Scottish council strikes suspended as government and councils make new offer

The Scottish council strikes due to take place during COP26 have been suspended due to the Scottish government and Scottish councils' umbrella body COSLA, making a new pay offer, *reports Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot.*

The new offer came at the eleventh hour as council workers in Glasgow were preparing to strike from Monday 1 November, with members of the GMB union threatening to cease all refuse collection and severely disrupt schools in the City as it hosts the world leaders attending COP26.

The revised pay offer came after months of stalling by the employers and government saying there was no further money to afford a better offer than that rejected by the three unions representing the 120,000 council workers affected by the pay award. Negotiations have stalled for 18 months as essential workers continued to work throughout the pandemic without any pay increase.

According to unions and media reports, the new money came in the form of an additional last minute £30 million funding from the Scottish government and £18.5 million from within existing council budgets. The new offer amounts to a flat rate rise of £1,062 for those earning below £25,000 per year (the majority of workers), representing a 5.89% percent pay rise for those on the lowest pay. The pay award is backdated to April 2021 and runs for 12 months.

The unions have suspended the threatened strikes, including those in Glasgow due to start on Monday 1 November, and will now consult members about whether to accept the pay award over the next fortnight. Unions will also almost immediately begin

negotiations over a new pay award from April 2022 at a time when the cost-of-living is spiralling upwards across Britain, particularly energy costs which are a higher burden in Scotland due to the colder climate. Official UK inflation is already over 4% and set to rise in coming months.

The offer falls well short of the joint demand by the unions for a £2,000/£10 per hour minimum pay award, but by winning a mandate for industrial action, despite the legal obstacles, and effective public campaigning the unions have shown how employers can be challenged on pay by the threat of strike action. The funding of the revised offer also indicates that despite trying to wash its hands of the dispute the Scottish government of the SNP, in alliance with the Scottish Green Party, is a key player in council finances and pressure needs to be kept up on them for decent public services at council level and a reversal of all cuts.