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UCU prepares for action against funding crisis

The University and College Union (UCU) representing staff at universities laid the groundwork for industrial action when they voted overwhelmingly in favour of preparing for an industrial dispute with the government. The decision was taken at its annual congress in Liverpool on 25 May and represents the first step towards a strike ballot. The **UCU** representing more than 120,000 staff is calling on the Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, to address serious funding issues.

Shrinking funding for universities and moves to cut international student numbers were among members' concerns, the **UCU** said. It has also raised the alarm over some 10,000 jobs at risk in higher education and was taking action against redundancies in Cardiff and Sheffield.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady, who was also interviewed on the Today programme on 26 May, said: "It is shameful that university cuts have become so severe under a Labour Government that our union is now laying the ground for a trade union dispute.

"The Prime Minister and Chancellor must stop standing in the way of proper funding for our universities.

"This vote sends them a crystal-clear message: if you refuse to listen you may be prepared to face a strike ballot."

Local Government pay offer vote

The **GMB Union** has recommended its 150,000 plus members working for councils and schools to reject the local government pay offer. As previously reported local authority and education workers across England and Wales have been offered a 3.2 per cent pay rise for 2025/26.

GMB's Local Government and Schools Committees unanimously recommended a rejection and to seek support for industrial action to secure an improved offer.

The consultative ballot - which will include a commitment to industrial action - opened on 12 May and closes on 20 June.

More at: <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/more-than-150,000-council-and-school-workers-vote-on-pay-offer>

Manchester mental health teams win major concessions over inadequate staffing and funding



Photo Caroline Bedale

As reported in TU News 21 on 16 October 2024, **UNISON** and **Unite** members working for the Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Trust Early Intervention in Psychosis service (EIS) took strike action for adequate funding for this vital service. They were not asking for better pay but were calling for more funding to ensure that their service can deliver adequate care to some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Subsequent strike action, lobbies of the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board, meetings with officials and with Andy Burnham, Greater Manchester Mayor, finally resulted in an offer being made to the unions which members voted to accept on 22 May.

There will be £1 million of recurrent funding, which will pay for 21 extra staff for the Early Intervention in Psychosis Service. Although this won't fill all the staffing gaps – they had wanted up to 54 extra staff – it is a significant achievement in the current climate of financial cuts and austerity.

The strikers appreciate the support they have received from a wide variety of trade unions, organisations and campaigns. Crucially they were supported throughout by services users and their families, who recognised the importance of the dispute in demanding better services for people with significant mental

health difficulties. The fight continues for funding and staffing to improve the six Community Mental Health Teams, which are also a vital resource for these service users.

Amazon workers score a big win as their legal challenge against the company begins

A ruling during a preliminary hearing at London Central Employment Tribunal on 6 May means Amazon staff will now have their full evidence heard about the company's union-busting actions when the case begins.

The next hearing is on 19 December 2025.

Amazon's lawyers had attempted to force a separate hearing on a technical point that would have shielded Amazon from having to explain their actions.

The case centres around Amazon's behaviour ahead of a vote, which saw 49.5 per cent of the 2,600 workers back union recognition at the Midlands facility in July last year, falling short by just 28 votes.

The result followed weeks of anti-union campaigning at the Coventry site, including bosses plastering QR codes across the warehouse that encouraged and made it easier for GMB members to leave the union.

Amanda Gearing, GMB Senior Organiser, said:

"It's been clear from the launch of the claim Amazon's tactics are tie the case up in red tape and bog it down with technical detail.

"Amazon's legal team pushed for a separate hearing on whether the QR codes constituted an 'offer' - a hearing that would deny GMB members the opportunity to talk about everything they experienced in the warehouse.

"Thankfully the judge agreed and ruled against a preliminary hearing on this issue alone – meaning the whole story will now be heard."

Source: <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/amazon-workers-score-big-win-in-legal-case>

Hull trains – more action taken

Train drivers at Hull Trains who are **ASLEF** members – and all the drivers at the company are members of **ASLEF** – took further strike on 23 and 24 May in support of a colleague who the union claims had done nothing wrong and had been unfairly sacked.

The strike caused serious disruption on the rail network and forced the company – an open access operator owned by FirstGroup, the rail and bus giant which also owns Avanti West Coast, Great Western, Lumo, and London Tramlink – to cancel many of its services on the East Coast main line.

Nigel Roebuck, **ASLEF**'s full-time organiser in the north-east of England, and lead officer with Hull Trains, said: "The company is clearly in the wrong. It sacked a driver, over what it claimed was a safety issue, who has a clean safety record. The driver did, and has done, nothing wrong. The company has behaved not just badly, but vindictively, in persecuting a driver for doing nothing more than raising a safety concern."

He added: "Hull Trains' attempts to find a solution seem somewhat futile and half hearted. We are always available for constructive talks, yet nothing has been tabled since early March and those early discussions were unacceptable to **ASLEF**."

Drivers also took strike action on 7, 8 and 31 March and 3 and 7 April.

Reports at: <https://aslef.org.uk/publications/aslef-drivers-take-strike-action-today>

<https://aslef.org.uk/publications/aslef-members-hull-trains-take-second-day-strike-action>

Lords back action against copyright theft

The **NUJ** is urging the UK government to support copyright owners following a debate of the Data (Use and Access) Bill.

On 19 May, peers voted in favour of an amendment tabled by the cross-bencher Baroness Kidron requiring AI companies to disclose all data used to train their AI models so that creators and rights owners can identify whether their works were included.

As currently written, the bill would permit AI companies to use copyrighted works to train their models without seeking permission from the rights owners, while providing rights owners the choice of opting out of allowing their works to be used. The measure has received strong support from U.S. technology companies, as well as the Trump administration. But their support now appears to be uniting and strengthening opposition.

The vote carried by 287 votes to 118 and means the Data (Use and Access) Bill as amended will again go back to the House of Commons for consideration.

The **NUJ** is calling on the government to accept the amendment and listen to widespread concerns from journalists, authors, photographers and others within the creative industries urging protection for their works.

Last week, government invoked financial privilege arguing there was no budget available for new regulations, following a vote by MPs in the House of Commons in favour of transparency amendments.

Speaking in the debate, Baroness Kidron, said:

“Ministers talk about balancing the interests of AI and creative companies, as if that is reasonable. Not only are they failing to listen to UK AI companies, but the idea is a little extraordinary. No other industrial sector in the UK is required by government policy to give its property or labour to another sector that is in direct competition with it, on a compulsory basis, in the name of balance.”

The day before the debate Sir Elton John described the government as "absolute losers" and said he felt "incredibly betrayed" over plans to exempt technology firms from copyright laws.

Speaking exclusively to Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, he said if ministers go ahead with plans to allow AI firms to use artists' content without paying, they would be "committing theft, thievery on a high scale".

Unions welcome South Western Trains renationalisation

Rail union the **TSSA** has welcomed the transfer of South Western Railway (SWR) to public ownership on Sunday 26 May, describing it as a 'landmark moment' for the railways. SWR is the first train operating company to transfer from private (First Group) control to public ownership under the government's 2024 Act.

Commenting, **TSSA** General Secretary, Maryam Eslamdoust said: “The transfer of SWR into public hands is a landmark moment which heralds in practical terms the beginning of the end to three decades of failed privatisation across the railways.

“The Labour government has taken the right decision and the necessary steps to bring our railways back in house, ending a broken system dreamt up by Conservative governments which cared only about profit, not the best ways and means of running our precious rail network.

"However, we do have concerns about the future of travel concessions for railway workers and their families. These are long-standing entitlements that recognise the public service contribution of railway staff. We urge the government to protect and uphold these benefits as part of its commitment to a fair and just transition to public ownership.

“Our union is also making a series of key demands to Ministers during the transition to GBR – and these seek to not only protect jobs, ensure a safe railway, protect the environment but also put passengers at the heart of the network.”

TSSA represents staffs who are General grades and Control at SWR.

The **RMT** welcomed the return of South Western Railway (SWR) to public ownership as a step in the right direction, but warned that continued outsourcing of essential frontline services risks undermining the benefits of renationalisation.

More at: <https://www.tssa.org.uk/news-and-events/tssa-news/tssa-welcomes-transfer-of-south-western-railway-to-public-hands> and <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/rmt-welcomes-swr-public-ownership-but-demands-end-to/>

Doctors threaten strike action after 4% pay offer

Resident doctors in England are threatening strike action after they were awarded a 4% pay rise plus an extra £750. The British Medical Association (**BMA**) said the increase from 1 April - was "derisory" and did not go far enough in reversing historical pay freezes. A ballot for strike action has begun and closes on 7 July. If successful the strike mandate for action would last from July to January 2026.

BMA council chair Prof Philip Banfield said doctors' pay was still around a quarter less than it was 16 years ago, when taking account of inflation.

He said the pay rise "takes us backwards, pushing pay restoration even further into the distance without a government plan or reassurance to correct this erosion of what a doctor is worth".

Dr Banfield added that "no one wants a return to scenes of doctors on picket lines" but the government's actions had "sadly made this look far more likely".

<https://www.bma.org.uk/bma-media-centre/bma-says-the-independent-pay-review-body-has-failed-doctors-as-government-announces-inadequate-pay-award>