

Unison conferences discuss action on pensions

Greg Maughan

In the days running up to Unison's local government conference, on 19-20 June, general secretary Dave Prentis made announcements to the press about strike action to stop pension attacks. This reflects the pressure that Unison members are putting on the leadership for action. Many delegates will be asking the obvious question: "Why aren't we out on 30 June with other unions?"

A resolution committing the local government group to "make preparations for potential lawful industrial action, within Unison's rules, and coordinate with other trade unions" was unanimously passed. But the question of timing and tactics for this action was not fully discussed as the debate was cut short. This is a vital discussion for the union which will hopefully be continued at the full conference.

Unison members in local government are facing cuts from councils of every political hue. The responsibility of parties who are in opposition in central government but who lead councils and dissolved governments was discussed.

Brian Smith of the Glasgow branch was applauded when he explained that: "it's not good enough



Unison members on the 26 March demo photo Paul Mattsson

to say 'a big boy did it and ran away'". He outlined the responsibility that local councils, and members of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly have if they want to be part of the anti-cuts movement. "The job of politicians, if they want to be on our side and on our platforms, is to refuse to implement cuts."

Although this position was greeted enthusiastically by conference delegates, a statement from the leadership explained that the reference to a 'needs budget' in the Glasgow resolution had been removed

"following legal advice".

Instead Unison is pushing the idea of "parallel budgets". That is drawing up the outline of a needs-based budget as a propaganda tool but not campaigning for additional funding to make this budget a reality or calling on Labour councillors, funded by Unison, to implement these budgets.

The toothlessness of this approach was highlighted by Steve North of the Salford branch who stated: "If the parallel budgets were led through to their logical conclu-

sion and money was campaigned for to pay for the services needed, there would be a point to them. And if one authority had the guts to stand up it would resonate around the country."

A marked number of other delegates expressed their anger at Labour local authorities carrying out cuts. But for people on the hard end of these attacks, just pointing the finger at the Tories won't wash.

In the discussion on youth services Monique Hirst from Kirklees spoke passionately about the fight to ensure young people are given support and opportunities in jobs and education. She praised the PCS, RMT, UCU and other unions in their support of the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign and warned Unison's leadership that they: "should not just sit on the sidelines" but get fully involved in campaigns like this.

National executive member Jean Thorpe gave the example of the Jar-row march that Youth Fight for Jobs is organising as something that Unison members can actively get involved with.

Support for the ideas and tactics that the Socialist Party put forward was shown in the copies of the Socialist that have been sold so far (over 80) and the interest in the Socialist Party's conference bulletin.

In brief

Tube strike for justice



Arwyn Thomas at the NSSN conference photo Paul Mattsson

Transport union RMT members working as drivers in London Underground began a series of strikes on 19 June. This action is in defence of driver and union rep Arwyn Thomas, who has been victimised by London Underground (LU). He has already won an interim tribunal hearing but LU have so far refused to reinstate him. Arwyn spoke at the recent National Shop Stewards Network conference. The second strike begins on 27 June.

• Please send protests to London Mayor Boris Johnson: mayor@london.gov.uk and LU personnel director: gerry.duffy@tube.tfl.gov.uk and urge them to reinstate Arwyn immediately.

Newsquest strike

The latest dispute in the struggle to defend local journalism led to a very lively picket for the two-day strike at Newsquest in south west London on 15-16 June. Pickets were out in force dressed as cowboys. Newsquest, which runs a series of local newspapers, has placed the entire sport and leisure department on notice of redundancy which would leave 12 reporters writing seven newspapers.

• Please send messages of support via ylgstrike.blogspot.com

Save Baron House

Customer services for the East Coast Main rail line are operated by National Express call centre workers at Baron House, Newcastle. However the publicly owned East Coast Main Line company has made the decision to franchise jobs to Intelenet Global Services, which will result in most of the work being transferred to India. Craig Johnson, RMT executive member, attended an adjournment debate in the House of Commons on the issue. Craig commented that Theresa Villiers, transport minister: "Couldn't have cared less about the loss of jobs, claiming it was a commercial decision by East Coast, a government-run company, that the government couldn't interfere in! She also defended the company, implying these decisions had to be taken to prepare East Coast for re-privatisation!" The loss of these 180 jobs would be a further blow to the economy in the North East.

There will be a protest against the job losses at Baron House, Newcastle Central station at 8am on 24 June.

Elaine Brunskill

Unite Rules conference

For a full report see: www.socialistparty.org.uk

Leeds Unison Say no to council offer!

A Leeds Unison steward

All Unison members in Leeds City council are being balloted on the council's cuts proposals. The union membership was first balloted in February, with the unions rejecting the offer but continuing to negotiate. After the council made slight concessions, the unions are now being asked to consult their members again.

Shamefully our Labour-led council rubber-stamped £90 million of cuts in February and with wages making up almost half (£442 million) of its total expenditure they are proposing a further £47 million for next year. The council intends to cut up to 3,000 jobs over four years. Around 1,000 workers have already left this year through the Early Leavers Initiative.

A key sticking point for the unions has been the council's intended changes to its redeployment procedure. It intends to reduce that time from 12 months and three months

notice; a total of 15 months (currently), to nine months from July, and from April 2012 to six months. And they also want to reduce the pay protection that staff have, if they lose their job and are put into a lower grade, from three years to one year.

These proposals are the biggest attack on jobs, pay and conditions seen in decades. The effects are becoming painfully clear, with the threats of closure to adult mental health centres, Leeds Crisis Centre, care homes for the elderly and libraries. With Children's and Adults' social services forced to contract, share services or to be outsourced, closed or privatised, it is the front-line services that our members proudly deliver that will suffer.

All the unions must jointly organise and campaign for members to vote a decisive 'no' to these proposals. And we must build support for coordinated industrial action through protest lobbies and local demonstrations. Only decisive action can defeat the cuts.

The ballot ends on 27 June.

Prentis: "My call to arms"

Dave Prentis issued a call for action at the main Unison conference on 21 June. He said: "Today is my call to arms. When you get back to your branches prepare for action. You have a massive job to do: deciding in regions what action to take, millions of leaflets to distribute, winning the argument with the public and recruiting new members to our cause..."

"Strike action will need to be sustained. And the political and public campaigns intensified..."

"Our members deserve better than the shabby treatment they have suffered at the hands of this wretched government. That's why we're fighting to build a united, coordinated, sustained campaign of public education, community organisation, targeted industrial action and mass mobilisation."

Recognising the anger felt by Unison members being sacked by Labour councillors, he added: "It's

about breaking a political consensus that says markets know best - in truth Labour built the bridge over which the Tories now march. In future [we should] only support Labour candidates who support our values, our union, our people."

The call for action will be welcomed by Unison members who are demanding a strategy to defend their jobs and the services they deliver. But they will be asking how this action will be organised. They will be searching for a clear call for united action, across all sectors of local government.

However, when asked in the press conference what he meant by regional action, Prentis repeated that he didn't want to bring everyone out on the same day because lower-paid workers couldn't afford it.

The Socialist Party is campaigning for coordinated action across the entire public sector.

Strike action to defend Royal Mail jobs

A Coventry postal worker.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) recently announced its intention to hold a national strike ballot if any postal worker, anywhere in the country, is made compulsorily redundant. This is to be welcomed as Royal Mail, under the stewardship of new boss Moya Greene, seems intent on ripping up the agreement it signed up to just a year ago.

This new business plan includes the closure of half of the mail centres around the country, which will lead to compulsory redundancies. This is contrary to last year's agreement. And it won't end with mail centre closures.

CWU members can learn from the stand of the four unions taking action on 30 June. We need to be unified in action against the planned attacks on all our jobs. And we need our union leaders to begin to coordinate action with other unions whose members face attacks on their jobs, pay, conditions and the services they provide.

We face a further attack on our pensions if Royal Mail is privatised. We were shunted onto an inferior pension scheme two years ago and the CWU leaders accepted it. This was unforgivable. It's down to members to put pressure on the leadership to allow us to take action in order to defend ourselves from all attacks.

POA to hold protest meetings

The national executive committee of the Prison Officers Association (POA) has announced that lunchtime pension cuts protest meetings will be held at every prison and secure hospital on 30 June.

These are being organised at the same time as the strike action by members of four trade unions - civil service union PCS and education unions NUT, UCU and ATL - against public sector pension changes.

Members of two of those un-

ions, PCS and UCU, work alongside prison officers.

Pete McParlin, national chair of the POA said: "It has to be unreasonable to expect my members to work to 68 years of age and pay more in contributions. In effect our terms and conditions are being ripped up and our members are being taxed to pay for the mess that bankers and politicians created."

These meetings will be held across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.