

## **University negotiations at a critical point**

### **- gearing up for a strike**

The principal negotiators in the university sector returned to the negotiating table on 25 February. The employee union organisations presented their response to the written proposal of the Employers' Association of Universities in Finland (SYTY) and the negotiations were scheduled to continue on Friday, 26 February and, if necessary, on 1 and 2 March.

The employer has proposed terms and conditions of employment that will clearly be weaker than the existing conditions. For example, the period of salaried sickness leave would be radically shorter than the currently applicable period. This would mean, for example, that the employee would quite quickly begin to receive, instead of salary, the sickness allowance provided by Kela, and would no longer accrue annual holiday during the sick leave.

The working hour flexibility within the scope of the Working Hours Act (Työaikalaki 605/1996) would be implemented in the manner determined by the employer, for instance, a 9-hour day and a 48-hour week or, as separately agreed on locally, a 10-hour day and 60-hour week. Additionally, the employer could elect for regular working hours on a Sunday without the approval of the employee.

The employer is proposing that the agreement on yearly total working hours of 1,600 hours, previously applicable to the teaching staff, be expanded to cover researchers as well, but without the necessary protective regulations. In the future, researchers could, thus, be assigned teaching tasks or other new duties without any clear boundaries. If this is the case, doctoral students, for example, would be without any protection. There remains a good deal of confusion concerning the maximum teaching duty in instruction-oriented positions, and there is a clear danger that the workload in these groups would increase.

The current situation, in which there is no valid agreement, causes great insecurity regarding the type of working hour and working hour supervision system the teaching staff will have in the future. The university reform promised that the teaching and research personnel would be able to focus more on their own core competencies and tasks.

As there is currently no valid agreement, the universities have not conducted the assessments required for the salary system, and, thus, employees have not received the due salary increases. The employer has proposed changes to the assessment system, but the consequences of these changes are uncertain.

Furthermore, weaker conditions have been proposed for, among other areas, the shop steward and occupational safety and health system, and the co-operation (YT) negotiations. Due to the lack of a valid agreement, the universities are already now unclear about who is representing the employees in important matters, such as in YT negotiations.

The employer has not made a new salary offer since its earlier near-zero offer. The next discussion concerning money will take place when a solution is reached in the collective negotiations for state civil servants.

This uncertainty cannot continue for long. Therefore, all of the principal contractual organisations representing the employees of the universities have made their decision regarding future industrial actions. They are prepared to give notice of a strike within the next week. The strike can begin, at

the earliest, within two weeks of the notice. The strike notice will contain the limitations and duration of the strike.

Members should closely monitor the information provided by their own unions and local strike organisations.

Members may also contact their own organisation or shop steward for more information.

JUKO, Pardia, JHL