

Sheffield UCU General Meeting Thurs 14th October, 13.00-14.00

Chair: Sarah Staniland, Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1. Sarah welcomed everyone to the meeting, and announced that there will be an all staff meeting on Tues 19th Oct 12.00 to discuss the disputes.

2. Update on local dispute

- 2.1. Our local dispute was framed by a member motion in August specifically around the closure of Archaeology, changes to languages, and the exclusion of staffs' views in decision making. Due to trade union law we needed to narrow the terms of the dispute to demanding no compulsory redundancies. The University refused this as well as all other previous requests, including a review of University governance.

- 2.2. The concrete issue now is the demand for no compulsory redundancies and we have told University management that we will ballot our members. We recommend that you vote yes to both strike action and action short of a strike (ASOS). Next week all full members will receive three ballot papers (the two national and one local dispute) - in two envelopes. We need a minimum of a 50% turnout with a majority in favour of action. Of course our desire is not to need to take industrial action but a strong ballot outcome strengthens our hands in negotiations.

- 2.3. The SUCU Dispute Committee is discussing how we maintain the governance and decision making aspect through a wider campaign. If you would like to attend please get in touch. It meets alternate Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

- 2.4. Comments and questions included:
 - This is very important. We need to nip this in the bud to show colleagues that we will not tolerate redundancies. The urgent essence of the dispute is that peoples' jobs are at risk. The financial modelling used by University management indicates that they are planning for potentially 80% redundancies in Archaeology. Even if this is an upper bound - it suggests there is serious potential for job losses. The Archaeology plan for redundancies is being brought forward from next Spring to before Christmas and the School of Languages and Cultures (SLC) phase two is underway.

3. Guest speaker - Jo McNeil Liverpool UCU

- 3.1. Sarah welcomed and thanked Jo McNeil - Vice President at Liverpool UCU and a prominent figure in UCU, both on the NEC and she also ran for General Secretary. Jo explained how her branch successfully fought off the threat of 47 redundancies in the Health and Life Sciences Faculty by using hard strike action.

- 3.2. Management offered only a statutory level voluntary severance scheme initially, and used research metrics to select for redundancy. This is known as "rank and yank". Members were incandescent. The Branch called a huge meeting, balloted members and achieved a 59.8% turnout. This immediately changed negotiations with management who reduced the number of staff at risk to 31. The Branch started action short of a strike (ASOS) for two weeks followed by fourteen days of strike action. Due to covid, instead of conventional picket lines, members organised a presence on campus, and a mass participatory digital picket for 96 days.

Management then reduced the numbers at risk to 27 and improved the voluntary severance offer. Branch members then decided to escalate action up to a marking and assessment boycott which caused mass disruption. The number at risk was then reduced to 6. Branch members did not stop at that point and served notice on management and took strike action during the confirmation and clearing period in August. At this point management reduced the number of staff at risk of redundancy to 2. Branch members did not stop there either and served notice to take strike action during the second week of teaching. In the end the final two staff members took the enhanced voluntary severance.

- 3.3. Jo talked about how the UCU national fighting fund was made available to members during the 14 strike days and the marking and assessment boycott. Locally members also set up a wage sharing scheme to financially support colleagues.

- 3.4. Comments and questions included:

- Was there a change in negotiations as a result of the action?
Ans. Yes definitely - there was a power shift in all negotiating forums.
- It is inspirational that you were fighting for every job.
Ans. This was a decision taken by the whole membership
- We have worked out that only two staff will be saved in Archaeology despite management saying that they are only looking at two areas of work.
- Strategically it is important to hit critical periods in the academic year.
- How did you get international students on board?
Ans. We had leaflets and materials translated.
- How did you communicate with students?
Ans. It was important to direct any anger to University management. Members also used statements to students in their email signatures, and talked to students at the beginning or end of lectures.
- Research income targets are planned for individuals in SLC.
- We held Get the vote (GTVO) training for new reps yesterday. It is important to understand how the local and national disputes fit together and our overall strategy.
Ans. It is a big advantage that the local dispute has an aligned time frame with the national disputes. Targeting mid term teaching and marking and assessment boycotts is most effective.

4. Update on USS and 4Fights disputes

- 4.1. GTVO materials have arrived at the union office on Hounsfeld Road. All reps are asked to get in touch about either picking them up or we can deliver.
- 4.2. We will talk about the national disputes in detail at the all staff meeting next Tues 19th October. The USS valuation has now been filed and UUK have pushed through cuts.
- 4.3. It will require industrial action for us to move the employers on the 4Fights demands. Inflation has increased, as predicted. The employers have not responded to the unions' request for a without prejudice meeting.
- 4.4. As with the local dispute, the same type of financial mismanagement and contempt for staff underpins the national disputes.

5. AOB

- 5.1. Return to campus safety concerns were raised. Naturally ventilated rooms should have CO₂ monitors. When they turn amber, staff can insist that students wear mask as you are responsible for health and safety in the room. If the monitor turns red, you should evacuate the room and call EFM. We are concerned that mechanically ventilated rooms are not adequately ventilated. Specific rooms will be monitored following a request from the unions.
- 5.2. The recent controversy at the University of Sussex was raised and the UCU Branch's statement was highlighted.