

8,000 schools across England and Wales gear up for teachers' strike chaos

LONDON — A third of schools are expected to be thrown into chaos as teachers stage their first national strike in 21 years — with threats of further industrial action to come.

Up to 8,000 primary, secondary and special schools are being forced to close — or turn entire classes away — because of the one-day walkout.

The National Union of Teachers refused to rule out a rolling programme of strikes later this year as the British government appeared unlikely to cave in to demands for

improved pay. The union — representing almost half of the teachers in England and Wales — insist that this year's 2.45-per-cent rise represents a real-terms cut, following a huge increase in the cost of living.

College lecturers, job centre workers, coastguards, driving examiners and other civil servants were also preparing to walk out in separate pay disputes.

The combined action will represent one of the most disruptive days of industrial action since Labour came to power.

Research by *The Daily Telegraph*

indicated almost 8,000 out of 24,000 schools will be affected across England and Wales.

About half of those hit will close altogether and others will operate on reduced timetables.

The British Chambers of Commerce warned the strike could cost businesses up to £68 million (\$182 million) in lost working hours because parents will have to take time off work or pay for extra childcare.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown urged staff to "reconsider" any further industrial action.

"I hope that after reflection, the teachers will reconsider the action they are going to take in the future on this matter."

More than 50 rallies were due to be held by striking workers yesterday. Up to 250 colleges will be affected as lecturers walk out across England. Ten government departments and agencies will be hit.

Hundreds of coastguards will strike and passport workers at airports, including Heathrow's Terminal 5, which has been hit by delays, will also go on strike.

— THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Abstinence 'not effective'

\$1.8b in funding but teen pregnancy, STD rates unchanged

WASHINGTON — Programmes teaching schoolchildren in the United States to abstain from sex have not cut teen pregnancies or sexually-transmitted diseases or delayed the age at which sex begins.

Health groups told US Congress this on Wednesday, reported *Reuters*.

The Bush administration, however, voiced continuing support for such programmes during a hearing before a House of Representatives panel.

This, even as many Democrats called to cut off federal money for so-called abstinence-only instruction, said *Reuters*.

"Vast sums of federal money continues to be directed to the programmes. In fact, evidence suggests some are even harmful and have negative consequences by not providing adequate information for sexually active teens," the news service quoted Dr Margaret Blythe of the American Academy of Paediatrics as saying.

The programmes are supported by social conservatives who oppose the teaching of contraceptive methods to teenagers.

Reuters said the programmes had received about US\$1.3 billion (\$1.8 billion) in federal funds since the late 1990s. Seventeen of the 50 US states refuse to accept federal funds for such programmes.

Experts from the American Public Health Association and US Institute of Medicine testi-

fied that scientific studies have not found that abstinence-only teaching works to cut pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases or the age when sexual activity begins.

The American Psychological Association and American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have criticised the abstinence-only programmes.

Dr Blythe said comprehensive sex education programmes should emphasise abstinence as the best way for a teenager to avoid pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease.

"Adolescents who choose to abstain from intercourse should obviously be encouraged

and supported in their decisions by their families, peers and communities. But abstinence should not be the only strategy discussed," she was quoted as saying by *Reuters*.

Lawmakers cited government statistics showing that one in four US teenage girls has a sexually-transmitted disease and 30 per cent of American girls become pregnant before the age of 20.

Republicans said even if some abstinence-only programmes do not work, others do, and it would be wrong to end the funding.

Mr Charles Keckler of the US Department of Health and Human Services said the Bush administration believes abstinence education programmes send the healthiest message.

Mr Stan Weed, director of the Utah-based Institute for Research and Evaluation, said research casts doubt on the effectiveness of comprehensive sex education programmes.

Abstinence should not be the only strategy discussed.

— Dr Margaret Blythe of the American Academy of Paediatrics



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