

Unison member: no pensions sell-out

This is an extract of a response on the pensions 'heads of agreement' which was recently sent to a Unison official in local government, from a steward in a large Unison branch.

"I have to say that I believe we should reject the 'heads of agreement' and there are several reasons for this. Obviously there are a few minor concessions related to those closest to retirement and the lower-paid but the principles of the attack on pensions in the public sector remain - pay more, work longer, get less.

The very fact that those minor concessions were gained is the result of the massive united strike action taken so far and we should not let that be forgotten.

The coalition government is weak and divided and desperate not to fall apart and it will sense victory if we become divided...

The fact that the civil servants and some teaching unions are holding out against this potential deal is a lesson to the other unions that we should stand united...

All around the world now it seems that workers are having to pay for this crisis and that particularly any sense of public service or collective provision is being dismantled to add to the profits of the few. This is why in every sector of society - health, education, local government, trans-



Unison members were inspired by N30 photo Paul Mattsson

port, housing, welfare - we are under attack...

This campaign has seen our unions gain in membership and credibility. This is because we have been willing to fight and stand up for workers, we have been strong

and principled, not weak. We have been united in standing up for our members and they have backed us up. In essence we have reverted in many ways to what unions are actually in existence for and that is to fight for the rights and conditions of

our members, of workers. I would feel defeated and hypocritical and feel I would have let down my fellow workers if we accepted this proposal, especially since we were meant to be fighting against a pensions plan that forced us to work longer, pay more and get less...

It would be very difficult and indeed wrong to accept the proposals with so little gained and so much of what we were defending lost. It would lead to us being seen as selling out our members, old and new; it would weaken the union movement nationally and locally, with people coming to the conclusion that nothing is worth fighting for and that defeat is inevitable.

It would lead the way to further defeats and concessions as the government would be given the signal to 'go for the kill' with a spineless and unprincipled Labour Party chasing them rightwards as the working class become even more disillusioned, divided and hopeless. Like the Grand Old Duke of York we would have been marched right up to the top of the hill and then marched back down again."

1,200 jobs threatened by DVLA closures

Hugh Caffrey

PCS union members working at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) are angry and frustrated at plans by the Con-Dem government to shut all 39 local offices by the end of 2013.

These offices are where members of the public can deal with vehicle registration and taxes and similar issues. Closure will mean a worse service at greater cost to the taxpayer - this cut is to prepare the service for privatisation.

Workers protested outside their Manchester office as part of a national day of action on 10 January. Sam Oxford, PCS DVLA Midlands branch organiser said: "Over 1,200

jobs are threatened at 39 locations...

We've got no confidence in senior management, they've lied to us on loads of occasions.

They've released a provisional plan for four stages of closures: the first stage in October 2012, the second in June 2013, and then August 2013, and finally October 2013.

Public support in the offices when they come in to visit us has been great. We just need to ramp up the campaign, we'll have a petition ready soon.

We need to put pressure on MPs, we urge everyone to write to their MP, and to respond to the consultation document."

The consultation document is at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/>



Fighting for jobs in Manchester photo Hugh Caffrey

We need more railway jobs

Pete Worcester

In December 2011, after a dispute between Scotrail and rail union Aslef, an agreement was reached which provides for the recruitment of at least 32 train drivers in 2012 and for eliminating rest day working by April 2013.

Rest day working is where drivers work shifts on their rest days to avoid the service being disrupted through staff shortages.

Working overtime has a long history in the rail industry. Even as late as 20 years ago, before privatisation, some workers would improve take-home pay by working overtime. Getting your rest day in and 'making 12' were ways to do this.

Making 12 was when overtime was available and workers would agree to extend their shift to 12 hours. This was sometimes done on the day itself, meaning disruption to home and social life to make up for low rates of basic pay.

Even now there is still considera-

ble overtime working. In some companies it is thought overtime covers 10% of services.

The franchise system in the rail industry means employers have few incentives to recruit and train staff, particularly towards the end of a franchise. If a firm trains staff and then loses the franchise they will have effectively subsidised their successful competitor.

With a million unemployed young people, the rail unions now have a responsibility to cut the reliance on overtime as soon as possible. This will not be achieved overnight, as it can take nearly a year to train a train driver. The Scotrail agreement makes a start. Now elected reps should press for similar arrangements, with numbers to be recruited and a deadline for eliminating rest day working.

What better way is there to convince young people to join the trade unions in the rail industry than to be able to say the unions have played a part in opening up job chances for those who face a lifetime of unemployment?

Cuts councillors dishonoured

Bob Severn

Waltham Forest workers and campaigners will lobby the north east London borough's first 2012 council cabinet meeting on 12 January in support of sacked library and Waltham Forest Direct workers.

In response to one cabinet member, Liaquat Ali, being presented with an MBE for "tireless service to the people of Waltham Forest", campaigners will reward all the cabinet members CBEs - Cuts Brutally Executed awards.

The lobby, organised by Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union (WFACU), will be followed by protests at cabinet members' surgeries.

Waltham Forest Unison chair and libraries convenor Nancy Taaffe, who has a fighting record of trade union campaigning, is one of the sacked workers. It looks like the Labour council is attempting to get rid of Nancy to make it easier to drive through cuts.

WFACU calls for all of the sacked

workers to be reinstated and for the council to set and fight for a 'needs budget', rather than spinelessly implementing Con-Dem cuts.

Nursery nurses protest

Waltham Forest Nursery Nurses protested outside the town hall on 10 January before the council's joint consultative committee meeting.

Over half of the nursery nurses working in schools are being forced to accept new part time, term time only contracts under threat of dismissal.

Waltham Forest Unison members are also being balloted over changes to terms and conditions, including cuts to overtime pay, travel allowances and emergency call out allowances.

For more industrial reports and analysis go to www.socialistparty.org.uk

In brief

Support striking bus drivers

Stagecoach bus drivers are striking in Barnsley and Rawmarsh, Rotherham, in a series of rolling 24-hour strikes. The majority of over 250 drivers are on strike but Stagecoach is bussing in supervisors and managers from all around the country.

The company imposed an 18p pay rise in November taking their top rate to £8.74 an hour. The drivers are demanding £9.50 an hour with no strings. The next strike is 16 January.

• Messages of support should be sent to Barnsley Unite branch secretary Tony Rushforth, a-rushforth@sky.com. Cheques should be made payable to Barnsley Unite and sent to Tony at 45 Tune Street, Wombwell, Barnsley S73 8PX

Save Greenwich libraries

Greenwich Unite has learnt that the council has set aside money from its book budget in order to prepare for a legal challenge. The council is planning to transfer the library service to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), a move opposed by the trade union. The union claims that the transfer will be followed by cuts - including library closures and the introduction of charges.

Unite Officer Onay Kasab stated: "Rather than sacrifice money from the book budget, the council should shelve its plans to cut the service by proxy. The transfer will simply get the council off the hook politically as far as closures are concerned - instead it will be unaccountable managers at GLL not councillors who face election who make the cuts.

"Yet the reality is that there really is no need for this measure - the council still has over £130 million in its reserves gathering dust."

Reinstate Vik Chechi



Vik (right) photo C.Newby

On 18 October 2011, Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) Unison branch secretary Vikhas Chechi was suspended from his post. This is clearly linked to Vik's vocal opposition to the cuts and restructuring being imposed on the university.

The latest situation is that management still haven't completed their preliminary investigation. The process started on 18 October, almost three months ago.

While not suspended from trade union activities, his long term employment and therefore union position as shop steward and branch secretary, remains severely in doubt.

• Please send letters of protest to QMUL Director of HR Chris Pearson (c.pearson@qmul.ac.uk) and director Fran Balkwill (f.balkwill@qmul.ac.uk) demanding his reinstatement and opposing trade union victimisation at QMUL.