

SUCU General Meeting Minutes, Wed 31st October 2018, 1pm

Council Room, Firth Court

Chair: Sam Marsh, SUCU Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introductions

Sam Marsh welcomed all members to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes from the Extra Ordinary General Meeting on 29th October will be circulated shortly.

3. Brief round-up of news

3.1. Pay ballot: SUCU branch achieved more than the 50% threshold in the disaggregated ballot. Anti-trade union law meant that many other branch ballot results did not meet the threshold.

3.2. USS: Everyday, more and more information is emerging about the duplicity underlying this pension scheme.

3.3. Staff survey: Everyone is encouraged to participate, as this survey is our chance to to communicate concerns to management.

3.4. Branch Activist Handbook: An electronic copy of this has been circulated and members interested in becoming more active are encouraged to take a look at this excellent handbook.

3.5. Personal Casework: An appeal was made for new personal caseworkers. Training is available for this aspect of branch activity where advice and support is given to colleagues experiencing individual workplace issues.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- An update on the casualisation campaign was given. University management have agreed to stop using casual worker agreements, but we are raising concerns that some areas continue to use them. There have been implications for Graduate Teaching Assistants in two Departments and we are negotiating with management on behalf of these members.
- SUCU will be holding a number of events to mark the National Day of Action for Disability Equality in Education on 21st Nov.
- All members are welcomed to attend a SUCU party in the Devonshire Cat from 5pm this evening.

4. Pay dispute

A motion was passed at the EGM on Monday 29th Oct which will be submitted to the Special Sector Conference on Wed 7th Nov. Four SUCU Branch Officers will also attend. The motion calls for: the 2018/19 dispute to be resolved nationally, and if it is unresolved to have a statutory aggregated ballot

before March 2019, and for national UCU to invest more resources in branch support. The next step in the dispute will be decided by the UCU National HE Committee this week.

5. Motion - Build the union

Proposed motion:

Building Sheffield UCU

Branch notes

- That our union branch is organising to defend our members individually and collectively on an unprecedented scale
- That we are faced with the prospect of potential industrial action on pay and equality as well as potential further industrial action over our pensions
- That increasing marketisation, privatisation, and cutbacks across the sector and at this University and have created challenges for our members that are varied and complex
- That dealing with these challenges on a larger scale requires member involvement and feedback beyond one centralised branch committee.

Branch resolves

- To build on the existing formal network of branch representatives in our departments, and to build informal networks of union members in our departments, buildings, faculties and shared interests/experiences, replicating the work done by members; for example, ICOS and Jessop 'Left'.
- These networks would act to facilitate communication between members, and between members and the branch committee, and act as additional organisational bodies for the branch

Branch committee resolves

- To support, resource and encourage the development of formal branch representatives and informal member networks
- To provide UCU rep training and other relevant training to all interested branch members and empower members to lead in their own work environment
- To work towards a more decentralised and member-led model for our Sheffield UCU branch in future, and to commit to building UCU at the University of Sheffield from the shop floor upwards

Proposed: Sam Morecroft on behalf of Committee

Seconded: from the floor

Discussion included:

- The proposer gave some background and then discussion followed.
- "Jessop Left" was formed during the strike and are able to mobilise very quickly.
- What training is available?

Ans. Committee will do what we can and are happy to listen to suggestions. UCU nationally also provides training for activists.

Passed nem con.

6. Guest speaker Motion – Douglas Chalmers UCU Vice President

Sam Marsh introduced and welcomed Douglas Chalmers, UCU Vice President and member of the Higher Education Committee. Douglas gave an overview of UCU's recent activities and strategic objectives emphasising that we are facing multi layered problems that require a multi layered approach. His overview included:

- UCU has just finished conducting the largest number of industrial action ballots in its history - 250 get the vote out campaigns.
- There has been success in recruitment and an increase in overall UCU membership in the last year to 107,000.
- Politically, UCU has worked with Labour on the national education service idea and looking at putting academic freedom in legislation. Due to pressure from UCU immigration law has changed. This has removed the fear for members on a tier 2 visa of taking industrial action. UCU has also argued against the uncoupling of teacher training from Universities, and the voluntary code for Vice Chancellor pay.
- Higher Education Committee will consider next steps with USS tomorrow.
- Workload is the biggest issue for members after micro-management. We have seen how the Employer has made piecemeal job losses which increases the workload for remaining staff. Linked to this is a reduction in research time and an increased teaching load. Douglas highlighted the "Gold Paper" produced by Goldsmiths, and suggested we need something similar in all Universities.
- Local Branches are encouraged to submit local claims regarding casualised staff and UCU has responded to the Taylor Review.

Comments and questions from the floor included:

- Governance of the union was queried as the General Secretary is unfortunately unwell at the moment.

Ans. According to UCU rules the Head of Democratic Services deputises for the General Secretary and s/he consults with Officers of the union. The Democracy Commission suggest an elected deputy and this will be looked at.

- We should have a Deputy General Secretary like other trade unions.
- We have just had the most successful pay ballot in UCU history. What are your views on a disaggregated ballot?

Ans. A disaggregated consultative ballot highlights where we need to do more work, and where members are likely to come out on strike.

- What support is given to weaker branches?

Ans. We have a network of Regional Organisers who assist branches and nationally a "Get the Vote Out" guide has been produced which provides very useful information.

7. Motion – Support for Jasic workers

Proposed motion:

Global Call on China to Release Arrested Jasic Labor Activists

We stand with the workers and their allies unjustly arrested for unionizing and organizing solidarity actions in China.

In May, workers at Shenzhen Jasic Technology reported to the local authorities the company's labor rights violations such as illegal work rotas, an illegal system of fines, and underpayment of social insurance contributions. Acting on the advice of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), workers organized a union drive in accordance to China Trade Union Law and their co-workers signed a petition in support of union recognition.

Rather than recognizing the union, the worker organizers were accused by management and the ACFTU of illegally unionizing, and were threatened and fired by Jasic. When the fired workers staged protests, they were arrested on July 27 by the authorities (Amnesty International: China Thirty people detained at factory worker protest must be released). 14 of the 29 arrested workers and their allies remain in detention. Progressive students, workers, and labor rights activists in China organized a series of solidarity actions in Shenzhen for the Jasic workers over the following weeks. But they too were harassed and arrested. Riot police arrested more than 50 supporters on August 24 (Reuters: Student activists disappear in southern China after police raid). Two staff of a labor rights group in Shenzhen were detained and charged with "picking quarrels and provoking trouble".

Many of the 70 arrested workers and allies remain detained or have their freedom restricted. Those released continue to be under house arrest and subject to surveillance. Students are threatened and disciplined by their universities. In protest, 5 students under house arrest for their support for workers have begun hunger strikes.

This is the most severe repression against workers and labor activists since a crackdown on labor rights organizations in 2015 (The Nation: China's Latest Crackdown on Workers Is Unprecedented). As workers' struggle in China, we stand together with the Chinese labor activists and demand that the Chinese government and the ACFTU:

- Release all detained workers, reinstate their jobs and recognize their right to unionize;
- Release all detained student supporters, and protect them from retaliation; and
- Release all detained labor rights group staff.

Proposed: Mark Pendleton on behalf of Committee.

Seconded: from the floor.

Discussion included:

- The proposer gave some background

Passed nem con.

8. Motion – Support for International Workers of Great Britain campaign

Proposed motion:

Motion to boycott in support of outsourced workers at the central University of London

Branch notes:

- Outsourced workers at the central University of London have been campaigning since September 2017 to end outsourcing and be made direct employees of the university.
- This campaign has the support of the vast majority of the outsourced workers at the University of London demonstrated by the fact that in April 2018 they held the largest outsourced workers' strike in the history of UK higher education.
- Outsourced workers, the majority of whom are migrant workers or BAME, suffer from far worse terms and conditions than the majority white British colleagues that are directly employed by the university. They are also far more likely to suffer from bullying, discrimination and unlawful deduction of wages.
- Almost a year after the University of London began its facilities management review (November 2017) outsourced workers are still in limbo, waiting to be given a clear timetable under which they will be made direct employees. In this period they continue to suffer under a regime of structural discrimination, where they are vulnerable to unfair and ill treatment.
- The university has ignored all calls by the workers to go into substantive negotiations with them and the union that represents the vast majority of the outsourced workers, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain.
- Consequently, the workers have been excluded from the University of London's facilities management review, a review that would have a significant impact on the work they do and on their terms and conditions.
- Rather than engage with the workers, the university has opted for strong arm tactics to try and break their campaign, employing dozens of strike breakers and extra security, at a significant cost.

Branch resolves

- To organise a boycott of University of London central administration (including Senate House, Senate House, Stewart House, the Warburg, the Institute of Historical Research and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies) until the outsourced workers' demands are met and they are brought in-house. The boycott will require members to not organise or attend events at these buildings.
- Inform members of the boycott and the reasons behind the boycott of University of London central administration (including Senate House, Stewart House, the Warburg, the Institute of Historical Research and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies)
- Support the motion to this effect being brought to the next UCU conference.

Proposed: Sam Morecroft on behalf of Committee.

Seconded: from the floor.

Discussion included:

- The proposer gave some background.
- The motion should be circulated to other Universities.

Passed nem con.

9. Motion – Promote using our holiday entitlement

Proposed motion:

Promote using our Holiday entitlement

Branch notes:

- The University of Sheffield provides its staff 27 days (grades 1-6) and 30 days (grades 7-10) annual leave as well as 3 closure days and the 8 bank holidays giving 38 and 41 days holiday entitlement respectively.
- Holiday entitlement is part of our pay “reward package”. The employer must legally approve them or offer compensation.
- Leave and holidays are essential for our work /life balance and our mental health
- More and more members are reporting that they never take their full holiday entitlement because of their increasing workload
- For Saturday open days: a day off in lieu is provided as compensation for voluntarily working on this day off. An extra day’s leave is meaningless if existing days are not being used

Branch resolves:

- To campaign and communicate the important of staff taking all their annual leave entitlement and claiming their days off in lieu.
- To encourage the reporting and immediate investigation of any situations where annual leave has been denied that make it impossible for the staff member to take all their annual leave within the leave year.
- To lead by example and take all their annual leave entitlement. Go on, do it now, book yourselves some holiday!

Proposed: Sam Morecroft on behalf of Committee.

Seconded: from the floor.

Discussion included:

- The proposer gave some background.
- We need to encourage people to take breaks too. Its important to set an example.
- Departments should publish the amount of untaken leave.
- The current staff survey is asking staff to rank their top 3 benefits of employment.

Passed nem con.

10. Motion – Support for fracking protesters

Proposed motion:

Solidarity with anti-fracking protesters

Branch believes

- Fracking – a new technique for extracting hard-to-reach oil and gas – is a controversial and dangerous sort of energy extraction, and a number of large energy corporations have been given permission to drill wells across the country.
- Fracking has been linked to serious environmental problems, like water pollution, increased risk of earthquakes, dust, high production emissions, and noise pollution. It also involves the destruction of swathes of the countryside and is vastly unpopular with people living in small communities and villages with fracking sites nearby.
- The increased focus on giving permissions and support for fracking by this government represents a clear lack of commitment to supporting and promoting the properly renewable energy that we need to avoid immanent climate change.
- The three anti-fracking protesters who were arrested and charged in September 2018 were treated appallingly by the state, which tried to jail them for over a year each, and released them under pressure huge of public support for the protestors.

Branch resolves

- To send a message of solidarity and support to all three arrested protesters, as well as those who are affected by, and fighting against, fracking.
- We demand that Simon Roscoe Blevins, a researcher at the University of Sheffield and one of the charged protestors, does not undergo any punitive measures by the university on the basis of his being charged.

Proposed: Sam Morecroft on behalf of Committee.

Seconded: from the floor.

Discussion included:

- The proposer gave some background and then discussion followed.
- The protesters were freed by the judicial system rather than the state.

Amendments: It was suggested that “by the State” was removed from believes bullet point four. The proposer agreed to the amendment.

Final motion as amended:

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Passed by majority with 1 abstention.

11. AOB

Proposed motion:

Academic freedom: Solidarity with universities in Hungary, Australia, and Brazil

We the members of the Sheffield University branch the Universities and Colleges Union restate our solidarity with the faculty, staff and students of CEU and our strongest support for the university's continued functioning. We once again call upon the Hungarian government to remove the undue administrative and regulatory obstacles that would cripple CEU's operation in Budapest and to negotiate with CEU to find a satisfactory path that will allow it to operate and uphold academic freedom in Hungary.

We condemn the actions of members of the Australian government, who withdrew grant funding for 11 approved projects in the humanities, undermining scholarship and academic freedom in these disciplines.

We look also to Brazil with profound concern for university staff and students who find their academic freedom and physical safety under threat in the wake of the last week's election.

We express our solidarity and support, and our belief in the fundamental importance of academic freedom to democracy worldwide.

Proposed: from the floor

Seconded: from the floor.

Discussion included:

- The proposer gave some background and then discussion followed.

Passed nem con.