**Open University Branch of UCU - Online Strike rally, day 2 Thursday 2nd December 2021**

**(Zoom meeting transcript)**

10:00:49 [Chris speaking:] Good morning everybody. Nice to see you will be starting in a few minutes. In the meantime, you can appreciate, beautiful home picket line which I've constructed at minimal expense.

10:01:08 I hope those of us who need rest have had a rest, sometimes striking can be a really good time just to think I can stop worrying about all this work I'm supposed to be doing.

10:01:18 Sometimes it could be a good time for just putting, paying a bit more attention to care for yourself or for other people, and that's really good. And so, if people spent yesterday just in bed and are joining the rally for the first time, good on you!

10:01:31 There's a really good book by Marx’s son in law about *The Right To Be Lazy*, and I think that while we also think of ourselves as workers, we need to think about ourselves as people who deserve leisure, people who deserve retirement, people who deserve care as well.

10:01:47 Nice to see you. I hope you had a lay-in.

10:01:51 [Kit speaking:] Amen. Yeah. I can see we’re filling up here. I'm aiming to start things just about, about five past 10 just to give everyone an opportunity to join in so I can see there are still people filing in. Lovely to see you all, thanks for joining us this morning, it’s great to see so many of you coming out here.

10:02:08 And yeah, as Chris says, I hope you've taken the opportunity somewhere along the line here to rest up a bit and do something for yourselves.

10:02:22 [Chris speaking:] Yeah, when I'm at work, I often bang on quite a lot about productivity. This is because I want to be able to knock off early.

10:02:30 That's always the big fight, isn't it, between workers involved in unions and management, that's where our interests do not coincide.

10:02:38 We want to increase productivity so we can knock off early and still deliver the product. They want us to increase productivity so as we can keep working the same number of hours, but deliver more stuff.

10:02:57 And, and that's where the very real tensions exist.

10:02:54 As Caitlin's just put on the chat, you’ve got the Q&A function if you want to ask questions, and we're monitoring the chat.

10:03:01 We've got the members’ meeting happening at quarter past. And so, where our... They'll be a… that's the chance to have a discussion. This is our rally for everyone so it's a public rally, and people are joining from all over, and I can…

[Kit speaking:] Oh, we seem to have lost Chris for a second there. Sorry about that, everybody. Looks like we've got some… looks like Chris has been hijacked by live broadcast. This is fantastic. This is like, I'm having a Max Headroom moment, that's one for the over forties in the audience I suspect.

10:03:37 It looks like Chris is… [laughs] I don’t know if you can hear us or not.

10:03:44 But that's incredible so that's that looks like we're testing our live broadcast which is something we will be doing later in the rally so it looks like that worked, for a given value of worked.

10:03:59 Chris are you back? Let’s just see if we've, we've got him back.

[Chris speaking:] Yes.

[Kit speaking:] Ah, lovely.

10:04:04 All right. You, you were replaced by Cath there momentarily, which is.

10:04:15 [Chris speaking:] Ah well. She’s better at nearly everything I do than I am, so fair enough.

10:04:21 [Kit speaking:] So, you're now coming through on the… I think you're now coming through on the OU branch of UCU. Ah, there we go. You may need to rename.

[Chris speaking:] There’s a ghost of me, as well as me.

[Kit speaking:] Yeah, you’re duplicated, which I mean, frankly, if I'd known that was possible, we would have done it years ago.

10:04:43 Chris Williams 2 Electric Boogaloo, fantastic. Right, we’ve still got another minute or two for those who just joined us. I'm just going to give it another couple of minutes we have got quite an action-packed, we’ve got quite an action-packed rally today, quite a lot going on, but I am going to give it another minute or two just to give everyone else an opportunity to join.

As we said a minute ago, we've disabled the chat function but if you do want to raise questions either to me or to anyone else who is speaking at any point, there is a Q&A function which is live, please do use that and we’ll flag those questions, flag those questions to the relevant people as we go through so please do use that function if you want to participate.

We will also be using the chat to keep you informed as we go through where appropriate, so we'll add in, you know, links to outside resources and things like that.

10:05:39 As I say, we'll be starting in just a minute or two now.

10:05:48 Is anyone else not having a lay-in and checking sheep first thing? Goodness, what, real sheep or? I'm not quite... I'll admit to being flummoxed by the question there.

10:06: I mean I've heard of counting sheep, but I assume that’s not what you mean, you mean actual sheep know. No, that may just be you. But, but good on you. If that's what you're doing, sounds fantastic. Good stuff. All right.

10:06:23 Okay, I think I will, I can see there's still some people coming in, which is great, but I think in the interest of in the interest of time, I will start because we've got quite a packed schedule as I said, so I guess I'll start oh...

Firstly, welcome, welcome everybody to day two of the, of our three-day industrial action and this is our second public rally so, welcome all of you who've chosen to be here, and thank you so much for coming along.

10:06:53 I'll just run you through some housekeeping very quickly before we start, obviously we don't have to worry about fire alarms or fire exits, that's nice. But I will just explain a few things about how this is going to work today, so the first thing you need to be aware of is this entire meeting is being recorded.

10:07:08 And that is with the intention of posting it online following the rally so this will be available publicly, at some point fairly soon, and it will be posted online with the transcript.

10:07:17 So, so just bear that in mind really as we go through. You will have the opportunity to view this again later if you want to.

10:07:24 As I mentioned just a moment ago, we're not using the chat for general use there, but if you do want to participate if you have questions you want to raise, please use the Q&A function that exists, that is available to you as audience members, we're happy to hear from you.

10:07:41 So please do use that as we go through. If you have any questions for the guests, or indeed me or anyone else, you know, who's participating in the rally, we'll use that function there.

10:07:51 Also reminders, Zoom, very helpfully, has live captioning. So, if you do need, if you would find that facility useful, you can turn that on, you have a list of options at the bottom there's a dotted line that says More if you click on that, Show subtitle or indeed View full transcript, you can use either of those anytime.

10:08:10 Those will give you live captions so that's really helpful if that's something that's useful to you feel free to turn that on.

10:08:19 While I'm on the subject of transcripts, we are still looking for volunteers if any of you have an hour or two to spare, it would be really, we'd really appreciate some people to just go through the transcripts.

10:08:28 Zoom does produce automated transcripts, and they're mostly good but we have discovered it struggles with certain phrases, and in particular it struggles with, with the, what's the word I'm looking for, where we use initials like USS things like that, it tend to misinterpret those as different words so we've got some transcripts, but they do need an editing pass, as I say it's probably an hour, two hours work at the most just going through the transcript, watching the video and just making sure everything lines up the way it's supposed to.

If anyone's willing to volunteer for that, you'd be very welcome indeed so please do. Please do pop a volunteer in the Q&A or drop an email to the UCU box whatever, we'd be grateful to hear from you. Thank you in advance for that.

10:09:10 Yeah, just while we're here, this is day two. So this is, this is an online rally. This is the new thing we're trying this time obviously you know because of Covid and restrictions and so forth.

10:09:20 We thought it’d make more sense to try and do these as online activities.

10:09:24 So, you know, we had a very action-packed rally yesterday where we covered off, you know, we had a ton of guests coming in who spoke to various things.

10:09:37 And it was, it was very successful, again as I said, the video will be up fairly shortly so you’ll be able to see for yourselves if you want to get caught up on what we did yesterday.

10:09:45 And I just run you through the program of events for today. So today we've got…

10:09:51 Well, we start with an update from the picket lines, including Scotland, and we've got, Chris has actually thrown together a slideshow for us so and that's fantastic, looking forward to that.

10:09:59 Shortly after that we've got Mark Pendleton joining us from Sheffield. Mark Pendleton is a historian and branch activists at Sheffield and he's going to talk to us, in part, at least about local campaign they're currently running to try and save their Archaeology and Languages Department, really important stuff that's going on there at Sheffield. Mike's a great speaker so we're looking forward to hearing from him.

10:10:27 We are going to be doing some live broadcasts which I'm super excited about so we've got potential live broadcasts from…

10:10:25 We've got David and Cath, two of our UCU members, are at Birmingham picket line. So there'll be broadcasting live from the picket line, I just, it's great. I feel like, you know, David Dimbleby or Kate Aidie or someone. This is superb.

10:10:38 And then we've got a short film from Goldsmiths shown by Daisy Asquith about the situation there. And we'll also be going live to the Goldsmiths rally sometime after half past 10. We've got an OU colleague there who will be broadcasting live from the Goldsmiths rally so again super exciting.

10:10:57 And we’ll also be highlighting some of the activities we’ll be doing tomorrow as well so we’ve got an action-packed program.

10:11:09 Okay, great. So, I think then what we'll do is we'll start with the slideshow, if that's okay so this is Chris, Chris is turning this on now. So here we go. So this is just some, some photos from the picket lines wanted to make it, obviously, as you’ll all be aware, we've been a little bit limited in terms of making sure, we wanted to make sure that the pickets were done in a safe way - Covid, so forth. But we have been out there as you see these are shots of Walton Hall now, big crowds everyone holds… clearly visits from local MK counsellors and other people so it was a really, really incredible turnout and it's just lovely to see that and..

10:11:52 Look at Edinburgh! Look at that! What a fantastic turnout we had there as well. So that's great and then we put the ‘OU on tour’ as well, we visited the picket line at Sussex there.

10:12:06 Obviously we have an amazing situation where we have members all over the country so we’re able to have people go to various rallies. There's Sheffield. I love that ‘OU on tour’. Look at that! Fantastic.

10:12:10 Oh, sorry can you go back Chris quickly, just to the previous one. That was, yeah so that's...

10:12:17 Oh goodness! I'm completely blanking on the name, but she spoke at yesterday's, she spoke at yesterday’s rally. Absolutely fantastic speaker really helpful. So that was good.

10:12:26 Yep, sorry Chris, carry on.

[Chris speaking:] It’s Robyn Orfitelli who spoke, who was doing the Sheffield… who’s got the best banner.

10:12:35 [Kit speaking:] Yeah, yeah. Absolutely, and just fantastic speaker. Do catch up when the recording goes out and see that performance.

10:12:48 And there we are at Bristol. And Nottingham. I mean, look at this! Is that just this morning at Nottingham?

[Chris speaking:] Yes, this morning at Nottingham.

10:12:52 Fantastic, excellent. Yep, absolutely. So, flying the banner there.

10:13:01 [Chris speaking:] And finally the cricket crew had an OU student turned up to support them and was able to take a picture of the whole crew together which I think this is…

10:13:09 [Kit speaking:] Excellent, excellent. Oh yeah. No, student solidarity, that's absolutely fantastic. Yeah, I just quickly mention: do follow us on twitter if you're not already, @OUBUCU, I think, I'll double check that in a second, but do, yeah, absolutely follow us there because there's.

10:13:23 You'll see a lot of this stuff on there all the time. We're constantly updating with photos and images from around the country. Birmingham!

10:13:30 [Chris speaking:] Early this morning, you can see from the tell-tale dawn light this morning there was actually some sunshine later and we'll be hearing later from Kathryn Davis who are in that picture.

10:13:38 [Kit speaking:] Yes.

[Chris speaking:] Also this morning we sent a couple of people, Kate and co went along to Northampton, and they saw Jo Grady was in Northampton so they got a chance to see her give her speech there.

10:13:52 And, you know, and again we've got a nice little ‘Open University on tour’ banner there. So that's the end of the slideshow. And I will now return you back to the MC Kit.

10:14:04 [Kit speaking:] Lovely. Thank you very much, Chris, that was absolutely superb, and it is really great just to see, you know, as I say, we've got members all over the country, see people getting involved, joining enough picket lines, showing solidarity across, you know, this is a national action at the end of the day, you know, and we're, we're a national institution so it's really warming to see that and to see those connections being made as well so that's absolutely fantastic.

10:14:24 And, yeah, Caitlin's put the branch Twitter account there in the chat so do go ahead and follow that if you haven't already, because we're always you know we’re tweeting all the time, we’re retweeting, you know,

10:14:35 videos, photos from rallies, around rallies other people's picket lines all that kind of stuff and it's a really good way of keeping up with what's going on. Also dogs on picket lines, pets on picket lines which is always worth a look. Fantastic stuff.

10:14:47 Right. Okay. That was great and I think now then, what I'd like to do is to introduce our first speaker so this is, as I said, this is Mike Pendleton, who's a member of the branch at Sheffield, he’s also a historian and branch activist, and Sheffield are currently involved, as I said, in a local campaign to save their Archaeology and Languages Department, so it’s a really crucial local dispute they’ve got on there.

10:15:08 Mark, welcome to the rally. Great to see you. Thanks for joining us this morning.

[Mark speaking:] Thanks, Kit, it's good to be with you and not be on quite so cold a picket as it was yesterday morning for a few hours there.

10:15:20 But, honestly, first I have a huge thanks to all of you for inviting me along. I think you're getting a bit of Sheffield overload this week with Robyn joining you yesterday and me today but I'm going to try and focus my contributions a bit more on

10:15:31 on the local issues at Sheffield and what's happening there. And yesterday we had, off the back of our first day of strike, pickets, a rally called ‘United against cultural vandalism’, which was organized by our colleagues in archaeology,

10:15:44 to really bring attention to the local issues that are happening, mostly in our Faculty of Arts and Humanities but, as you'll see as I talk on, it's really an issue that's affecting the university as a whole.

10:15:54 And really, I think reflective of what's happening across the sector, but I guess one thing to say off the bat is, it's been really great to see such support, to have that support from branches like yours, where we'd seen that yesterday we had, as you saw, one of our former members Amy who came along as part of your ‘OU on tour”’, which was great to see.

10:16:27 And we also had people from Liverpool and Leicester branches coming up to speak at the rally which is, you know, off the back of their really inspiring and long-standing disputes there, it was great to have that cross-branch solidarity

10:16:26. So just to update you all where we're at, we actually have success successfully achieved a local mandate on the dispute that’s around Archaeology and Languages earlier, well, last month now. We haven't yet exercise that mandate, we're giving management one more chance to get back to the negotiating table, but I wanted to explain kind of how we got there and what the issues that are affecting our branch.

10:16:45 I think the first thing to say really though is that it's a weird and unusual situation in Sheffield in that I've been there for about a decade now, and we have largely had a reasonably good relationship locally between the branch and management.

10:16:59 Obviously, there have been the national issues which we’re on regularly in dispute over, around pensions, pay, conditions, casualization and so on. We've made some really important local progress on many of those issues, around issues like improved GTA contracts, increasing their support for migrant members – these are costs – really significant work on establishing gender pay gap targets, to some of the things that are part of the Four Fights dispute locally had been, we felt we had been making progress on.

10:17:26 But something really changed a couple of years ago with the arrival of the new Vice Chancellor, a real shift in management tone, and suddenly we started to see barriers being put up in front of the branch, access to information being denied, and just simply everything being a lot difficult, a lot more difficult to get anything done.

10:17:43 And I guess the most significant shift happened last summer. So while we were all drowning in significant workloads, I'm sure it was exactly the same for you guys.

10:17:52 You know, we also had many of us significant caring responsibilities, we were ill, a lot of us as well. And on the back of that, the university decided to really ramp up its aggressive approach to driving through changes.

10:18:05 Their first attempt was to try to fire and rehire. They announced plans to fire all 8000 plus staff at Sheffield and rehire us on worst terms and conditions.

10:18:15 I mean that's just an appalling tactic that everybody from Len McCluskey to Boris Johnson have actually condemned in public.

10:18:19 We fought that off, which was really great to see, and again we had lots of support from people around the sector for that, which we're really appreciative of.

10:18:31 Of course management didn't disappear when they lost that battle, and they then announced a raft of secretive reviews, which failed to consult anyone who knew what they were talking about, and then made decisions about their own recommendations.

10:18:41 And these changes rarely made sense pedagogically. So just to give you one example of that, there was a secret review of languages provision, for the foreign languages division, which contained precisely zero people with expertise in languages.

10:18:54 In fact, it failed to even consider my home school, the school of East Asian Studies, which has the largest provision of non-European language offerings in the university.

10:19:02 So just, complete kind of amateur hour, really. And then the final… so the pedagogy doesn't make sense, the kind of intellectual basis of it isn't there, of course, and the financial models also just failed to hold up to scrutiny.

10:19:16 The bigger issue, I think, for us, is that what seems to be happening in lots of other places too, is we have situations where there's no meaningful and independent oversight of any decisions,

10:19:29 so people decide to review something, they review it themselves, they come up with recommendations to themselves, they accept those recommendations and then implement them, without anybody actually having an opportunity to say: Is this a good idea? You know what, why are we doing this? And that's caused significant problems.

10:19:43 And another example of that, really, is the closure, the decision to close the Department of Archaeology.

10:19:50 And just to give you a little bit of context to that, we’re a world-leading department, hugely recognized internationally for its research and teaching, really an exceptional department that we… It's been a hugely important part of the university for 50 years, and at Sheffield UCU well it was kind of strange to get a sense of where, why they were making these decisions.

10:20:10 They argued kind of that it was financially not viable but that wasn't really the basis. We've got some great mathematicians and others who know how to work with numbers on our committee, and they did a deep dive and showed that actually even under their models which suggest 80% of our colleagues in that department are going to lose their jobs, there would be a net financial loss to the university, so it doesn't even make sense on a financial basis to be doing, making these kinds of decisions.

10:20:35 Anyway, and the other kind of side of this is, I guess, that professional services colleagues are also affected and this happens I think in many places increasingly where centralization is happening, they're encouraging a consolidation of professional services to port out of the front line of dealing with students and staff, and moving them increasingly into centralized kind of service positions. And none of that is justified on the basis of delivering good student experience or high quality research, or excellent teaching or any of the other things that the university claims to value.

10:21:10 And just on top of that, I guess the final thing to say about what we're dealing with, there's now a wholesale portfolio review where every single University program is under review, so it's just kind of a constant escalation of review and restructure without oversight and no ability for meaningful input from staff, and so essentially what we've done as a branch is I'm drawing a line under the sand on that and said ‘No more’.

10:21:32 We've asked for a very simple demand that nobody loses their job as a result of these two sets of processes happening in Archaeology and Languages, and the University at this point has refused to meet that demand, which is why we balloted, and won that ballot

10:21:47 Alongside that, we are concerned, concerned about decision making and working with members to look at measures by which we can independently or ourselves review what's going on with the university's decision making, because it's just not acceptable that we find ourselves in a situation, time and time again, where management, gets away with bad decisions with no consequences.

10:22:10 The other kind of thing maybe just to mention on that front, if anyone's been following the debacle over our Student Lifecycle project at Sheffield, it's a really great example of this.

10:22:18 They've sunk about 30 something million pounds into a student IT system, IT management system, which they just had to abandon, and this was originally where they’d been told repeatedly by our members, by the other campus trade unions, by anyone who knows anything, that it was not going to work, that the university management, went off in their own direction and spent millions and millions of pounds, and with no consequences. And this just cannot continue to happen.

10:22:48 Alright. So, I'm going to kind of wrap things up there I guess but I wanted to just kind of finish with something that I was thinking about yesterday, for those who may be, you know, thinking about what else happens around the world

10:22:59 Yesterday was also World AIDS Day and over the weekend, I was reading, Sarah Shulman's recent book *Let The Record Show* which is a political history of ACT UP in New York, in the 80s and 90s, and it's a really interesting book, if you haven’t had a chance I'd recommend picking it up because it… What it does is, it really kind of looks at the organization of ACT UP, the way it kind of moved politically in the city and the way in which it was able to force change.

10:23:26 And I wanted to just kind of share, share with you a little extract from that as a way to kind of bring my kind of contribution to a close. And she says, interestingly that:

10:23:39 “Most of the men and women in New York with AIDS never came to ACT UP or an ACT UP meeting. Most of the people who love someone with AIDS and wanted their lives to be saved, most of the people who felt empathy or identification with people with AIDS, never came to an ACT UP meeting or action. Most people after all, do not act to create change no matter what. But in order to change institutions we have to confront institutions, and institutions as well as the individual to gain their power by being associated with them become angry and punitive when they're questioned. In order to get out of hell, you have to be in hell, so pretending it's all fine and we'll all be fine, won't get you out.”

10:24:10 And you know I think what's really great from what Sarah's work has shown is that, you know, some… We often get criticized from management or from the press that you know majority of people don't take strike action or certain percentage of students don't support what we do.

10:24:23 But, but that's never the story of any kind of successful social movement. It's a social movement, social movements win when we actually are right, and we commit to actually, to a program, of actually demanding change and achieving it.

10:24:38 And so I want to finish with this kind of quote from Shulman: “A few committed activists and focused on being effective can accomplish a lot” And I've absolutely every faith in our members at Sheffield, and in a union nationally, that we can accomplish a lot, if we commit to these actions, locally and nationally, and fight for the wins that we deserve. Thanks very much for having me.

[Kit speaking:] Thank you so much, that was superb. And I'm very grateful for your time. I have to apologize, I can't see at the moment, for some reason my screen’s a bit funny, I can see if there's any questions from the audience at this point.

10:25:11 I think I had one if that's all right, which I was just curious to… What is it that you think, you said that historically you'd had reasonably good relations, what was it you think that drove the change in tone? Was it the change in the leadership team that led to the situation?

10:25:27 [Mark speaking: ] Yeah, so we had a change of Vice Chancellor a couple of years ago, and a new Vice Chancellor Koen Lamberts came from York, and there was some similar sets of problems the branch had there in terms of an attitude shift. Certainly, we have found things a lot more difficult since he’s arrived.

10:25:45 I think the problem that he's facing is that he has encountered a branch that is organized, has the respect of its members, and I think of a lot of non-members as well. We work really closely with our colleagues in Unite and Unison, people know that we have their interests at heart. As I'm sure your branch does as well.

10:26:04 And I think what, what he's not, he's underestimated us and, and this is I think a sign of that, that we're not going to put up with this any longer.

10:26:15 [Kit speaking:] No that's… absolutely. That's good stuff. And I think the point you made about accountability are really important. I mean one of the things that you were saying there, both in terms of your local actions and the quotes you were talking about there…

10:26:26 You're absolutely right that being correct is, it helps, like it's important and we are, especially, you know, with the Four Fights at the moment and with the pensions we're clearly in the right of it, we have the numbers on our side, we have the data on our side, we have the stories as well, I think, we have the narrative on our side. But you've also, you're absolutely right that the accountability only happens if we make it happen, right? I mean that's the bottom line we actually have to, you know...

10:26:52 People want management… management won't magically self-govern, self-regulate, self-control, we have to, it’s our job. That's what we're here for. We have to be that pressure, we have to be that forced to make them do that.

10:27:06 Great stuff, right, thank you.

[Mark speaking:] Yeah, it’s not glamorous work, is it? you know. But it is work that is, it needs to be persistent, it needs to be organized and, you know, if we can do that, I think we can… I mean you've shown this as well in your history as a branch that, you know, you can have real wins when you're organized and committed and hold people to account.

10:27:22 [Kit speaking:] Yeah, absolutely. And also I think as well, beyond a certain point, when you start winning the argument, you do start building momentum as well and that's really important to bear in mind, so yeah.

10:27:30 Mark, thank you so much. A fantastic speaker, really inspirational, wonderful to have you and there's some thanks been expressed in the Q&A as well, and wishing you every success with your actions at Sheffield and sending solidarity to you and your branch with your struggles there. So, thank you so much.

10:27:47 All right.

10:27:50 So, I've just heard, I've just heard by our reporter in the field! We have got, we've got Ben Wiedel-Kaufmann online with the… I'm going to butcher this name and I apologize in advance… Jacob Mukherjee from Goldsmiths, I understand we have you live, David. Oh my goodness I could see him! Can we go over to David? Can you hear us? Can you speak?

10:28:16 [David speaking:] Hello, hello. Can you hear me?

[Kit speaking:] Yes! We can hear! Oh my God, this is so exciting! Please introduce yourself to the rally.

10:28:24 [Jacob speaking:] Hi, everybody. Solidarity. My name is Jacob Mukherjee, I am the co-secretary of Goldsmiths UCU. Very happy to be here.

10:28:34 [Kit speaking:] Fantastic. Oh, absolutely thrilled to be joining you live from… This is just, I'm sorry, I'm just buzzing, I feel like, I was saying earlier, I feel like Kate Aidie or something I'm just…

[Jacob speaking:] I don’t know if you can… picket line in progress with Teach-out session going on behind me about police powers. Should the police have more powers? So yeah, it's all going on.

10:28:57 [Kit speaking:] Fantastic. Okay, that's great. So, so you're… So, this is the Goldsmiths rally so I understand you've got some, you've got some local disputes going on as well, haven’t you? as well as the national picture. Are you okay to talk a little bit about what you've got going on there?

10:29:11 Sure thing. So we're actually in the middle, almost bang in the middle of a three week strike, just so happens that the National Action falls within the middle of our local action.

10:29:22 Our strike is over the threat of 52 redundancies at Goldsmiths. The redundancies plans fall across three areas: professional services, English and Creative writing, and History.

10:29:37 Part of the backgrounds of this is that these cuts, these job cuts, have been demanded by the banks, Lloyds and NatWest, as a condition for loans that they’ve given to the university. Loans which we argue that the university didn’t need and are using as a pretext for cuts that they wanted to make in any case.

10:29:59 So we had a huge strike ballot result: 86% in favour of strike actually on a 70% turnout.

10:30:06 And then we voted at a branch meeting overwhelmingly for three weeks of action to bring management to the negotiating table.

10:30:16 So we think this is a dispute of national significance because what we've got here is third-party financial institutions having a say essentially in the running of the university. The deals that management have done with these banks are extremely worrying in terms of the details, and we don't know all the details we're asking for them to open the books and tell us the full picture. What we do know is that the collateral for the loans that the banks have given to the university is the university.

10:30:50 So if the university were to default on these loans, the banks would own Goldsmiths, which is a sinister prospect. But also, another condition of the loans is to require management, to require the university to run a surplus until 2040, which, you know, no government in its right mind would sign up to.

10:31:13 And so basically what we've got is management in league with the banks engaged in an austerity program.

10:31:20 So today actually we're marching, assembling at 12, for anyone who is in the South London area, assembling at 12 in our picket line. And we're marching down to local branches of Lloyds and NatWest, and we're going to be saying to those banks, since you now own Goldsmiths, maybe you can help us out with one or two things.

10:31:45 So we've got people who are going to be asking the banks, you know, can you help me get disability support, some students are, you know, worried about the cuts that have already happened to professional services here and asking if since the banks are making a profit, making a killing out of this deal and out of education, and out of students’ tuition fees and lecturers’ labour and professional services work’s labour, well then perhaps they can, can do something in return for us.

10:32:07 And so yes, we are on a three-weeks strike. We're looking for solidarity. We're looking for donations to our strike fund to allow casualised and poorly paid workers, members of our union to take part in the action.

10:32:21 It's going to cost us a lot over this period, and we want everyone to be able to take part in the action. And the other thing to mention is that for anyone in London, 12:30 tomorrow, there’s a UCU London Region march, which is going to take in NatWest headquarters, central London headquarters.

10:32:42 And that shows how seriously, the UCU movement more broadly is taking this dispute and it is a dispute of national significance. We need to win this. If we don't win this, if we allow the banks to have a say in the running of the university that sets a very dangerous precedent.

10:32:58 So yeah, thank you very much for having me. Solidarity to you all in your own actions, if you are able to take a look at our social media feeds and our website, you find the link to our strike fund, please distribute it and share it widely.

10:33:15 If you have wealthy friends, lovers, relatives, whatever, ask them for a donation, we're looking to be able to allow hourly-paid lecturers, low paid Professional Services staff and others to take a full part in this action.

10:33:33 But, yeah, thank you very much for having me.

10:33:43 [Kit speaking:] No, thank you so much Jacob and yeah absolutely solidarity from the Open University. It does sound like an incredibly important fight you're in there and as you say it's really the thin edge of the, end of the wedge, isn't it? in terms of like we cannot really be in a situation in which banks are dictating the terms of a university either financially or in terms of what they choose to present. So yeah, that's an enormously important fight and I'm really grateful to you for taking the time today to bring it to our members attention and give them more information on that. We will of course circulate the information widely, we've already provided links to your local UCU site so people can go in and see what you've got going on there and the strike fund as well, and will continue to tweet and so forth. Details of the march going out as well. So, can you just, just give us again briefly the timings for today as well in case we got any members who are here who will be able to make it down.

[Jacob speaking:] So today, we're assembling at 12pm, at the main entrance to Goldsmiths on Lewisham Way for a small rally, and then we'll be marching down the road to the Lewisham branches of Lloyd's and NatWest, where we'll be having some speeches and doing some actions to highlight the role of the banks in this dispute.

[Kit speaking:] Great stuff. Thank you very much, Jacob, yes anyone who's listening please, please do make your way down there and help us show solidarity with the Goldsmiths branch there and that really important fight.

10:34:55 Amazing! Live broadcasts from the picket line! I'm so thrilled. This is, what an incredible thing to be able to do. I feel like, I don't know. Brave New World. Amazing. Thank you. And thank you, Jacob, for joining us and thank you very much indeed.

10:35:09 Okay, so that was live from the Goldsmiths rally. We've now actually, we're going to be going live over to Birmingham shortly to visit David and Cath, branch members, Exec members indeed, who are over at the Birmingham picket line right now but before that we do have a short film related to the Goldsmiths dispute, we'd like to show you, so Chris is cueing it up now.

10:35:52 Okay, the videos, we can see the video but we're not getting any sound. Unfortunately, Chris, sorry I don't know if there's something we can fix.

*10:36:04 [video shown] So me. So me. So me. So me. So me. So Goldsmiths. But making staff redundant. Take away those courses. Use our tuition fees to pay off the banks. I really hate these choices that are taken away from students.*

*10:36:25 If I would have known that, I would have gone somewhere else. If I had known that this would be threatening, I would have gone elsewhere. I would have stayed away. I would have gone elsewhere.*

*10:36:35 We’re saying no to these redundancies. So not Goldsmiths. So not Goldsmiths. I support the strike.*

10:36:49 [Kit speaking:] Right stuff. Thank you, Chris. That was superb.

10:36:52 So yeah, as you said, please do. Please do support that action. Any way you can we provided the links in the chat there. If any of you live locally and you can get down to either today or tomorrow to rallies or picket lines, please do that and yes support the hardship fund as well if you are able to do so.

10:37:08 Okay, fantastic. And now, I believe. I'm able to throw over live to

10:37:25 … and now live from the picket line in Birmingham, along with Cath, David, Cath, how’re you doing? Can you hear me?

10:37:30 [Cath speaking:] We can. We're good, thanks. Can you hear us?

[Kit speaking:] Yes, loud and clear, fantastic right. Show us what's going on.

10:38:02 So we've been in the picket line in Birmingham

[variety of people speaking]

10:38:10 Picket line baby. Fantastic.

We had a picket line dog earlier, didn’t we?

Yes, we had a picket line dog.

So lots going on here.

[Cath speaking:] So we’ve been doing a tour of Birmingham picket lines, they've got the on all the different gates, this is one by the railway station, really effective here. Brilliant.

[Kit speaking:] Fantastic.

10:38:21 And they’ve come round with treats, as well. We’ve had chocolate, and everything coming round, nothing but the best for the strikers here.

10:38:22 It was inspiring to hear how much the student support is here as well it was 76%, something like that.

[Kit speaking:] Oh, that's amazing. That's fantastic news. So, so, looks like an amazing turnout. Good weather, looks a little chilly, though, you’re all keeping warm there, I hope.

10:38:51 Oh, thank you very much. More chocolate.

10:38:51 No, we’ve been eating lots of chocolate. No snow like there was in Milton Keynes. It’s quite chilly here. It’s a fantastic lot here.

10:38:57 [Kit speaking:] Fantastic.

10:38:57 [Cath speaking:] We’re stealing all their ideas for next time. They had music on their first picket line.

10:39:07 [Kit speaking:] I don't think it counts as stealing if we're doing it for union activities. I think that’s sharing best practice, Cath.

10:39:12 [Cath speaking:] I like it, sharing best practice that's it then if you nick all their ideas,

10:39:19 [Kit speaking:] Wonderful stuff so, and it looks like spirits are high as well over there, one seems to be.

10:39:24 [Cath speaking:] Yeah, we've been having quite a lot of people hooting for us, haven’t we, as well.

[Kit speaking:] Wonderful. And as you say good student support, which is nice to hear we're seeing a lot of that online for the OU as well but obviously… because with distance learning, it must be great to get that direct contact with students and get to see them face to face as it were. It must be superb.

10:39:51 [Cath speaking:] Absolutely. We’ll have to get more onto campus just to support us, won’t we?

10:39:57 [Kit speaking:] We’ll have to figure out how to do that, that's great.

10:40:05 Yeah, absolutely brilliant. So, so how, how are you finding the touring of picket lines activities? Is that, you know, as you said you're learning ideas for something to bring back here I assume and.

10:40:21 [Cath speaking:] Definitely, yeah... and it’s just so nice to…

[voice speaking]

10:40:30 …Maybe next time.

10:40:33 [Cath speaking:] I will be traveling with great enthusiasm and Kit you must be able to get something from Springsteen for the playlist, right.

10:40:40 [Kit speaking:] Oh well, I would think so, yeah.

10:40:43 The, the cover of We shall overcome from the Sega sessions was pretty

[Cath speaking:] Oh yeah, we will go to that, definitely

[Kit speaking:] We can definitely get that on there. That's great. Yeah, okay. Well, it was fantastic to see you both and really superb to see the Birmingham picket line, please pass along our love and solidarity and instruct everybody to stay warm and stay cheerful, that's absolutely glorious.

[Cath speaking:] Lovely, lovely to speak to everyone. Take care.

[Kit speaking:] Thanks for joining us.

[Cath speaking:] Thanks. Bye.

10:41:08 [Kit speaking:] Thank you. Bye. Goodness me. I've just… This is just so great. Okay. So, just a reminder to our members, of members on tour. So far, we've, we've had photographs and all live footage and videos and so forth, from Bristol, Sheffield, York, Northampton, Sussex, Goldsmiths, Birkbeck and more. And a reminder to anyone, sort of living in the London area that we've got, there's loads of stuff happening, lots of stuff happening there as well.

10:41:39 Blimey, I'm a little flummoxed, to be honest, that was just absolutely superb and I'm really kind of, really buzzed.

10:41:48 So, yeah, okay, so, sorry going back to, to my sort of list of activity so, just running through some of the other things that that we know about that are happening at the moment.

10:41:59 So there's some UC National are running some teach-outs on green issues. They're running those today and tomorrow, and I think we’ll be hopefully, we'll be able to link to some details that in the chat but if you just go to the UCU national website, it should be fairly straightforward to find that from there. But do check that out and if the timing fits with what you're wanting to do, then go ahead and check them out,

10:42:24 Oh I've got, in fact, Caitlin, branch president, is on the call, she's willing to talk a little bit about that. Yeah, go ahead. Caitlin please be happy to hear a bit more about that.

10:42:37 [Caitlin speaking:] Hi there, everyone!

10:42:38 Yes, so just a reminder that there are some national teach-outs on green issues. One of them is today, 2 to 3:30pm, and that's on Fossil-Free careers.

10:42:48 And tomorrow afternoon from 2 to 3 UCU’s Green New Deal, and the Just Transition in the climate emergency. So those are two important things that are coming up.

10:42:59 I think also there's been already a mention of London's rally on Friday, tomorrow.

10:43:05 So just a reminder that that's forming up 12:30 at Tavistock Square. And then there's going to be march to Bank afterwards. We do have some branch members who are already planning to go and they are taking our branch banner with them.

10:43:17 So if you're interested, contact the office, and we'll put the details in the chat pane, and we'd love to see you there if you can get there. Thanks so much.

[Kit talking:] Great stuff. Thanks so much for that, Caitlin, really helpful. Yeah. Do go out there and get involved if you're able to that's really superb stuff. I’m glad to know that we’ll be flying the flag there at the march tomorrow, that's brilliant.

10:43:38 So I just have another look at what else I got to run through here.

10:43:42 We, London's also got some online rallies happening today as well. So again, probably worth checking the national site there and sending the links out.

10:43:52 I want to talk a brief, a bit about what we're going to be doing tomorrow as well. Just to kind of flag that up. So, tomorrow our focus is going to be on job insecurity and food insecurity in particular, one of the guest speakers, we're going to be having is, well a couple of the guests, hopefully, are going to be based in food banks around the country, talking about, you know, food precarity and what we can do to address it.

10:44:19 So, in advance of that, if anyone listen to this, if you do have a chance or an opportunity to do… I mean anything really to reach out to your local food bank whether that's going to make a donation, maybe taking some photographs or even just promoting a local food banks work on social media or anything you can do along those lines would be great.

10:44:36 And if you want to get us details of what you've done so that we can talk about it as part of tomorrow's rally that would be fantastic. Just as I think most of you know we've got a Slack channel you can use to just post photographs and, text,

10:44:50 if you want to or you can email the UCU mailbox at the OU if that's easier, but just get in touch with us and let us know and then we'll be happy to incorporate that into tomorrow. Obviously, this is, you know, it's a burning issue in the country right now.

10:45:05 And, you know, there is a direct link obviously between job insecurity and food insecurity, so it does speak to kind of the wider issues around some of the reasons that we’re striking.

10:45:17 I did also, there was something that was mentioned in the Q&A earlier that I want to make sure I do bring up before we close this just to say that.

10:45:24 Obviously the face-to-face picket lines stuff is all very exciting and it's great stuff, but I also want to put a special shout out to all of you I know who are observing the virtual picket line.

10:45:34 You know you're not engaging with your online work during this period but also are picketing online so you're, you know you're posting on Twitter, you're using the hashtags that link into the UCU strike to spread some wonderful photographs of, you know, people sitting outside of their own offices at home with a candle in place of a brazier or just sitting there and reading a newspaper instead of working or, I see some wonderful kind of pets, and all the toys, teddies on strike all that stuff, fantastic stuff please keep it going. It really does all matter as well I want to make that point like it's really,

10:46:14 all of that stuff that gets posted on Twitter, on Facebook, it is visible, and it does make a difference it raises awareness of what's going on.

10:46:22 It does send a message to management that a lot of us are, you know, are withdrawing our labour over these issues, and that's absolutely crucial.

10:46:29 As you heard earlier it's that level of determination is what we need in order to get movement on this action and it's, you know, it's desperately sad that we're forced into this position but that's where we are, you know, management, will you know…

10:46:43 They made it clear by their actions. They’ll only respond to our demands in a meaningful way if we, if they know that the threat of withdrawing labour is serious.

10:46:53 So, anything you can do that helps publicize that you're on strike and why you're doing it.

10:46:56 Believe me, every single tweet, every single Facebook post, every single, you know piece of social media like that doesn't make a difference. Do be polite, do be playful, do be humorous, but do make the point that that's what's going on. You know we shared the branch Twitter account earlier.

10:47:13 Feel free to tag us in any of those photos we’ll be happy to retweet them, the Twitter hashtag #WhyImStriking, yes – Caitlin’s mentioning that in the chat – is making visible, a lot of the stories of precarious work in HE and also the concerns around pensions, working conditions, all of that stuff. So yeah, if you do feel that able and willing to share your story of why I'm striking use that hashtag. And, again, we can make sure that this all gets posted and people see, as we've heard, and as we've seen from… if any of you’s seen the interviews that Jo Grady’s given yesterday to national and local news.

10:47:47 You know, so far that the turnout is as good or better than we've ever seen before in this kind of an action nationally. Enormous students support, which is absolutely crucial and again, I think it's hard for us at the OU sometimes to see that visibly because of the nature of how we deliver our teaching but I can promise you that we're seeing messages of support from students coming through via social media via emails and also, you know, that's reflected in the national picture where the NUS are very strongly supporting the action, and that, that really helps us in terms of, it makes it harder for management to paint this as being staff versus students. It’s absolutely not, we’re united.

10:48:26 Students increasingly understand that our working conditions are their learning conditions, we can only deliver effective teaching and effective support for that teaching, if we're a healthy and happy workforce and we're far from that at the moment because of the financial situations that we're facing. And because of the enormous workloads that we're all struggling with at the moment. So, and again, that it's really powerful that stuff it, it gives management nowhere to hide and it should hopefully force them to the table.

I'm being asked if we can, if Chris has asked if we can show a picture of cakes that have been baked. I'm sad that you feel the need to ask Chris. Of course, cakes, it goes without saying are always welcome, so please go ahead and share the photo of cake.

10:49:10 I think I demand it. Oh look at that!

[Chris speaking:] This is what Anita has been doing in Wales, with the OU shield cakes for picket lines, dragon cakes for picket lines and so I know all over the country, and what’s been popping up on Twitter, in particular, is OU staff helping out with local pickets and all sorts of things. Lobbying online. I'm picking up arguments online, I think we can be pretty proud of things because as a branch, what we've been doing this last couple of days and what we're going to continue to be doing… I said all over the country, I meant all over the state, across all four nations, you know, we've been taking an active part in supporting this whole strike, so I think we need to give ourselves a clap, basically. And that's the case, that’s really nice, Anita.

[Kit speaking:] Yeah, they look absolutely fantastic. And, yeah, I'm a little bit jealous, if I’m honest.

10:50:04 But they look great. Anita, thank you so much, you’re an absolute star. Okay, I'm just going to have a quick look at the Q&A, so I can see some stuff coming in I know we're going to be finishing at 11.

10:50:12 So we've only got 10 minutes to run, but I'm just gonna have a quick look and see if there's any okay, I’m not seeing any questions.

10:50:21 There we go, cake in Wales, yes, that was asked as a question, fantastic. Okay. Good stuff. And the other thing I did want to mention is that we, we do have a lot of colleagues who’ll be coming straight out of the strike actually to teach on Saturday as well.

10:50:36 And I just wanted to, you know, recognize that. And, and thank you again for your dedication both to this action and to your students and I know that you've been put in a very difficult position.

10:50:48 And it's very frustrating. So, you know, I just wanted to acknowledge that publicly and say thank you so much to every single one of you that’s supporting this action.

10:50:56 But I know it's not easy.

10:50:58 Okay, so I just want to remind everybody then, of what we've got coming up as we're as we're approaching the end of the rally.

10:51:07 So there's a members-only meeting that starts at 11:15. So encourage anyone here who's a member to come along to that.

10:51:15 The focus of the members’ meeting is going to be organizing to win. We got some interesting conversation activities lined up for that so please do come along, you'd be enormously welcome, and as a way of helping us kind of build on the action and build on the energy and momentum that we're all feeling at the moment.

10:51:36 So please do come along, I promise it'll be entertaining and you'll learn some stuff and it'll give you an opportunity to contribute as well.

10:51:41 So, so please do go ahead and do that.

10:51:45 And also part of that activity is building lobbying efforts so there was a, we did a brief kind of workshop / discussion yesterday, on writing to your MP and how to produce a letter to your MP that will command a response, so we'll be continuing that today. We're also going to be doing a one on one on social media very important so those of you who heard me talking earlier about Twitter or Facebook, maybe feeling a bit of trepidation so unsure of how to present what kind of things to say some dos and donts.

10:52:15 Do come along, we've got some, you know, will be delivering some, some thoughts on that that will hopefully help build your confidence in using them, they are incredibly powerful tools when used right, critical to campaigning especially for an institution like ours, but I do appreciate that, you know, for some people coming fresh to it, or who feel a little bit anxious, you want to make sure that you're using it in the correct way. So, yeah, please do, please do come along at 11:15 for all of that.

10:52:46 And, and we're rallying again. So we have a day three rally tomorrow, same time, 10 o'clock so if you enjoyed yourself today do come back, do spread the word as well get, let everybody know that that's going on. We’ll be delivering further updates from picket lines, discussing the OU on tour, as I said, we're also going to be focusing on food precarity, so we've got a guest from at least one Food Bank maybe a guest from a couple coming in, we'll be talking about that.

10:53:15 And it looks like we'll also be talking about the UCU dispute with the University of Sussex on USS, casualisation so forth so that's good. And there will be music tomorrow, so I'm just gonna, I'm gonna tease that now. Chris, yeah, go ahead, apparently we’ve got Jo Grady with the univers… oh! Look at that! Go ahead, Chris.

10:53:37 [Chris speaking:] Thanks very much, to Kate and co who were down in Northampton guys, got a pic of Jo who's, as ever, the best dressed picket in the universe.

10:53:49 Next time, University on tour placard, so it's good to see that we're out and about all over different places around the country and supporting our comrades in other branches and, I don’t know, I'm kind of liking this whole sort of virtual presence thing,

10:54:03 you know, but also big shout out particularly for the Nottingham people because I didn't have to get up at five this morning to get to Nottingham, because a whole bunch of other people did.

10:54:11 And thank you ever so much for that they're the ones, I think they’re warming up in the cake shop right now. So thanks to everyone who did get up and didn’t do a virtual thing, where I’m sat here in my nighty, you know, with a three-minute commute.

I think it’s really good this rally and the rally before and hopefully tomorrow will be as well. It’s like joining together people who are doing a lot of different work for the branch, and also for the union, and for our comrades and colleagues outside the union as well, and I think we will win.

[Kit speaking:] Absolutely, yeah, completely agree. Thank you so much for this, Chris. We have five minutes to run but I don’t see any reason why we can’t bring it to a close early, and take an extended break. Those of you who are members who will be joining us again at 11:15, so you should have your separate meeting request invite, so please join us, you’ll be enormously welcome, we’d love to see you. Thanks to all of our amazing speakers and guests today and for the live broadcast, that was an absolute thrill, really exciting stuff. And yeah, thank you to all of you for joining, and showing your solidarity and support for this action today. It’s really good to see you all. And, again, yeah, same time tomorrow, 10 o’clock, look forward to seeing many of you there. And with that, I will call this rally to a close. Thank you.