronger stance from the Welsh Government was given on the day of the

strike. The statement from the Government is as follows:

"The Welsh Government recognises the adverse impact of the UK Government's proposals on public sector workers. With a two year pay freeze, rising fuel costs, inflation at 5%, the threat of redundancy, it's clear that public sector workers are facing a particularly tough time at the moment, and are being asked to play an unfair part in deficit reduction. There is an understandable anger at changes to pension arrangements for 100,000s of workers in Wales.

It is also clear that these proposals will have a particular impact on women, who make up the majority of low paid public sector workers. The public sector plays an important role in Wales, and we will be making representations to the Westminster Government about the impact their pension reform proposals will have on workers here.

Let's be clear, the unions are NOT in dispute with the Welsh Government- it is a pay dispute with the UK Coalition Government over pension arrangements. Welsh Government Ministers will not be crossing picket lines today."

Press Coverage

Press coverage of the strike was made right across the media in Wales, highlighting our fight to the wider public. News stories, including interviews with UCU members were published in the Western Mail, Daily Post, BBC News as well as media on BBC Radio Wales, BBC Radio Cymru, BBC Wales Today and Wales Tonight on ITV Wales.