

UK's largest teaching union accepts rotten pay deal after NEU leadership sabotages struggle

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Members of the National Education Union (NEU) have voted to accept the 5.5 percent pay rise offered to teachers by the Labour government, following Labour's acceptance of the statutory pay review body's recommendation.

The announcement was made September 30, following a ten-day "snap poll" of NEU members. Some 300,00 teachers were asked to vote; turnout was low at 41 percent. Ninety five percent of those who voted accepted the offer, which the NEU leadership had endorsed and called on its members to accept.

None of the other education unions bothered to consult their members at all, accepting the pay deal immediately on their behalf.

The outcome of the NEU poll is the end product of the union's sabotage of the indicative ballot for strike action voted for in April over pay and working conditions. The bureaucracy has stifled mass opposition among teachers to intolerable pay and conditions even as the Starmer government implements its right-wing, pro-war and austerity agenda.

NEU General Secretary Daniel Kebede said the union's members "should be proud of what they have achieved through a hard-fought campaign", while in the same breath admitting that teacher pay in England was still down in real terms compared to 2010-11, and lower than in Scotland.

Kebede tried to square this circle by describing the deal as a "first step in the major pay correction needed."

Members were sent a leaflet calling on them to accept the offer, presenting it in the most glowing terms and referencing some limited and cosmetic changes to conditions which will have no impact on the chronic

underfunding of education or the biggest recruitment and retention crisis in the history of the sector.

The leaflet asked its members to vote "ACCEPT" with the claim that "The award is significantly above inflation and schools will receive £1.2 billion extra to fund it." The NEU ignored the fact that the offer still leaves teachers' pay at lower than the 2010-11 level in real terms, and that in its manifesto for the general election the union called for education funding to increase by "£12.2bn next year to start reversing the impact of Government cuts"—ten times the funds actually provided.

It promoted the removal of the requirement for maintained schools to enforce performance-related pay (PRP) from September 1 and the acceptance that PPA (planning and preparation time) can be taken from home as huge government concessions.

The education unions did not mount any struggle against performance related pay when it was introduced under the Conservative government in 2014 and were key to its enforcement. The change is not a full reversal. As the NEU notes, "removing the requirement for schools to use PRP will not automatically end it. Academy trusts... are already free to abandon PRP, however most academy trusts have not done so."

Repeated studies on teacher workload, conducted by the unions themselves, have established that a teacher's working week is between 45-55 hours; PPA is a paltry 2.5 hours per week, totally inadequate whether taken at home or in school. No extra time for planning has been made available.

According to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)'s annual labour market report, the recruitment and retention crisis shows "no signs of

abating”. It predicted secondary recruitment, while set to improve, will still miss its target by about 40 percent, with 10 out of 17 secondary subjects likely to have shortfalls. Last year the target was missed by 50 percent.

Primary recruitment is forecast to be about 17 percent below target, far worse than the 4 percent seen last year.

According to the most recent official data published by the Department for Education (DfE), nearly as many teachers left the profession in England last year as entered it. According to the school workforce census, 44,002 teachers joined in the year to November 2023, while 43,522 teachers left, with teacher vacancies up by 20 percent.

Jack Worth, school workforce lead at the NFER and co-author of the report, said, “Teacher supply is in a critical state that risks the quality of education that children and young people receive.” The report notes that “little progress” has been made on reducing teacher workload since the pandemic and that this is still the “main reason” teachers leave the profession.

The NEU, alongside a host of other unions including the British Medical Association, Royal College of Nursing, and the RMT and ASLEF rail unions, has recommended pay settlements only marginally improved from those offered by the Sunak Conservative government, while promoting the fraud that the Labour government is committed to public services.

When the NEU held an indicative ballot of its members for strike action in January, with the results published days before its conference in April, Kebede hailed the outcome of the ballot, with over 90 percent voting for strike on a 50.3 percent turnout, stating, “The facts speak for themselves; over half of our members voted in the ballot and overwhelmingly supported a move to a formal ballot to secure a fully funded, above inflation pay rise which constitutes a meaningful step towards pay restoration.”

What did the NEU bureaucracy do with this mandate? It fought tooth and nail to disavow it, refusing to organise action while holding out the possibility of a Labour government supposedly more likely to act in teachers’ interests.

Now in power, Labour has committed to a programme of brutal austerity. It has already refused to

scrap the “two child benefit cap”, which would have taken some 300,000 children out of poverty. It has attacked pensioners through cuts to the winter fuel allowance impacting 10 million people. And it has continued the racist and inhumane anti-immigrant and refugee policies adopted under the Conservative government.

Next, the government is planning to implement draconian measures against disability benefit claimants, aimed at forcing people who are incapacitated and unable to work into the workforce on pain of losing welfare payments.

The only area it has pledged to increase spending is on the military front. It continues to support Israel’s war and genocide in the Middle East, and to back continuous escalation of the conflict between the NATO powers and Russia over the war in Ukraine.

Teachers must prepare to take on the Labour government. The trade union bureaucracy sees its interests lying in a cordial arrangement with Starmer and big business. Teachers’ allies are their fellow workers throughout the education sector and the wider workforce, all confronted with the same attacks by the employers and the same government austerity agenda.

To fight for their interests, they need rank-and-file organisations which can inform and organise workers against betrayed strikes and sellout deals. And they need a new, socialist party to take on and defeat the right-wing agenda of the Labour Party.

Get in touch with likeminded education workers today.



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