

30 June pension strike reports

The 30 June coordinated strike action by the PCS civil service union and NUT, ATL and UCU teaching unions was a historic event. The Socialist Party website has reports from across the country, revealing, in particular, the massive turnout, the

huge support from other unions and the public and the mood for further action. Over 20,000 marched in London; 6,000 in Bristol; 5,000 in Birmingham and Manchester; 4,000 in Brighton; over 2,000 in Leeds and Newcastle and over 1,000 in Cardiff, Glasgow,

Sheffield, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Oxford and Hull. Hundreds marched in dozens of other towns and cities. Here is a tiny taste of a magnificent day for the working class in Britain. See www.socialistparty.org.uk for the full reports and videos.

Why we're striking

- The 500+ strong march in Ipswich was led by a white-haired and wrinkled teacher sitting in a coffin on a bike. Words printed on the coffin said: "Good morning, class, I am your new teacher today!" highlighting the increased number of years a teacher will need to work in order to get a full pension.

- Thelma Snelgrove, deputy branch secretary of PCS Woking revenues and customs said: "When workers join the civil service they accept low salaries because of the pension scheme and the civil service compensation schemes but the government are trying to unilaterally change our contracts in the race to the bottom. "There is a £120 billion tax gap to be collected. If there were the resources and the staff to collect these taxes we wouldn't have to make the cuts."

- Durham passport office PCS branch chair, John McGrory, explained that: "We're fighting to save all the hard earned gains made in the past... We're fighting for all those in the future. They're attempting to push us back to the hungry 1930s."

- Richard Murray, a PCS member at Durham land registry explained that: "A lot of disabled people work for the civil service precisely because of the pension. If I'm forced to work until I'm 66 or 68 - I'll not get there. Thousands of other disabled people will be in the same position - we'll die before we get our pensions."

- Bryn Griffiths of Worcester Technology College UCU said there were management plans to double up class sizes so there might be 100 students in a class!

- "You wouldn't tolerate it if Cameron broke into your house and stole your telly so you have to fight when they do the same to your pension", a PCS picket at Bristol Crown Court explained.

- In Newcastle, one group of teachers told us they have been accused of disrupting school children's education - but they pointed out the media didn't complain about the interruption for school students when they had the day off for the royal wedding! One of the strikers calculated he would have to be on strike for 388 days before he lost the amount of money he will lose through pension changes.

Solidarity and support

- Birmingham also saw a one-day strike of local government workers against huge pay and job cuts and the planned imposition of worse contracts. The huge march took some time to make its way through the city. Along the way there was lots of public support with people coming out of shops and cafes to give a thumbs up. There was a very militant mood and speeches. Every time the bankers were mentioned there were huge boos!

- Socialist Party member Lee Vernon spoke at the London rally on behalf of PCS young members. The audience cheered as he described as "madness" the idea of raising the retirement age when there is mass youth unemployment. He referred to the student movement late last year as a wake up call to the power of mass movements, and pointed to



Teachers in the NUT wait for the train to travel to the London demo photo Saif

the youth movement alongside strike action in Greece and Spain. "Come the autumn we want to see students and young people on every picket, in every anti-cuts campaign and on every strike committee. We need to unite the students, young workers and the unemployed, to go beyond pensions and to also speak about defending our schools, universities and public services."

- There was a picket line/demo of 90 outside the three Bolton colleges which are next to each other: Bolton Sixth Form, Bolton University and Bolton College. NUT, ATL and UCU, who all participated, had spent two weeks building for it and had sent seven pickets to another sixth form campus too.

- PCS branch chair, British Council, Manchester and Socialist Party member Alex Davidson said only ten went in, a strike rate of well over 90%.

- In Swansea, Les Woodward brought solidarity and support from Remploy workers and said they "fully support the strikers and hoped support from them would be forthcoming if action was needed by Remploy workers to save their factories from closure". A big shout of 'Yes' confirmed that solidarity.

- James Drummond, the NUT teachers' union campaigns officer at B6 college in Hackney said: "We have picked up the torch of the fight that the students began over the Education Maintenance Allowance before Christmas... Now we have a responsibility to give a lead and continue the struggle."

- The strike at Walthamstow Jobcentre, where managers had taken pride in remaining open in previous strikes, was virtually solid. "This is all our fight, I hope you win" said one passer-by, expressing the solidarity that many clearly felt with workers. Over 250 people, many in non-striking unions, expressed their solidarity at the excellent lunchtime demo at Waltham Forest Town Hall.

- About 70 people made the brief march to a rally jointly organised by the PCS North Staffs branch and the

National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) Staffordshire. The rally was chaired by the secretary of CWU North Midlands branch. We had speakers from the NUT, PCS North Staffs branch secretary, CWU Midlands No.7 branch secretary, NSSN Staffordshire, North Staffs TUC, Stoke-on-Trent College UCU and Keele University.

- At Uxbridge Jobcentre the junior manager turned up for work, stayed half an hour, then came outside and joined the pickets with some cakes, and requested to join the PCS!

- Land registry workers on the PCS picket line in Leicester were buoyed up by not only turning away the post but also the bin lorry with workers refusing to cross picket lines. There was support from the public going past, especially from bus drivers.

- Over 5,000 people marched through Bristol in the biggest demonstration that the city has seen in a generation. Solidarity for the strike was shown by members of the FBU, CWU, Unite, Unison and other unions and by a large number of students who all joined the demonstration. The biggest cheers came from all sides when speakers called for the action to be extended to a general strike across the whole public sector.

- A PCS member reported that: "A policeman on foot patrol stopped to wish us good luck and said if it wasn't for the strike ban on police they would be out as well."

Union growth

- Stefan Seddon, PCS branch secretary at Scotland Yard told the Socialist: "We have recruited 20 new members to the union branch through the pensions campaign and ten just yesterday... The picket is having an effect, we turned one person home so far and have been getting a lot of good publicity. We

want to see Unison out too... "We would also like to see more joint action with other public sector unions and the RMT, as getting coordinated public sector unions going out at the same time is the key."

- Jimmy Gill, chair of Cardiff and District DWP PCS branch, said: "We've never had such solid support for strike action and momentum is building. I've been to meetings in the last week discussing with new reps who have never taken strike action before who were putting on picket lines this morning."

Next time:

- Security staff at Parliament set up their picket at 5.30am. Saikou Jaiteh, a PCS rep there, said: "We see this strike as just the beginning. This government isn't going to make any serious concessions without a serious fight. We need other unions, all the public sector, to come out together. If we get that in the autumn it will be a real game-changer."

- 200 staff held a lunchtime rally at Rampton secure hospital in Nottinghamshire organised by health workers in the POA and Unison. There was a lot of support for strike action in the NHS, maintaining emergency cover. Many workers feared that some trade union leaders would conclude separate deals leaving NHS workers isolated, with the worst deal.

- Comments from Socialist Party members went down very well at the Hertfordshire rally. The message was clear: go back and organise, talk to fellow members, talk to members of other unions the next action should be all public service unions, including Unison, NASUWT, Unite, GMB and all the rest.

- At a packed rally following the picket lines in Exeter, 500 people crammed in to hear speakers from all the unions, including Socialist Party member

Jim Thomson.

The main speaker was Brendan Barber, who while certainly talking the talk about unity and action, fell short of calling for a 24-hour public sector general strike as Jim did.

- Dave Prentis, Unison general secretary, was cheered in Southampton at a united rally of council workers, teachers and civil servants. He gave the message: "If their attack on pensions continues, there should be five million out by the autumn."

Ian Woodland, Unite, whose members in Southampton local government face dismissal on 11 July if they refuse to sign up to new worse contracts, said: "Our campaign will continue, come what may."

- In Swansea, Katrine Williams, Wales chair of PCS, had a huge ovation when she said: "We've had half a million marching, 750,000 striking today and we need four million out in the autumn!"

Political alternative

- One new teacher at the London rally said: "I wouldn't have described myself as a political person before, but the government is forcing me to find my voice, and it's getting louder."

- In Durham PCS member Wendy Hilary said: "I'm a Labour Party member. When I saw on the news that Miliband was going to cross the picket line I felt like crying."

- At the Doncaster rally, condemnation was poured onto the Con-Dem government but the biggest cheer came when one speaker attacked the Labour Party's refusal to support the strikes and gave Doncaster North MP, Ed Miliband the ultimatum: "Back us, or back off!"

- At the Rampton rally former local government election candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Jon Dale was applauded when he called for a 24-hour public sector general strike. Referring to Ed Miliband's condemnation of the strike he called for the building of a new mass workers' party based on the trade unions.

- When a speaker from the ATL teachers' union said the strike was not intended to bring down the government large sections of the Bristol crowd vocally expressed their disagreement!

- Alec Thraves brought solidarity from the Socialist Party to the Swansea rally of about 400: "Unlike Cameron, Clegg and Miliband, the Socialist Party gives unequivocal support to the strikers and will assist in building for wider action in the autumn".

- Ronnie Job, secretary of Swansea Trades Council, rammied home the message at the Swansea rally: "It was the bankers, speculators, spivs and their rotten system that's at fault and needs changing".

- In Sheffield, Marion Lloyd (Socialist Party and PCS national executive), drew loud applause when she denounced Ed Miliband and called on Unison leader Dave Prentis to ballot his members to join future public sector strikes. She said that it was a strike for the alternative, and that alternative is socialism.

