

Unison members say YES to strike

Roger Davey
Unison Health SGE,
personal capacity

Unison members have voted overwhelmingly to take strike action in defence of their public sector pensions.

It means that 30 November will witness one of the biggest single demonstrations of working class power since the 1926 general strike, and it is a decisive step against the Con-Dem government and its policy of austerity and cuts.

Almost 80% of Unison members who voted said yes to strike action, with a turnout of almost 30%. This is a great result and clearly shows the anger and bitterness that exists among the working class and their determination to fight back.

In fact such is the enthusiasm of public sector workers to fight back that thousands have been recruited to the union.

In the health sector, the vote was in excess of 80% in favour of strike action and will mean the first day of national action in the NHS since 1982.

The size of the majority in favour of action reflects not only the unprecedented attack on pensions, but also the government drive towards privatisation, and the relentless attacks on health workers' living standards.

It is clear that the latest government proposals concerning pensions represented no real concessions and were made with a view to winning public opinion and dividing the trade unions.

The Unison health service group executive (SGE), which met on 3 November, reflected the determination of members to take action against the government, with no compromise over our existing fundamental pension rights.

The dominant mood of the health SGE meeting was that all efforts must be geared towards building for 30 November in order to ensure what will be the biggest day of strike action that Unison has ever organised.

We also have to be prepared for a long struggle, with a strategy of action to build on 30 November, including further national coordinated action.



Marching on 26 March photo Paul Mattsson

Southampton Sink Tory cuts!

At mass meetings of Unite and Unison Southampton council workers, it was agreed to carry on with industrial action short of a strike until the ballot result on the council's latest offer is known. Voting started on 4 November and the Unite shop stewards are recommending a 'no' vote.

After the months of sacrifices made by striking council workers, this opportunity to escalate the action must be seized with a resounding NO vote to this pitiful offer. The successful strikes of recent months and the enormous public support have shown that the Tory council's cuts will not be accepted.

With the 24-hour national public sector strike looming on 30 November, over three million workers will join the fight against the cuts. It will

show the massive opposition that is growing to the austerity agenda and will give huge confidence to all those facing the cuts.

It is essential that the connection is made in Southampton between all trade unions, private and public, whose members will suffer the proposed council cuts in reduced services and higher taxes. All must be called on to back the campaign. This means a call for a mass demonstration in the city on a Saturday to mobilise the full backing and support of the trade unions, our communities, youth, students and pensioners against the cuts.

A show of mass support will then give confidence to council workers to support a campaign of escalated strike action to reverse the cuts.

Bombardier protest against job losses



Marching through Derby earlier this year photo Paul Mattsson

Becci Heagney

Around 40 Bombardier workers, trade unionists and members of the community protested outside the Derby and Derbyshire Rail Forum (DDRF) conference on 3 November.

The DDRF is an organisation that represents businesses involved in the rail industry in the East Midlands. Its chair, Colin Walton, is also chair of Bombardier in the UK. Despite this, Theresa Villiers, minister of transport, was billed to speak at the conference.

It was Villiers who announced earlier in the year that the Thameslink contract would be given to Siemens in Germany rather than Bombardier, prompting over 1,400 job cuts at the factory in Derby.

Also due to speak was Roy McNulty who chaired the study 'Rail Value for Money'. This study recommended that ticket offices should have more automatic ticket machines, the only staff on trains should be the driver and tracks and signalling should be checked by 'automatic technology' to cut staff numbers.

Workers who keep their jobs can look forward to reduced pensions, increases in working hours, pay freezes and more 'flexible' employment.

Protesters gathered to demand that jobs are saved at Bombardier and elsewhere in the rail industry but neither Villiers nor McNulty actually turned up to the conference!

Jake Madely, an RMT union rep at Bombardier said: "Clearly everyone knows what's been happening with Bombardier; it's an absolute outrage. As far as the McNulty report goes generally, all he's looking to do is sack people."

"He might save a few quid but in the process he's going to put more and more people out of work and essentially collapse the rail industry itself."

"Various people are protesting here today from admin, people who work on the trains, the trade union council, Bombardier - the people it's going to have an impact on."

Those who attended the conference were the likes of the CEO of Network Rail and the chair of Crossrail. These representatives of business do not have workers' or rail service users' interests in mind.

The Socialist Party demands that Bombardier is nationalised under democratic workers' control and management as part of a re-nationalisation and expansion of the entire rail industry to provide jobs and decent, affordable public transport for all.

Fast news

Vik Chechi

On 18 October, Queen Mary University (QMUL) Unison branch secretary Vik Chechi was suspended from his post at the east London university. This suspension is undoubtedly linked to Vik's opposition to the cuts and restructuring being imposed at Queen Mary and his tireless efforts to organise campus workers, reinvigorate the Unison branch and link up with the students.

Please send letters of protest demanding his immediate reinstatement and letters of support to unison@qmul.ac.uk.

- There is an online petition: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/reinstatetikchechi/>
- QMUL Unison are also organising a public meeting and a lobby.
- Meeting: Thursday 10 November, 5.30-6.30pm, Francis Bancroft Room 1.13a, Mile End Campus, Queen Mary University, E1 4NS
- Lobby: Tuesday 15 November, 4.30-5.30pm, Garrod Building entrance, Queen Mary University, Whitechapel Campus, behind Royal London Hospital, Turner Street, Whitechapel, E1 2AD.

Mick Dooley

Construction industry campaigner Mick Dooley has won his unfair dismissal claim against building union Ucat. In a recent issue of the Socialist Mick explained how his efforts to turn Ucat into a campaigning union had resulted in him being sacked as a fulltime official. Also, despite gaining 30 nominations from union branches, Mick has been barred by Ucat from standing in the re-run election for the union's general secretary. Mick is now contemplating legal action against this ban.

Train cleaners

Hundreds of cleaners working on Virgin West Coast mainline trains will strike for 48 hours from 1am on 11 November to midnight on 12 November, as their employer continues to offer insultingly low pay 'rises'.

350 workers struck on 28 October and refused to empty train effluent tanks or refill fresh water tanks. The cleaners are paid barely over minimum wage. For five years, their pay only increased with the minimum wage. 94% of workers voted to strike in a ballot organised by their union, the RMT. Now, as a result, the company, Carlisle, is offering a few pence more an hour. Carlisle is owned by the Impellam Group, itself part of the business empire of top Tory Lord Ashcroft. Impellam increased its profits by almost 30% to £16.2 million in the past year!

The RMT is demanding a meeting with Virgin's boss Richard Branson, who so far has refused to intervene. Branson's millions are made from workers like those at Carlisle being paid peanuts. The entire rail service is run so train operators like Virgin and contractors like Carlisle can rip off taxpayers through subsidies, the travelling public through extortionate ticket prices, and workers in the industry through low pay. This disgraceful shambles should be renationalised from top to bottom and run under the democratic control by representatives of rail workers and the travelling public, as well as the government.

Hugh Caffrey

Defend the national agreements!



Construction workers are continuing their protests about de-skilling and pay cuts. On 9 November they are demonstrating through London photo Paul Mattsson