

# General Meeting 17<sup>th</sup> February 2011



## Fulwood Room, University House

### 1. Introductions:

The chair opened proceedings with a welcome to the meeting's attendees, and Matt Waddup and Geoff Turner received a special welcome and thank you for attending and being willing to speak to the meeting.

Minutes from the previous meeting were passed.

### 2. Update of the National Picture and Ballots:

Matt Waddup, UCU National Head of Campaigns and Organising, gave an overview of the political context, and the worst set of financial settlements since the Thatcher era. Cuts are being made across the board especially within Arts and Humanities in HE. 80% of the cuts are to be funded in the future by students. The relationship between members and students will change over the next few years. UCU is finding the speed of changes so quick it is difficult to take stock of the issues coming out of Government. The next step is a White paper opening the boundaries of competition within the Higher Education system. This will have a huge impact on standards and will change the dynamic between employers and employees.

One way the changes will impact members will be the low pay deals being offered. This has been seen for the past 2 years. It has been perceived by UCU to be a reaction to the better pay offers University staff received in the 5 years before this.

In addition, the law permits employers to seek to impede trade unionists' fundamental democratic right to vote on the basis of minor technicalities.

So how is UCU helping: UCU is explaining to the Government that future impacts have human costs as well as economic. This is being put to all sides of the political spectrum, MP's across the country are being contacted by UCU. Explaining the consequences and impact these actions will have on the youth of the country if opportunities are taken away from them.

UCU is focusing on the defence of Pensions. This Union co-founded the USS pension scheme. This has up to recently been a partnership, this partnership has been broken. This will have a major impact on recruitment and retention if the USS pension scheme is broken. UCU is investing a lot of energy and work into this. 6000 non-members responded to the consultation on USS run by UCU, more than the entire number of respondents to USS's own consultation process.

There are 6 local ballots going on about defending jobs, the Union is trying to place everything in the same context. To refuse funding to higher education is to deny our youth.

There was an update on local negotiations with the University around a new Organisational Change agreement. We are making good progress and it seems quite likely that we can come to a reasonable agreement here.

In response to a question from a member who is also a member of Sheffield Pensioners Action Group Matt confirmed that UCU does work closely with pensioner groups.

Geoff Turner then spoke about the local movement, including the Sheffield Anti-Cuts Alliance. A website link is now on the UCU website. A stall is running every Saturday lunch time outside the Town Hall. Forthcoming events include:

- The Spring Conference for the Liberal Democrats which will happen in Sheffield; the Alliance will be holding a demo at 11a.m. on 12<sup>th</sup> March on Devonshire Green.
- On 26<sup>th</sup> March there is a TUC National demo in London which organisers, including UCU, hope will be very big.

Members are strongly encouraged to attend both events.

SUCU is a member of Sheffield Trades Council, whose AGM will happen next Tuesday. Geoff is a delegate and members are encouraged to contact the union office if they would be interested in attending too.

### **3. USPS Pensions Update**

There was an update on the latest USPS developments. The proposals are very bad for the lower grade staff, who are covered by the scheme. Opposition and resistance from the trades unions has forced the University to extend the consultation period to give time for negotiations. It is unclear at this point how serious the University is in being open to making fundamental changes. The proposed 'Cash Balance' scheme is completely unacceptable and ballots for industrial action are likely from the other Trade Unions to allow them to take action if an agreement isn't reached in the very short timescale the University has set.

### **4. Election of Treasurer:**

The position of branch Treasurer was vacant. Daragh O'Reilly was nominated, and elected nem con.

### **5. Motion Supporting Declaration of Opposition by Israeli Academics to Occupation and Settlement:**

The meeting was not quorate so the proposers agreed that the motion should be taken at the next General Meeting.

**6. AOB:**

The Stop the War Coalition has organised a meeting on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February at 2pm at the Quaker Meeting House about the events in Egypt. Darea Mustafa will be presenting their personal account.