

# Classroom Teacher No. 5

## Action and Change for Teachers

### THOUSANDS RALLY AS STRENGTH OF STRIKE ANSWERS PRESS & POLITICIANS

**ON APRIL 24th** it was the same story right across England and Wales: schools closed by strike action and union rallies packed to overflowing. Those who claimed that our strike would be a failure have had to eat their words. Now will the Government have to listen to us? Yes, but, in the words quoted in the press from Classroom Teacher 4, only if our action is the start - and not the end - of the matter. The mood at the strike rallies was clear - we've shown we can do it - now let's step up the action to win!

### NOW LET'S STEP UP THE ACTION !

3000 of us marched through the streets of **Bristol**. The mood was electric. When I spoke at the joint union rally on behalf of young teachers, I apologised if I had crossed any picket-line the last time the NUT had held a national strike - after all, I was only in reception class!

I pointed out how rubbish the government were at maths when it came to calculating inflation; the fact that when you consider the long hours we work, young teachers like me were earning less than £7 an hour; and that it was great that the NUT, PCS and UCU were on strike - but, next time, all the public sector unions

*Sheila Caffrey*



Dozens of schools closed across **Kirklees**. At my school, over £25 was given to us by NASUWT and ATL members for our hardship fund, showing the sympathy that the NUT's campaign also has with other classroom teachers.

Over 200 attended the NUT rally in **Huddersfield**. Stella Dennis from the PCS union received rapturous applause when she called for a united front of public sector unions to fight the government's pay freeze.

600 marched in **Sheffield** and around 200 rallied in **Barnsley** where a show of hands showed almost unanimous support for taking further strike action.

*Dylan Murphy*

**Wow!!** What an absolutely fantastic day. We had pickets at a number of schools from 7.30 am. Everyone was really upbeat about the support they were receiving from drivers and parents. Strikers congregated in a local bar for breakfast and dried out a bit from the morning's rain before attending a short **Coventry** Rally. It was really lively and determined. UCU, PCS and NUT members spoke about our pay campaigns. A young teacher gave an inspiring speech explaining how student debt and low pay meant she might never get a mortgage. At 10.45 we boarded buses to **Birmingham** for the main event of the day. Chamberlain Square was packed with thousands of strikers, including City Council unions who were on their second day of action against single status. Teachers were eager to have stickers, placards and leaflets and marched noisily through the city streets. We had fantastic radio and newspaper coverage and returned home tired but absolutely adamant that the campaign must continue. It was an inspiring day which has hopefully given many teachers the confidence to fight, not just for better pay, but, also to say 'No!' to Heads when unreasonable demands are made of them!

*Jane Nellist and Nicky Downes*

**Classroom Teacher** is a campaigning newsletter written for, and by, classroom teachers. If you want help organising a union in your school, if you want to take action to defend teachers and education, if you want to give us your views about the pressures teachers face:

**Write to:** [classroom.teacher@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:classroom.teacher@yahoo.co.uk) **Visit:** [www.classroomteacher.org.uk](http://www.classroomteacher.org.uk)



Faith McGrath and David Plews

Like everywhere else, the response to the strike in **St. Helens** exceeded everyone's expectations. The government said we only had the support of a minority of our members but on the day when members had the choice to strike or go to work, they nearly all came out. That's the ballot that really counts! We went down to the march in **Liverpool**. People had to be turned away from the rally at the end because it was just too full! The local press claim parents oppose us but could only find the local chamber of commerce prepared to criticise the strike. Members report parents giving support. After all, most parents are just like us, fed up with below inflation pay rises!

Robin Pye

"What a day, it's revitalised my thinking about action" - just one of the comments made by a fantastic crowd of protesters on Thursday. We had the privilege of being stewards at the **London** march and, at first, it seemed some of the police chiefs had been listening too closely to the papers' failed attempts to downplay our level of support. They weren't even expecting to have to close off the roads! Then throngs appeared from all sides. We think 400 came from our **Lewisham** Association alone! The Evening Standard conceded that 10000 marched. Young teachers sang "Solidarity Forever" and led noisy chants. "Gordon Brown, stop the rot, give us what the bankers got" seemed to be one of the most popular! The rally was already so full that we had to shut the doors long before everyone had arrived at Westminster. Inside, whenever a speaker talked about calling further action, they were cheered and applauded such as when Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the PCS civil service union, called for united strike action across the whole public sector. Unfortunately, Brendan Barber of the TUC talked of unions 'pooling resources' but gave no firm commitments. We have to demand it happens!

Across **Sussex**, teachers took a trip to the coast - to join up with others on strike! There were packed meetings in Brighton, Worthing and Eastbourne as schools across the area closed for the day. PCS, NUT & UCU members at the **Eastbourne** rally were joined by prison officers from Lewes looking to soon recreate their highly successful strike. The debate brought up many questions, including why some unions still fund the Labour Party. Was it any coincidence that none of the unions on the platform do give money to Labour, but are all willing to stand up for their members pay?! In **Brighton**, a huge round of applause went to a UCU speaker who asked if a handful of Labour MPs can send Gordon Brown into reverse, imagine what hundreds of thousands of public sector workers can do? Writing to MPs is not enough now, we must ballot again as soon as possible.



Phil Clarke

## WHAT SHOULD CLASSROOM TEACHERS DO NOW?

The NUT National Executive meets to decide on its next steps on May 8th. Some NEC members will want to seize the time and push ahead with further action - but others will want to delay. So school groups should:

- **Meet and agree on a motion to send in to the National Executive.** E-mail to [c.blower@nut.org.uk](mailto:c.blower@nut.org.uk). For example, 80 members of Bolton NUT voted to "welcome the NUT Conference decision to continue our fight on the linked issues of pay, workload and class size by building for more strike action at the earliest 'appropriate' time. We believe this should mean balloting for discontinuous strike action to begin in the summer term and we call on the executive to launch such a ballot as soon as possible".
- **Call on your colleagues in other unions to demand they are balloted for action too.** Let's build for joint action across every union. Colleagues in UNISON, GMB, ATL & NASUWT should call for ballots too.
- **Build the Lobby of Parliament on Monday June 9th.** The TUC have called a joint lobby on pay - but, if there's no strike, we need to organise now to ensure schools agree to release reps so that they can go.
- **Get organised in your school!** Build on the confidence we can draw from April 24th, get involved in your union, make demands on your leaders, contact Classroom Teacher, stand firm on local issues too.

**Classroom  
Teacher**

**Look on our blog** for more reports and comments about the strike

**Have your say!** Contribute to the blog via [www.classroomteacher.org.uk](http://www.classroomteacher.org.uk)

**Contact us:** via 32 Tannsfeld Rd, Sydenham SE26 5DF \* 0208 659 8478

**Would your school like a regular copy?** Send details to us at: [classroom.teacher@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:classroom.teacher@yahoo.co.uk)