

Reasons to be on strike

Union reps prepare for N30

Graham O'Reilly

My partner and I are union reps in the public sector. She is a steward with Unison and I am with Prospect. Over the last few weeks we have been giving people information on pensions and the ballots that both unions have been holding.

It came as no shock when both unions voted in favour of industrial action on 30 November. What has come as a shock is what has been said and asked since the results of those ballots have been published.

People have asked my wife why are they striking? Was it to do with the upcoming shift changes? Others have said to her they voted yes to action because they were tired of being bullied by management, others because they are upset at not getting a wage rise again. Very few people she has spoken to voted yes because of the pension issue.

A manager told me he had voted against action as he felt a few extra pounds each month towards his pension was not a lot to ask. I took



Marching through London on 30 June photo Paul Mattsson

the time to go through the figures with him. It was not a few quid each month he was going to pay, it was £100 extra every month and he would be getting less than he thought in return when he eventually retired.

On top of this he was not getting a wage rise for the foreseeable future. His home utility bills had increased, the cost of feeding his family had increased and the cost of a tank of fuel to get him to work had increased from £55 in May 2010 to £67 today.

He was considerably worse off and a pay rise of 20% would only just see him back to the standard of living he had two years ago.

We then spoke about cuts in services, both nationally and locally, cleanliness in hospitals and how money was not going to pay staff and to keep hospitals clean but how it was being given in bonuses to managers and to shareholders.

When we finished talking he said he wished he had voted yes and was thankful that his 'no' vote was in the minority.

Everyone my wife and I have spoken to in the last few days has their own reason for taking action on 30 November. Some are worried about their pension but most are not. They are worried about now, worried about having no money to pay their bills, worried that the services they rely are on being cut, worried that they won't have a job.

The message we are getting from the people we represent is they overwhelmingly support action on 30 November whether or not they voted and even those who voted 'no' are now changing their minds. I know one who will be joining me on the picket line.

Construction workers fight pay cuts

The pressure is growing on the 'Big 7' construction companies who want to withdraw from the Joint Industry Board agreement and impose the new BESNA contracts which will cut workers' pay by up to 35%.

Unite are balloting electricians in Balfour Beatty (BBES) because they've given 1,600 electricians notice that they will put them on the BESNA contract from 7 December. All BBES workers should vote yes to strike on that day.

Electricians all over the country are fighting back. In Glasgow, "skilled jobs for skilled workers" was the chant as over 300 construction electricians and supporters marched from the Unite offices to George Square on 19 November.

Ian Leech brought solidarity greetings from the 11,500 members of Glasgow city Union. "Our fight is the same as yours. We're fighting to defend decent pay, pensions and working conditions from millionaires who think we should pay the price for an economic crisis created by the rich."

Over 100 electricians and supporters gathered at Farringdon sta-

tion in London on 16 November. A number of electricians had refused to go into work, including a group of Polish workers. They were given a huge cheer when this was announced on the microphone.

Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network, pointed to the walkouts in Ratcliffe and Corus as showing the way forward. He also urged electricians to join up with the public sector action on 30 November.

Paul Callanan from Youth Fight for Jobs said that kettling was used against sparks' attempts to join the student protest on 9 November because the bosses feared workers joining up with young people in opposition to cuts.

Around 30 electricians demonstrated outside one of SPIE Matthew Hall's sites in Liverpool. The electricians on this site were adamant that the employers must not be allowed to get away with their plans to de-skill and cut the rate for the job and were fully behind the official action being called for 7 December.

On 16 November, around 300 workers protested outside Corus



In London on 9 November photo Rob Williams

Steel in Redcar.

On the same day all 1,000 contractors at West Burton power station in North Notts struck. GMB pickets spoke to Jon Dale.

"There's no recession in this industry. In fact, there's a massive amount of work, mostly on power stations. Half the power stations need replacing.

"The private owners have also stopped training, so there's a short-

age of skilled workers, who are getting older. They did away with apprentices for a long time. They used to pinch skilled workers from steel, mining, railways and other industries, but these sources have dried up. They've tried to bring in foreign workers but that's also caused them problems.

"We've no problem with foreign workers so long as they get the same pay as us."

Fire service cuts

South Yorkshire Fire Authority is planning to close four fire stations, take three engines out of service and cut 140 firefighters' jobs (20% of the workforce) by introducing four consecutive 24 hour shifts.

These proposals, out to public consultation until 6 February, are to meet government's funding cuts of £10 million a year.

This is the same Labour-control-

led fire authority that two years ago threatened to sack over 700 firefighters if the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) did not accept new shift patterns.

South Yorkshire FBU members took strike action two years ago against imposed shift changes. They may have to take industrial action again to stop these even bigger shift changes and service cuts from going through.

Support Vik Chechi

On 18 October, Queen Mary University (QMUL) Unison branch secretary Vik Chechi was suspended from work at the east London university. This suspension is undoubtedly linked to Vik's opposition to the cuts and restructuring

being imposed at Queen Mary.

Please send letters of protest demanding his immediate reinstatement and letters of support to unison@qmul.ac.uk.

• Petition: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/reinstatevikchechi/>

Bus drivers strike over pay

South Yorkshire bus drivers, members of Unite the union, took strike action on 18 and 21 November. Many pickets were out all day on both days at the Barnsley and Rawmarsh (Rotherham) depots.

The 340 Stagecoach drivers, currently on £8.57 an hour, are fighting for a £9 an hour pay rate, to bring them in line with Stagecoach drivers in Sheffield.

The new deal should have started in April but negotiations have dragged on and on.

In fact, Unite branch secretary Harry Foss told me: "The manager here (Rawmarsh) doesn't negotiate. He just says take it or leave it! We were even willing to forgo our back pay to help fund £9 an hour but then he insisted on a two-year

£9 an hour is long overdue

deal. With at least 5% inflation, we'd have fallen further behind again."

A strong mood on the picket line was reinforced by loads of honking horns in support on a busy main road.

More strikes are planned for 2 and 3 December if the company doesn't agree to £9 an hour in a one year deal.

Alistair Tice

In brief

Pension mythbuster

Teachers' union NUT has revealed that £46.4 billion more has been paid into the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) since its foundation in 1923, than has been paid out. This is in addition to the findings by the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee which concluded that the long-term costs of the TPS are declining. This has not been found on the front pages of the bosses' papers, that continually peddle the myth that public sector pensions are "gold-plated" and unsustainable.

Transport for London (TfL) jobs

Unions took their united campaign to stop the proposed outsourcing of London Taxi and Private Hire (Compliance and Driver Licensing) to TfL headquarters on 23 November. 94 workers could be shunted out of the company, losing their travel facilities and possibly pensions. 68 may be forced to move out of London altogether (to Northampton or Coventry) if they want to keep their jobs. For all TfL's talk of "Safer Travel at Night" it's difficult to see how passenger safety would not be affected with regulation of London's 28,000 black cabs and 50,000 private hire vehicles run from 100 miles away by the same kind of private firms who have so expensively failed to deliver across the public sector (think Tube privatisation!). And, if we let this through, TfL call centres could be the next.

• Join TfL unions on 7 December at 8am outside Windsor House, Victoria Street to lobby the full TfL board

Paul Stevens
TfL RMT

No academy!

On 16 November, teachers in NASUWT and NUT at Prince Henry grammar school in Otley, Leeds took their second day of strike action against the proposal to turn the school into an academy. Academies are a form of backdoor privatisation and in Otley there is huge opposition to the planned changes. School students and parents joined the picket line. Many were discussing how to support the strike. A well-organised strike by students could be a way of upping the pressure on the head teacher and remaining governors to back off from the academisation plans.

• Please sign the NASUWT petition against Prince Henry becoming an academy online at www.leedsnasuwt.org.uk/1stpetition

Iain Dalton
Leeds Socialist Party

Strike vote

PCS members working at HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have voted to strike against privatisation. HMRC want to use private contractors in two contact centres dealing with calls about tax credits. In the ballot 70% voted to strike and 86% voted for other action, on a 34.7% turnout in the ballot involving 21,000 workers.

Strike vote 2

Transport Union RMT members in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary have voted for action in defence of their pensions. 60% voted to strike and 80% for action short of a strike.