

UCU at the crossroads on pensions

Dave Beale

UCU, personal capacity

Lecturers in the further and higher education sectors are being attacked on all fronts by the Con-Dem government and the employers - cuts, job losses, pay and pensions.

Members of the lecturers' union, UCU, have been inspired by the decisions of the NUT and ATL to ballot for strike action in defence of the Teachers' Pension Scheme, which covers teaching staff in schools, colleges and the new, post-1992 universities. The potential for united strike action on 30 June in defence of pensions across not only education sectors but also the civil service is opening up.

In these circumstances, therefore, rank and file UCU members will be outraged by the change in strategy by sections of the UCU leadership regarding the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) - the scheme for the 'old' pre-1992 universities - and the major concessions to the employers that have now been offered by the union's USS negotiators.

The union's higher education national sector conference last November refused to consider immediate strike action in defence of USS, which was called for by Manchester University branch, and instead chose to ballot after the critical USS Trustees' meeting in January

this year. A 'yes' vote was secured following a further delay, and one-day strikes were eventually held in March. The union leadership insisted that the union's position on USS was still secure because the employers could not proceed with their planned changes to the scheme unless UCU's national pensions reps attended the joint USS forum - and they would refuse to do so.

Subsequently, the UCU reps were threatened with legal action by the employers if they declined to attend. No great surprise there, most of the history of the trade unions has included employers threatening trade unionists with the law.

UCU members will no doubt be shocked to discover that their elected USS reps capitulated to the employers and attended the joint national USS meeting on 10 May. Members will be wondering whether they had the encouragement of key 'moderate' sections of the national leadership to do so.

As a result, the employers, with the chair's casting vote, forced through their plans for a dual scheme, giving new starters a much inferior career-averaged rather than final salary based scheme.

This is a disgraceful state of affairs - and the best the 'moderates' seem to be able to do is suggest another ballot to somehow pressurise the employers! Also, according to UCU Left, the unions' pensions reps failed to report these events to the



Pickets at Bradford University during the last strike photo Iain Dalton

union's national higher education (HE) committee on 15 April.

Plans for strike action over USS on 24 May must go ahead, and the UCU HE committee meeting the day before must have the bottle to insist on this. A vote of no confidence in the union's USS pension reps should be tabled at the HE committee.

A full investigation of the na-

tional leadership's handling of the USS dispute should be held. And the union's whole handling of this dispute must be put to vote at the union national conference starting on 28 May.

But this must not be a distraction from the crucial battle UCU must fight with other public sector unions in defending the Teachers' Pension

Scheme and the schemes of other public sector workers. Strike on 24 May! All out on 30 June!

• STOP PRESS: The UCU have just announced that the 24 May strike has been cancelled because "only sustained and seriously disruptive action will achieve a settlement". The HE committee on 23 May will be discussing a fresh ballot.

CWU conference Support joint union action on 30 June

A postal worker

Morale among postal workers has never been so low. We think things can't get any worse but they do. One of the Brown government's final acts was to appoint new chief executive, Moya Greene, with the job of privatising Royal Mail.

She's overseeing the closure of seven mail centres in the London area and the one in Hull, where workers are being offered jobs in Sheffield. A round trip of 140 miles! This will lead to thousands of redundancies, many compulsory. This smashes the 2010 Business Transformation Agreement, which the CWU leadership tells us is a great deal. It is not.

After 6,000 job losses, greater workload and pensions cuts, members feel let down. They are mistrustful of the CWU leadership.

There are rumours that we in Royal Mail may be balloted for action over pensions, as the Con-Dems'

plan is to raid the fund's £25 billion assets and transfer us to an even worse scheme than the one we were shunted onto two years ago. But we should have been balloted over the closure of the final salary scheme. And this lack of fight is leading many workers to question the value of being a CWU member.

Job losses are adding to the funding crisis in the CWU. But members are also becoming disillusioned and leaving because they feel they are not being properly represented.

This is a message to the leadership and officials. You've got to start listening to us. You are supposed to represent our interests, not accept job cuts or negotiate pay cuts. You've got to get us back on side by showing you are up for a fight against all attacks on the workers.

Postal workers also face attacks on the public services we all rely on from the savage cuts in public spending announced by the government and councils across the

country. Widespread, coordinated industrial action backed up by movements of local communities and service users is what's needed to stop the cuts.

Our union must support all such movements, we should try to link our own action with that of other trade unions.

A one-day strike of Royal Mail members against privatisation on 30 June when other public sector workers will be taking strike action would show the government that we won't accept attacks on Royal Mail lying down.

Whatever happens, CWU should support workers taking action on 30 June and we should march with them on the regional and city-wide demonstrations.

**National Shop Stewards Network
CWU conference meeting
Sunday 22 May, 6pm
Hermitage hotel, Exeter Road,
Bournemouth.**



Postal workers lobbying parliament photo Paul Mattsson

Fighting attacks on civilian defence jobs

By a Unite union member

LandMarc Support Services provide support for UK troops training for overseas operations. They operate on a number of estates across the country and employ 1,200 people ranging from cleaning staff to range wardens, building maintenance, rural estate workers, and administration. LandMarc won the bid for the Public Private Part-

nership contract from the Labour government in 2002 after a murky battle for the contract.

The 'Statement of Requirement' (SOR) manual determines LandMarc's responsibilities and gives clear timescales for safety matters. It is rumoured that the SOR has been amended but our trade union has not been involved with this alteration in the terms and conditions.

The March 2011 Ministry of Defence (MoD) spending review an-

nounced a spending cut of around 23% and so the speculation of where the axe was to fall had been rife. On 18 April 400-500 'at risk of redundancy' letters were sent out by LandMarc who said 111 jobs were to go. They have a £80 million contract with MoD which says that it will be reduced by 23%, £19 million, and they want changes by 1 October 2011.

The Unite union national officer covering LandMarc said that he had only been told the day before

the letters were received but that he had not been told of the date of implementation.

You would expect that Unite would have jumped at the chance of standing up to government cuts in this highly sensitive area. However, when the union met with LandMarc management on 11 May the national official was not there and no arrangements have been made for on-site union meetings to be called.

Union members are calling for

immediate union meetings on all sites to inform us of what the union is doing to oppose these cuts so that a campaign to defend jobs can be built. Union members are also calling for pension agreements to be honoured.

Members believe that important facilities such as the ranges can only be maintained to a high standard by workers employed by the MoD and not by some multinational company.