

To the General Secretaries, national officers  
and executive members of the NUT, PCS and UCU unions

21 April 2008

Dear Christine Blower, Mark Serwotka, Sally Hunt and colleagues,

The strike action your members are taking on Thursday of this week in schools, colleges and government departments across Britain deserves the widest support, not simply from workers in education and the civil service, but from all of us who rely on the work they do.

The issues here are straightforward, and the government would be well advised to take heed of them.

It is counterproductive, as well as iniquitous, to adopt a policy of freezing public sector pay and, in fact, cutting wages relative to the actual rate of inflation.

Its iniquity is clear. This week the government bailed out the banks to the tune of £50 billion. These are gigantic institutions which have over the last decade boasted record profits year on year – profits which have been taxed at a lower rate than under Margaret Thatcher and her chancellor Nigel Lawson.

It now appears that the only thing private about the banks is their profits: with the first whiff of trouble from the global credit crunch a bottomless pit of government cash is opened up and all their risks become a public concern. This £50 billion follows a similar sum for Northern Rock.

As your members know only too well, there is no such emergency package for working people who face a housing crisis, the threat of repossession in all too many cases, and a chill economic wind.

And, of course, it is not only your members – it is millions of working people across the public sector and the private sector, where there is no government wage freeze, but there is the threat of pay cuts and redundancies in a country where trade union rights scandalously are about as limited as they were under the Tories.

For those reasons alone, it is most welcome that your members, through you, have chosen to act in concert over the issues that affect all of them. The desire for such united action has been expressed to me by representatives of many unions in my constituency and beyond over the last year.

But there are further reasons as well. The fiasco over the loss of half the nation's personal data ought to have shown how self-defeating are the policies of privatisation, job cuts and demoralising pay freezes.

Parents, who will naturally be inconvenienced by the closure of schools this Thursday will, I'm sure, be likely to support the action teachers are taking when they are told how an overworked and underpaid teaching staff will damage their children's educational opportunities.

I will be arguing across London, where I am campaigning in the Assembly elections, for the maximum support and solidarity for the stand you are taking. It is an example to the whole of the trade union movement.

It also holds out the potential for not only winning fair pay, but also contributing to a new political alignment, where the failed policies of neo-liberalism are challenged and progressive economic policies are in the political mainstream in a way that they already are in so many canteens and staffrooms across Britain.

I and my party, Respect, will continue to popularise those policies and make your case – alongside your members and all who are standing up for justice, through collective action and at the ballot box.

Yours sincerely,

George Galloway  
Respect MP for Bethnal Green and Bow