

# Unison pensions cowardice

## The devil's in the detail!

A Unison member

Since 10 January Unison's right-wing lay leadership, and the bureaucracy at whose bidding they act, have been attempting to sell their position on the local government pension scheme (LGPS) around the regions. Their hypocrisy in this endeavour is at times breathtaking, having abandoned the campaign of strike action, leaving the militant unions to fight alone, they nonetheless pretend that if necessary they will go back to strike action!

This is done on the basis that the motion carried by all the affected Service Group Executive committees refers to an on-going dispute

with the government, and the ballot results being "live". But few Unison members can expect further strike action following the break with those unions prepared to fight for a decent deal on pensions.

What is most likely to happen is that a few minor concessions will be negotiated, still leaving members in a 'pay more, work longer, get less' situation. A shabby deal will be recommended to members in a ballot, accompanied by a campaign of glossy literature and computerised presentations, misrepresenting the deal as something good.

But the hypocrisy does not stop there, they are also attempting to pretend that they have not agreed to the government's 'heads of agree-

ment', the principles that are the prerequisite for continuing talks. The motion referred to above contains the line: "To reserve our position on the detail of the LGPS principles and timetable until firm proposals emerge from the negotiations".

The nonsensical nature of this piece of sophistry can best be illustrated by the fact that the principles include the commitment that the age that members can draw their full pension will be linked to the increasing age that they can draw the old age pension. What "detail" can possibly make any difference to that?

In reality Unison's position has been shown to be pathetic by the fact that both PCS and Unite have

been allowed into the talks without agreeing to these principles. Further action by the fighting unions will put pressure on Unison's leadership, as Unison members refuse to cross picket lines, and question why their union is sitting on the sidelines.

Unison branches should pass motions demanding that Unison join with those unions who are prepared to take further action to defend members' pensions.

The forthcoming elections for the Service Group Executive committees will give Unison members the chance to have their say on the mishandling of the pensions dispute, by electing fighting leaderships in each Service Group.

### In brief

#### Unilever 1

To the sound of hoots of support from passing traffic, the delivery lorries normally supplying Walls Ice Cream were backing up, as drivers refused to cross the Unilever picket line in Gloucester on 25 January. The lorries turned round next to a banner reading 'Unilever the greatest thieves since Robert Maxwell'. The first national strike action to hit the world's third biggest consumer products company, started in December involving Unite, GMB and Usdaw. This was after management broke previous promises when deciding to replace its final salary pension scheme with an inferior career average, affecting 5,000 workers.

Despite repeated union appeals and the offer of talks at the conciliation service Acas, Unilever has refused to meet and instead scrapped Christmas parties, gifts and bonuses. So action has continued since 17 January for ten days, across all twelve British sites - from the Croespenmaen Pot Noodle factory in Wales and the Persil factory in Warrington, to the Colman's mustard factory in Norwich.

According to its profile: "No company touches so many people's lives in so many ways".

**Chris Moore**  
**Gloucestershire Socialist Party**

#### Unilever 2

When the Unilever Crumlin plant in south Wales comes out on strike, every single one of the 180 workers does their shifts on the picket line. It makes for a very strong dispute. In the latest strike from 26-28 January, this was shown very clearly.

Eight fitters were told they hadn't been included in the documentation to the company and they had to go in or their jobs were on the line. Very tense scenes erupted, when they tried to go in to work. In the end, the pickets let them through, but only on the adamant instructions of the full time official. But after a discussion with the manager, he admitted they couldn't be forced to cross a picket line, and they came back out again to support the strike!

**Mariam Kamish**

#### Stop DVLA closures

As previously reported in the Socialist, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) is planning to close all 39 of its local offices and centralise operations at its Swansea headquarters. This is part of a wider strategy to move away from face-to-face service to an electronic service. Not only will this move locally based facilities with experienced and knowledgeable staff away from the general public and the motor trade, but it will cut over 1,200 jobs.

PCS is strongly opposing these plans and a ballot on industrial action is to be held, not just at DVLA but across the entire Department for Transport group. This reflects the fact that job losses and privatisation are a common theme throughout the department. Lunchtime protests (12 noon - 2pm) are planned at all DVLA local offices on 9 February. Please visit the DVLA web site for locations of local offices and to respond to the consultation, which closes on 6 March.

**Dave Warren**  
**vice president DVLA section of PCS**

**+ For more on all these and other disputes see [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)**

## Olympic victory for DLR workers

London RMT transport organiser Steve Hedley reported on a deal won for workers at Docklands Light Railway, to recognise the extra work involved with transport during the London Olympics.

### What have the workers won?

Well what they've got is a £900 bonus paid at £100 a week and then they've got overtime paid at time and three quarters for any overtime worked during the games. And if they want to they can get guaranteed five hours overtime a week.

If they choose to do that then the least that they're going to come out with is £2,500 and the middle to higher earners will be taking home something in the region of £3,500.

### How was this achieved in a time of austerity?

Well, basically by good trade union organisation. In the Docklands we're the only trade union there. We have over 90% membership and we've got a very determined and combative workforce. We're going to make sure that they've a recompense for productivity during the games - the fact that they'll have to be more flexible and the fact that they'll have to work harder. They were determined that they weren't going to be cheated out of that.



**"Good trade union organisation"**  
photo Paul Mattsson

## Whipps Cross: Defend Len Hockey



**Workers at Whipps Cross hospital in east London rally in support of their Unison branch secretary Len Hockey. Len is under attack from his employer Initial Rentokil. Shockingly he is also being attacked by his own trade union, in spite of Len's branch being given official awards by Unison for good trade union organisation!**  
photo Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

## Remploy workers fight privatisation

Jon Dale

The first strike in Chesterfield Remploy's 60-year history was rock solid after a 93% vote in favour. Many workers joined the picket line for the one-day strike on 26 January.

The 50 workers, all with a disability, make hand-fitted shoes for people with foot problems like arthritis and diabetes. Remploy is government-owned. Most shoes are supplied through the NHS. Any profit is ploughed back into the business.

But instead of supplying the NHS directly as Remploy used to, shoes are now sold to Webster Shoes very cheaply - which then sells them to the NHS with a huge mark-up. Now Simon Webster, chief executive of

Webster Shoes, is trying to take over the factory. Workers suspect he wants to take over the order book, make a quick profit and then move on.

"This is privatisation through the backdoor", said Michael Hall, Remploy GMB Yorkshire President.

Already non-disabled workers are being taken on with worse pay and conditions - no final salary pension, less holidays and sick pay.

Many trainees have been through Remploy over the years, getting a proper training with trade union terms and conditions. A private owner is likely to use trainees as cheap labour.

The future of Remploy is in the balance. "This government is more or less continuing what the last La-

bour government started," said a GMB rep. Labour closed 30 factories and the remaining 54 factories are under threat of closure in 2013 when public funding runs out.

A lot of public money was used to set up Enterprise Businesses, but then Remploy didn't get the contracts from public organisations. How can it make sense for public bodies, like schools and hospitals, to buy from private companies and put disabled workers in the public sector out of work? Many will have difficulty finding another job in this dire economic situation.

Building action throughout Remploy and linking up with other workers fighting to defend jobs and pensions can knock the government back.

## Jet tanker drivers continue strike action

Alistair Tice

123 oil tanker drivers employed by road haulage firm Wincanton began a week-long strike on Tuesday 24 January. Employed on the ConocoPhillips contract, they deliver fuel to Jet petrol stations. After a 83% vote for action, these Unite members are striking for

job security - they want ConocoPhillips to guarantee they will abide by TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employees) if they end or fragment the Wincanton contract.

In effect, the tanker drivers are being subcontracted to ConocoPhillips who want to cut costs by putting the Jet contact out to the lowest bidder. This would see the Wincanton

drivers either lose their jobs or see their terms and conditions cut if they aren't protected by TUPE.

Three major fuel distribution depots are affected, in Kingsbury, Stockton-on-Tees and the biggest on Immingham docks, where nearly all the 86 drivers and fitters manned picket lines in and out of the refinery depot.

The strike is solid at all three depots with support flooding in from other Unite drivers' branches. The union has served notice of a further week long strike starting on Thursday 2 February. The only disappointment for the drivers is that due to the anti-union laws, they will have to go back to work for two days before continuing the strike.