

Workers' Liberty

School workers bulletin

Pensions Action
N30
2011
Strike Bulletin

Can we win? Yes we can!

Francis Maude told the BBC recently that public sector unions were wrong to strike and that they should 'engage properly with the negotiations'. Later in the same interview he insisted once again that the latest 'offer' made by government was 'all that was on offer' and that there were no more concessions they could make. So what exactly is there to negotiate? This Tory-led government still plan to make public sector workers pay much more, work much longer and receive much less in pension. The 'offer' made at the start of November was nothing more than an attempt to divide older from younger workers, to weaken the unity and solidarity of the pensions campaign.

If that's all that's on offer then N30 is justified and should be supported by every worker. It's a shame we

didn't have this line-up of over 20 unions taking part in the June 30 strike. Far from taking action prematurely, as the hopelessly weak Ed Miliband claimed in June, the trade union movement as a whole has been slow to respond to the scale and seriousness of this attack. If we followed the lead of the likes of Miliband there would have been no June 30 and very likely no November 30. And without the reality of June 30 and the prospect of November 30 there would have been no concessions at all from government. When we fight we don't always win. But for certain when we do not fight we are guaranteed to lose.

The urgent issue for all of us now, however, is how we develop a strategy to win this dispute. Major one day strikes across the public sector are dramatic demonstrations

of the power and unity of the trade union movement, but they are unlikely to force the government to back down from these proposals. There were 5 months between the first pensions strike and November 30 and there is currently no reason to expect that we won't see the same delay before the next day of action. That is not enough to win.

Changing this is not simply a matter of deciding what is needed. If we all went out on November 30 and then stayed out the balance would shift decisively in our favour. It is as plain as day, however, that the trade union movement is a very long way indeed from having the confidence and organisation to deliver such a clear cut strategy. And that is not just a matter of leadership. There is no reason to think that members of even the strongest and most confident unions in this dispute could deliver all out action. Developing a strategy to win means considering what is needed alongside what is possible. It has to mean, however, being very bold about what is possible.

Our minimum aim should be to address the main weakness on our side - that nothing much happens between the occasional national strike days. The government needs to feel the pressure of trade union action in a sustained way throughout this dispute. We should argue for...

- Rolling strike action across regions and areas with at least



- one area coming out each week
- ☑ Sectoral co-ordinated action so that schools, colleges local council workers, the health service and civil service are affected in turn
 - ☑ More regular national days of strike action named well in advance alongside this action.
 - ☑ Much greater involvement of members in the dispute. Reports on negotiations should be made available to reps and members as soon as possible and regularly. Any proposal to settle this dispute
- should first be put to members in a ballot. Local reps committees should be established to consider the action strategy.
- ☑ Cross-union co-ordination should be organised at a local area level and not just left to national leaders.
 - ☑ Co-ordination with the widest possible number of unions is good but we cannot be tied to the pace of the slowest. We need to be able to propose more effective and regular action co-ordination of action
- with unions that are prepared to take it.
- ☑ Clear demands- the offer to teachers with 10 years to retirement is a warning to us all. We represent all our members and an injury to one is an injury to all. We must demand that these proposals are withdrawn and there is no worsening of our pension entitlement, no increase in the pension age and no increase in contributions to pay the deficit.

Patrick Murphy, Leeds NUT (PC)

A future of academies is bleak - fight this future!

Canary Wharf College - an academy free school for the children of the rich

The Docklands Settlement Centre used to be the home of a Tower Hamlets Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), a place where devoted teachers worked to get vulnerable and excluded year 11 students from Poplar and the Isle of Dogs through their all important GCSEs. The council did not have the money to adapt the building to suit the needs of a group of young people and teachers, but Sarah Counter, previously headteacher of a private school, did.

Thus at the beginning of this term, the kids from the PRU took a bus to their new premises in Aldgate, while a group of younger and more middle class children walked through the doors of Tower Hamlets' first Free school. Canary Wharf College is run by Counter, her husband and a board of trustees comprising largely of people who work in finance and consultancy.

It's ability to have class sizes of no more than 20 can only be possible with private funding, it's existence outside of the local education authority gives it freedoms around admissions and curriculum that can both directly and indirectly exclude certain groups of children. Canary Wharf College was advertised in private nurseries and estates as a Christian school in a largely working class, socially housed and Bengali area; currently 2% of pupils attending the college are entitled to free school meals, compared to a local average of 48%.

This is a school for the children of the bankers, lawyers and accountants of its namesake. Not only does this school represent an introduction of social segregation in an area in which schools pride themselves on being truly comprehensive and inclusive, but it also sets a new standard, an artificial standard that can only be achieved through selection and private funding, against which good local community schools will be judged.

Canary Wharf College may be the first Academy Free School to have infiltrated Tower Hamlets, but it will certainly not be the last unless schools and communities stand together to defend comprehensive state education against privatisation, and the exchange of principles of collaboration between schools, for those of competition.