'Teachers should put the interests of pupils ahead of financial concerns' by Francis Bennion

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Teachers should put the interests of pupils ahead of financial concerns

Striking does not put students first.

Sir.

[On 14 June the National Union of Teachers issued a press release announcing that in a ballot for a strike "to defend teachers' pensions", with a turnout of 40% of the NUT membership, 92% voted in favour. They will be joined by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, who have had a similar result in their own strike ballot.] A day of national strike action has been called for June 30.

I first experienced this kind of situation in 1970. Two NUT members, Ray Bryant and Colin Leicester, were trying to form a no-strike breakaway union and asked for my help. [In their 1991 book on this they said that it was reported on February 16 1970 that "the NUT's action committee's recommendation of sanctions against the public examinations implied the union's readiness to continue the salaries campaign into the summer." They added: "The threat to the examinations brought forth a response in the form of Francis Bennion's 'Save the 70' exams' campaign, launched . . . with the objective of recruiting 50,000 volunteers to supervise GCE and CSE examinations".

As their book goes on to explain, Bryant and Leicester asked for my help.] The upshot was the formation of the Professional Association of Teachers (PAT). It had (and still has) as a cardinal rule: "Members shall not go on strike in any circumstances". PAT believes that [it is unprofessional not to] teachers must put the interests of pupils ahead of their own [those of their teachers. As the author of a book on professional ethics I agree.

So too does the General Teaching Council for England. In its Code of Conduct, published in 2009, eight principles of conduct and practice are laid down. The first is that teachers must "put the wellbeing, development and progress of children and young people first".] At least one million children could be affected by the threatened strikes. This must cause youngsters facing exams great anxiety, as it did when I was prompted to take action back in 1970. Clearly the present striking teachers are not putting their pupils' wellbeing first.

Francis Bennion, [Emeritus Chairman, Professional Association of Teachers.]¹

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