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what we think

30 November - the fight of all our lives

The Financial Times, by replicating the model of government borrowing used by the Office for Budget Responsibility, suggests the structural deficit in 2011-12 is £12 billion higher than thought, a rise of 25%. To paraphrase the Verve: "The cuts don't work; they just make it worse".

Most people's experience and instinct tells them that government austerity measures are having a negative impact – be they the one million young people out of work, the one million women out of work, or the 50% of young black people out of work.

Those suffering cuts to benefits and much-needed services, the 10% of private sector renters who couldn't pay their rent on time this month, or those who face the threat of huge attacks on their pensions will also be clear that austerity measures are making things worse.

That is why the votes for ballots for strike action at this month's Trade Union Congress (TUC) are to be welcomed by every section of the working class, and by the middle class who are increasingly affected by the cuts.

The Conservative Party's trade union envoy, Richard Balfe, derided the ballot announcements as "nothing exceptional". While government ministers desperately attempt to play the plans down, it is clear that Wednesday 30 November could potentially be the biggest day of strike action in British history, at least in terms of the number of strikers, and bigger than any individual day of the mighty 1926 general strike.

This massive strike of up to four million workers could also be joined by tens of thousands of students in solidarity, and in protest at the vicious cuts to education combined with rising youth unemployment.

Cabinet minister Francis Maude, Tory education minister Michael Gove and other Con-Dem politicians did their utmost to undermine public support for the strike by 750,000 civil service and education workers on 30 June. But they failed.

Immediately after the 30 June strike polls showed opinion was evenly divided between those who supported the action and those who opposed it. Since then it has become increasingly clear that these are not short-term cuts and that everyone, apart from the super-rich will suffer.

Cabinet minister Sayeeda Warsi wrote in the Daily Star that "across Britain families are tightening belts... These are the people who will suffer the consequences of this strike action."

But these are the people who are suffering the consequences of government cuts and those carried out at local level by Tory, Liberal and Labour-led councils. And it is many of these people who will be on strike, including firefighters, hospital and ambulance workers, teachers and lecturers and school and college support staff, care workers, meals-on-wheels staff, prison officers, tax collectors and refuse collectors, street cleaners, cemetery workers and police support staff. There will be few families without at least one striker in their number.

The unions, including NUT, PCS, UCU, ATL, who were out on 30 June, and FBU, Unison, GMB, Unite, NIPSA, Prospect, NASUWT, NAHT, UCAC, and EIS have agreed to coordinate action around pensions. The government plans would see millions of public sector workers pay higher contributions, work longer and get less.

Warsi parroted the government's line from June in defence of the cuts: "The terms proposed are still great pension schemes, far better than almost anything in the private sector."

At the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally on the eve of the TUC, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka explained that this was not a battle between public and private. "Low-paid private sector workers are exploited by shareholders and executives, not by fellow low-paid workers in the public sector."

A PCS press release said: "While this is

a campaign of public sector unions, we are clear that we are not just fighting for our own members. We fundamentally reject the calls to equalise the misery, we want fair pensions for all, public and private alike."

As NSSN chair Rob Williams said: "Now the date has been named, trade unionists up and down the country will be pressuring their union leaderships to make sure that they're out on that day, and building for the action among their members in order to strike a devastating blow to this government's plans to make us pay for the fallout of a crisis of their system."

Fight all cuts

But the 30 November strike is also a mandate to build for action in all areas where working class people come together – in workplaces, in local campaigns and groups, in the local communities and on estates.

It must be made clear to young people in the schools, colleges and universities, and to those one million who are without work, education and training, that their place is in the labour movement and that solidarity with striking workers is in all of our interests.

The ballots will be on the issue of pensions but every effort must be made by trade unionists and campaigners to make it clear that this strike will form a crucial step in the battle against all cuts. Discussions and debates on a positive programme of demands for the anti-cuts and labour movement – as outlined in the previous issue of the Socialist – must be held.

The question of sharing out the work to create jobs without loss of pay; of investment in the creation of socially useful jobs, including of house-building and renovation, which would also address the problems of homelessness and overcrowding; of green jobs; and of nationalisation of the banks and big corporations must be raised and debated. In this way it can be made clear that success in

this struggle will be of benefit to all.

Ed Miliband's speech at the TUC showed that he is definitely a one-trick pony. He repeated almost word for word his condemnation of June's strike: "While negotiations were going on, I do believe it was a mistake for strikes to happen. I continue to believe that. But what we need now is meaningful negotiation to prevent further confrontation over the autumn."

It is little wonder that only half of Labour voters can even imagine Miliband as prime minister. No party in parliament represents workers. Never has the need for the trade unions to take steps to build a new mass workers' party been more urgent.

At the TUC, PCS president Janice Godrich and others pointed out that the government is refusing to negotiate on the key issues. However it cannot be completely ruled out that the government may 'chuck another U-ey' and try to side-step the strike as it becomes clear how much momentum is building.

There may be attempts to divide the united action by building on hints made previously that the government may offer crumbs to the lowest paid. But small concessions, while welcome to workers who will benefit from them, must not deter the trade union leaders from continuing to build united action for 30 November and beyond.

The government and the bosses should fear this strike. The organised working class, in united action, will make the 'feral over-class' quake like nothing else can. This action will whet the appetites of millions of workers and youth to not just show their strength, but to change their conditions completely. In this battle ideas – increasingly including socialist ideas – will come to the fore.

On Tuesday 29 November George Osborne will give his autumn statement, undoubtedly arguing once again that ordinary people must pay, pay and pay again for the crisis. All our energy must be directed to making sure his words are drowned out by the roar of the working class in action on the following day.

Protest at Lib Dem conference

Tom Creek

Birmingham Socialist Party

On Sunday 18 September around 800 protesters gathered in Birmingham to 'welcome' the Liberal Democrats for their annual conference. A vocal demonstration showed the Tories' favourite stooges that they have not been forgiven for jumping into the Con-Dem coalition at the first chance of power and abandoning their pre-election promises.

The anger of workers and youth remains, especially over the Lib Dems' u-turn over tuition fees. One Lib Dem delegate who made the mistake of asking for directions from demonstrators was simply told to 'try going left'!

Inside the conference, the party's leaders desperately tried to regain some credibility. One insisted that the 'marriage' with the Tories was only temporary, and would be over in five years. Most people would think that five days was too long!

Vince Cable spouted dishonest rhetoric about making the rich pay their taxes, despite the fact that his government is making hundreds of HMRC workers who deal with tax evasion redundant.

Of course, socialists never had any illusions in Nick Clegg and his party. The Lib Dems have always been a party of big business and capitalism, so their betrayals were only to be expected.

Socialist Party members distributed leaflets calling for people to support the public sector strike on 30 November and the National Shop Stewards Network campaign against all cuts. We also called for a socialist alternative to the crisis ridden capitalist system that the Lib Dems support.



If you want ideas about how to defeat this government of millionaires book your Socialism 2011 ticket today!

This weekend of debate and discussion will hear from leading trade unionists, campaigners and workers in struggle.

Rally for Socialism

6.30–8.30pm, Saturday 5 November
Euston Friends Meeting House, 173
Euston Road, NW1 2BJ.

Speakers include Egyptian and Tunisian trade unionists, Irish Socialist Party MP Clare Daly, and Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe.

Weekend tickets cost £30 (£15 concession) or you can get a golden ticket, which includes accommodation and entrance to the Saturday night social, for £50 (£35 concession). Rally only tickets are just £5.

Book online or find out more details at www.socialism2011.net or phone 020 8988 8779. Cheques should be made payable to 'Socialism' and sent to Socialism 2011, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

Sessions include:

- What would a socialist democracy look like?
- Strategy and tactics for the 21st century: a debate with UKUncut (invited)
- The future of the world economy: will capitalism collapse?
- Building a successful electoral alternative: lessons from Ireland
- Ten years since 9/11: is US imperialism going to be eclipsed?
- Who are the EDL? How do we stop them?
- Riot, reaction and resistance: what future for young people?
- How can we build fighting unions?