



Pensions Fightback

A Workers' Liberty bulletin for the 30 November strike

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This is class war!

"There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." (Warren Buffett, the 2nd richest man in the world)

The government claims that public sector pensions are "unaffordable" and we all need to "tighten our belts" to get out of the economic crisis.

So public sector workers are expected to pay more, work longer and get less— so-called "reforms" that will cost every one of us tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of pounds. Whether we work in schools, hospitals, the civil service, or any other part of the public sector, they expect us to carry impossible workloads, deliver poorly-funded services in intolerable conditions, and to work for low pay until we retire in poverty.

But the government's own figures show that public sector pensions are affordable and they expect them to get cheaper over the next 50 years. So why are they doing this?

When the financial crisis hit in 2008, many businesses collapsed or laid off many workers, so the government got less tax revenue and had to borrow more to run public services. The national debt is actually smaller than at some times in the past, but global financial institutions insist that

governments cut public spending. If they don't, they say, the cost of borrowing will increase, making the debt crisis worse. This is what is happening in Greece and other Eurozone countries.

But the attacks on the public sector — cutting services, jobs, pensions and real-terms wages — will hardly make a dent in the national debt. While the social cost of the cuts is huge, the money saved is tiny in comparison to the budget deficit. The deficit has increased since the Tories started their "austerity" drive!

For the Tories, the cuts are a gesture — a sacrifice of working-class people's lives and living standards to try to satisfy the fickle gods of international financial capital. They are attacking public services because they hate public services; they are attacking our pay, conditions and pensions because they hold us in contempt. They are making us pay for the failures of their system.

The Tory Party has always opposed every measure to establish and improve public services. They think that everything — even children's education, even care of the sick and vulnerable — should be an opportunity for private capitalists to make profits, whatever the detriment to the services themselves. And all so that a tiny minority can enjoy obscene wealth at our

expense. The fight to defend pensions is a fight between the human right to a comfortable, dignified retirement and the "right" of capitalism to work us until we drop. We are striking to defend our pensions, but we should not be satisfied with defending the status quo.

We have to fight to win. 30 November will be a fantastic show of strength and will put serious pressure on the government. But we are unlikely to win this with a one-day strike run from above our heads by the union leaders. This leaflet sets out some ideas for making November 30 as effective as possible, and for following it up with a fight that can win.

The alternative to Tory austerity is a world where the wealth we create is shared so that we can all enjoy a decent working life and a decent retirement.

The pensions dispute in numbers

£7,000 — the average (so-called "gold plated") public sector pension

£24,000 — MPs' pension

£137 billion — amount by which the 1,000 richest people in Britain *increased* their wealth from 2009-2011

£157 billion — current budget deficit

£95 billion — size of the cuts proposed over the course of this government

97% — amount of private sector bosses with access to a company-backed pension scheme

33% — amount of private sector workers with access to a scheme

£175,000 — average pension for a boss at one of the country's 350 richest companies

We need a workers' government

When we strike, we can bring capitalism to a halt. If we use the momentum from 30 November, we can move on from a defensive campaign to go on the offensive for our own demands.

The government has a plan to make working-class people pay for the crisis; we need a workers' plan instead:

- seize the wealth of the banks and take them into democratic public ownership
- taxation of the rich and business
- fund living wages and decent pensions for all workers, public and private sector
- expand public services — build houses, cut class sizes, extend health care, create jobs
- scrap the anti-union laws

Who could implement such demands? A workers' government, based on working-class organisations such as trade unions, accountable to our interests just as the current government is accountable to the rich.

Build rank-and-file power!

Where next after 30 Nov? • Who's running the show? • No sell-out!



In every trade union, there is always a tension between grassroots members and elected reps in the workplaces (“the rank-and-file”) and the union’s official structures – its officials and its paid staff (“the bureaucracy”).

This is not because union officials are bad people; many are sincere activists who want to fight for workers’ rights. But being removed from our day-to-day struggles puts pressure on union officials to put the interests of the union infrastructure (its funds, legal status, offices etc.) ahead of the interests of us, the members. Many unions lack real accountability of officials. Top union leaders often enjoy wages and lifestyles closer to those of bosses than of members. They have a direct interest in maintaining the status quo.

The bureaucracy’s control of the unions has meant that vital negotiations about our pensions have been conducted behind closed doors, away from scrutiny or participation by the people whose futures the talks are about — i.e. us! If union leaders decide the government has offered us some crumb worth taking, they could de-escalate or even call off our dispute. We

would have a hard time stopping a sell-out if we have no input into how the dispute has been run at a national level. We would still have this problem even if we elected better people into officer positions (especially when many senior union positions are appointed rather than elected!). Rank-and-file members need to build strong organisation, focused on the workplace, and formulate our own strategies to win our disputes and challenge the bureaucracy’s stranglehold.

Strong rank-and-file campaigns can force the union officialdom to swing into line behind them. Electricians recently began a rank-and-file fight which won their union, Unite, round to backing them. Workers in Cambridge, Brighton, Nottingham and elsewhere have set up cross-union strike committees, run from the grassroots, to plan action on 30 November. When the Regional TUC tried to take control over strike day plans in Nottingham, the strike committee challenged them.

Sometimes rank-and-file groups have won democratic reform in their unions and made them into more effective, fighting organisations. Having a well-organised rank-and-file network does not guarantee victory, and even without one, we could still win. But it would significantly improve our chances.

And if you believe that strikes should be controlled by the workers actually taking part in them, rather than by unaccountable union officials, you need rank-and-file organisation.

A rank-and-file strategy for the pensions battle

- Cross-union strike committees in every town to discuss and plan ongoing action
- Open the negotiations: union members should be informed about the content of negotiations with government and have a say in them
- Demand that union leaders name the next actions now
- Use rolling, selective and escalating action: one-day strikes are not enough!
- Fight for positive demands: clear campaigning for decent pensions for all, public and private sector
- Develop a workers’ plan for the crisis
- Fight for a workers’ government to impose the interests of the working-class majority in the same way the current government imposes the interests of the rich.

How to picket

In recent years, strikes have become a way for workers to register a protest rather than a means by which to shut down workplaces and force concessions from employers.

But to win strikes, we need to use our power to its fullest. Effective picket lines are vital to make a strike successful.

- Choose in advance the best place(s) to picket. This should be where you will get best access to people arriving for work so you can persuade them not to go in. Try to cover all entrances.

- Identify all the times that people will be arriving at work and draw up a picketing rota.

- Make sure that you have enough people to picket at the right times of the day. Start earlier than the time that people normally arrive in case some try to slip in early!

- Get members to volunteer to picket and to commit to a particular time slot. Reassure any who are nervous about picketing, and perhaps practice in advance the arguments you will use to dissuade workmates from strike-breaking.

- Ask your union branch to fund babysitting for members who need to pay someone to look after their kids so that they can picket. Or organise collective childcare arrangements.

- Make sure you have materials — flags, banners, placards, union clothing etc. — to make your picket visible and eye-catching.

- Whenever someone turns up for work, talk to them about the industrial action and try to persuade them to join it. This is the key purpose of your picket!

- Leaflet passers-by while you picket.

- A picket line is a great place to discuss dispute tactics, the next steps, and the politics of the issue. Encourage discussion, get people talking, and plan how you are going to pursue your ideas.

A picket line is a form of direct action aimed at having the maximum impact on our bosses. Make yours as strong, lively and confident as possible!

Workers’ Liberty is a revolutionary socialist organisation active in the labour movement fighting for an alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership and working-class democracy. To find out more about our ideas, visit www.workersliberty.org