



U.S. Progressive Scholars Stand in Solidarity with Striking Instructors in the UK

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Scholars for Social Justice (SSJ) is a new formation of over one hundred progressive scholars, located in more than forty institutions in the United States, and growing rapidly.

SSJ stands in solidarity with our colleagues in the United Kingdom who have entered a third week of a strike wave action in defense of their pensions. With more than 400,000 members, the Universities Superannuation Scheme has rejected their employer's attempt to offload and individualize pension liabilities such that University faculty and staff will experience a 10-40% reduction in their future retirement income. Beyond these very concrete material consequences, this shift from a defined benefit scheme to a contribution scheme subject to the whims of the stock market constitutes one more battle in the struggle over whether higher education will remain a public good in any meaningful sense.

As scholars committed to advancing a political agenda of equality and justice that centers the experiences of the most marginalized in our communities, we view the effort to privatize pensions as part of a broader effort to undermine equity and access in higher education. In the United Kingdom, the proposed pension plan arrives after the introduction of a fee system that has expanded University revenues at the expense of students. It also comes at a moment when the power of organized labor on University campuses has been whittled away by the conservative government. These are not trends unique to the United Kingdom. On University campuses across the world, we are all subject to the consequences of underinvestment in higher education, casualization of the faculty, administrative bloat and rising student debt, which ensure that only the wealthy and most privileged in our societies can fully access the university as either students or faculty.

On both sides of the Atlantic, these trends have coincided with efforts to increase access to underrepresented groups and women. In their commitments to equity and inclusion, universities aspire to create an intellectual community that represents an increasingly diverse and global society. However, the privatization of higher education continuously undermines these efforts and reproduces the very inequalities that a commitment to inclusion is meant to combat. Women and people of color are thus incorporated at the very moment in which the benefits of inclusion are eroded and the costs of entry are raised. For instance, the proposed changes to the pensions will disproportionately affect younger lecturers while protecting the entitlements of older faculty. Insofar as any gains in diversity and inclusion have largely been made among younger generations of faculty, women and people of color that have only recently joined the ranks will bear the brunt of this policy.

SSJ stands with our colleagues in the UK to demand a different vision of the university, one that is committed to higher education as a public good, where the faculty and staff who do the labor of teaching are fairly and adequately compensated for the work they do, and where they play a central role in governing their universities. These are the necessary conditions for ensuring that diversity and inclusion do not reproduce hierarchies, but instead lay the foundation for a democratic and egalitarian university.

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