

Southampton: strikes set to continue

Nick Chaffey

Following the failure of ACAS arbitration talks on Thursday 16 June, Unite and Unison have announced further strike action to intensify the pressure on Southampton council. These strikes against cuts to jobs, pay and services, will coincide with the national pension strike on 30 June.

Throughout the strike action council workers have been leafletting across the city and report strong support for the dispute. As the rubbish piles up, many are asking why the council is refusing to negotiate with the union.

The general view is that the Tory council, which is threatening to sack workers who don't sign new, worse contracts, is to blame for this mess. The strike of the refuse workers has been solid, with mass picketing everyday for the last two weeks.

"We want to be at work but what can we do? If they cut our pay this year, what happens next year? How

can you make ends meet when all the bills are going up?"

With the national pension strike next week the growing mood is to all stand together to force the council and government into retreat.

Medirest

Council workers also visited the Medirest cleaners' pickets to show their solidarity. Workers are owed thousands of pounds in unpaid wages and sick pay.

Cleaners were out for seven days last week and a delegation of Unison stewards is attending Unison national conference to build support for their dispute. Activists are looking to spread the dispute to involve other Medirest NHS workers nationally.

Both council workers and Medirest cleaners will be joining the Hampshire Against Cuts demonstration in Winchester on Saturday 25 June, assembling at 11am at Oram's Arbour.



photo Paul Mattsson

Send messages of support - Council Strike: Unison Southampton District Branch, Civic Centre Southampton SO14 7NB. Contact Mike Tucker

branchsecretary@soton-unison-office.org.uk and Unite, 15 The Avenue, Southampton SO17 1XF and/or Ian Woodland, regional officer, 07770704480; woodland_

ian@hotmail.com; TGWU 2/8 Strike Fund, Unity Trust Bank, No: 20185358 SC 08-60-01. Medirest Dispute: Text Unison steward Jo Spear 07899 087957

Busting the public sector pensions myths!

The Con-Dem ministers who attack the unions for taking strike action in defence of public sector pensions on 30 June are liars. They will say anything to try and divide the working class. Here Sean Figg shows how some combine lies with manipulation of the "debate" onto false choices and myths that they themselves have created.

Public sector pensions are "too generous"

Surely this can only be answered by considering whether the pension does its job: provides a decent standard of living for a retired worker. On this measure no public sector pension is "too generous". The average pension for ordinary civil servants is just £4,200 a year. The average pension in the education sector is £10,000 a year.

The definition of poverty according to the government is living on less than 60% of the median income

(£15,568 a year in 2010). No public sector pension gets close to this level.

Public sector pensions are "unfair" to workers in the private sector

True, 'Fred the Shred' Goodwin of bank collapse fame, for example, got £16 million. But most private sector workers get a raw deal on pensions. This is because the Tories already helped big business to decimate their pensions. Now they present the private sector as typical of some "natural" pension level, rather than

a conscious pro-big business policy choice 20 years ago.

The Con-Dems will even argue that the tax paid by private sector workers is directly funding public sector pensions. But no government ear-marks funds in this way. Again, it is a pro-big business choice by the Con-Dems to cut taxes on bankers and the super-rich.

A successful campaign to defend public sector pensions must simultaneously be the launch point for a campaign to win back the pension rights of private sector workers. We're not falling for the divide and rule myth.

The country can no longer afford "gold-plated" public sector pensions

Arguments about the "national interest" include the following variants: "the public sector is too big";

"the public debt is too high", "we're living too long" etc, etc. In other words, we should all take a hit for "the good of the country".

But currently public sector pensions are 1.9% of GDP. According to Lord Hutton's report this proportion will fall to 1.4% by 2060 without making a single change! The teachers' pension pot is self-funding, requiring no money from elsewhere.

The claim that we are living longer is another cover-up for Con-Dem policy choices. There is huge wealth in society that could fund earlier retirement on a living pension for all workers in the public and private sectors. The problem is that it is all locked away with the super-rich. The richest 1,000 people in Britain have £395 billion between them.

Socialist policies that took such vast wealth into democratic public ownership and spent it to the ben-

efit of all would mean we could live into our hundreds without worrying about the "affordability" of pensions.

"We're all in this together"

We have arrived at the big lie that explains the half-truths and obfuscations of the other pitiful arguments: "we are all in this together".

The attack on public sector pensions is part of a broader effort to make the working class pay for the crisis of capitalism. In the biggest rip-off in history the politicians are trying to let the banks and financial markets get away without contributing a penny to fix the economy they wrecked. Instead they think they can make the working class pay.

But of course they can't say that to us plainly and that explains the Houdini style contortions in the "debate" on public sector pensions...

30 June rallies to support the strikes

London (07748534891, paulamitchell@socialistparty.org.uk)

London
11am, Lincoln's Inn Field and march to Westminster

North (01914216230 and 07841144890, red_brunskill@yahoo.co.uk)

Newcastle
12pm at Centre for Life, Times Square, Newcastle, march to Monument

North West (07769611320, manc_sfe@hotmail.com)

Chester
12.30pm, town hall

Liverpool
11.30am, top of William Brown Street and march to rally, 12.30pm, The Black-E, Great George Street

Manchester
11am, All Saints Park on Oxford Road. Rally, 12.30pm, Castlefield Arena

Preston
12pm, the Flag Market, Market Square

Wigan
11am, town centre

South (07833681910, nickchaffey@btinternet.com)

Camberley
1pm, Railway Station and march to

Michael Gove's Office

Oxford
1pm, Bonn Square, OX1 1EU

Portsmouth
12pm, Guildhall Square, PO1 2AB

South East (07894716095, info.bhsp@gmail.com)

Brighton
10.30am, the Level

Hastings
10.30am, indoor rally at the White Rock Theatre, 12pm, outdoor rally and leafletting in Robertson Street, family picnic in Alexandra Park afterwards (weather dependent)

Medway
10am, outside Primark on Chatham High Street, march at 11.30am to NUT rally at the Command House from 12-2pm

West Midlands
Coventry
12pm, outside council house

Wales (029 2044 0571, spw@ntlworld.com)

Swansea
12.30pm, Castle Square

Yorkshire (07706710041, alistairtice@yahoo.co.uk)

Sheffield
12pm, Peace Gardens

Public meetings: Where next after 30 June?

East (07704995140, info@stevenage-socialistparty.org.uk)

Hatfield Socialist Party
Tuesday 5 July, 7.30pm, Community Resource No 1 Centre, Town Centre Hatfield AL10 0JZ

Stevenage Socialist Party
Monday 11 July, 8pm
For venue details please ring Mark Pickersgill on (01438) 313318

East Midlands (01162230534 and 07737978057, stevescore1@gmail.com)

Leicester National Shop Stewards Network
Tuesday 5 July, 7.30pm, Secular Hall, Humberstone gate, Leicester

Lincoln
Thursday 8 July, 7.30pm, details TBA

Mansfield Socialist Party
Wednesday 6 July, 7.30pm, Park Road Resource Centre, Mansfield Woodhouse

Northampton Socialist Party
Monday 4 July, 7.30pm, Black Lion pub, 1 Black Lion Hill, Northampton, NN1 1SW

Nottingham Socialist Party
Open meeting - 5 July, 7.30pm, YMCA (formerly International Community Centre), 61b Mansfield Road, Nottingham NG1 3FN

London

London Socialist Party
Thursday 7 July, 7.30pm, Room 3b, University of London Union, Malet Street, London

North

Carlisle Socialist Party
Monday 4 July, 7pm, Club 35, Lowther St, Carlisle

North West

Liverpool Socialist Party
Tuesday 5 July, 7.30pm, Casa pub, 29 Hope St., L1 9BQ with Peter Taaffe, Dave Nellist and Janice Godrich

Manchester Socialist Party
Monday 4 July, 7pm, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, M2 5NS

Salford Socialist Party
Wednesday 6 July, 7pm, 186 Worsley Road, Swinton, M27 5SN

South Lancs Socialist Party
Thursday 7 July, 7pm, The Anvil pub, Dorning Street, Wigan, WN1 1ND

South East

Brighton
Wednesday 6 July, 6pm, Duke of Wellington pub
Thursday 7 July, 8.15pm, Phoenix community centre

Hastings
Tuesday 5 July, 6.30pm - The Roomz cafe/bar

Medway

Thursday 7 July, 6.30pm, The Sunlight Centre, Richmond Road, Gillingham

South West (07759 796478, robinclapp@blueyonder.co.uk)

Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance
Monday 4 July, 7.30pm, Hamilton House, Stokes Croft

Bristol National Shop Stewards Network
Thursday 7 July, 7.30pm, Newminster House, Baldwin St, BS1 1LT

Wales

Llanelli and West Wales Socialist Party
Thursday 30 June, 7.30pm Railway Tavern, Station Road, Llanelli

Yorkshire

Bradford Socialist Party
Tuesday 5 July, Equity Centre, 1 Longlands Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD1 2TP

Leeds City Socialist Party
Monday 4 July, 7.30pm, Old Red Lion pub, Meadow Lane, Leeds

If no event is listed in your area, get in touch with the regional organisers (details given) or see www.socialistparty.org.uk/whatson