

Vote 'yes' for action against cuts

inbrief

THE NATIONAL executive (NEC) of civil service union PCS is launching a policy ballot urging members to vote 'yes' to reject the government's proposals on the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS). These proposals tear up members' accrued rights, severely cut redundancy payments in both compulsory and voluntary situations and make the overwhelming majority of members worse off than under existing entitlements.

John McNally,
PCS national vice-president,
personal capacity

The intention is to drive through up to 100,000 job cuts as quickly and cheaply as possible. This is not just an attack on redundancy payments but a major assault on jobs and services - that is why the NEC is also urging members to vote 'yes' in a second question in the ballot to support the union's campaign to defend jobs, pay, pension and services.

PCS has fought a tremendous campaign to defend the CSCS. The Labour government began the attack but members took three days of action in March which set the conditions for victories in the High Court. This ruling stated it was unlawful for the government to impose a new scheme without union agreement.

The Tory/Liberal coalition government then sought to get around the law by introducing primary legislation in parliament. Despite every effort by PCS to reach a negotiated settlement, including demanding that any redundancy payments under any new scheme were more fairly distributed in favour of the lower paid rather than the small percentage of high earning senior civil servants, the government has decided to press ahead and impose the detri-



Protesting at cuts at the Ministry of Justice.

photo Paul Mattsson

mental proposals.

PCS and the Prison Officer's Association (POA), which between them represent the overwhelming majority of workers covered by the scheme, are balloting at the same time. A rejection of the proposals would show that there can be no settlement without union agreement.

Some smaller unions, with a particularly pernicious collaborative role having been played by the First Division Association (FDA) and Prospect, struck a deal behind PCS's back with the Cabinet Office. But this will not deter PCS and the POA from defending members' interests.

The ballot is an indicative one, not for industrial action, but no less important for that. As the union

prepares to fight the government's cuts programme a clear rejection of the CSCS proposals and support for its defence of jobs, condition and services will send a clear message that our members will not be a soft touch for these unwarranted attacks. A positive ballot result will build a firm foundation for the union's campaign, including industrial action, both national or with other unions.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) has indicated it will ballot on pensions next year and PCS will do all it can to coordinate any such action on this or any other issue that represents an attack on our jobs and conditions.

As the sheer scale of the cuts is

hitting home and the implications for our jobs, services and communities becomes clear, opposition is building. The tremendous protests of students and school students and the proliferation of anti-cuts groups is setting the scene for more generalised opposition.

The TUC has a clear policy to coordinate the campaign against the cuts, including industrial action, and will come under increasing pressure to do so. But PCS and other unions with campaigning left leaderships will build campaigns to defend their members' interests now.

The ballot starts on 7 December through to 14 January and every PCS activist will be working flat out to win a 'yes'/'yes' vote.

A united battle for pensions

ON TOP of the fight against cuts is the battle to save the pensions of five million public sector workers. The government has told us to expect to pay 3% more in our pension contribution rate from April, taking it to nearly 9%-10% of our salary. Then they are coming back for more.

The decision of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) executive to ballot on pensions in the next couple of months is a step that should be grasped by all the public sector unions to prepare for a public sector wide general strike in defence of pensions.

Incredibly, some at the top of Unison are arguing that it is too 'premature' to ballot with the NUT as "we don't know the exact detail of the Hutton proposals until April". It is clear that the death warrant has been signed, but Unison's leaders would have us waiting until we are on the gallows before saying we could do anything about it.

The public sector unions must launch the campaign to save our pensions. Even Unison general secretary Dave Prentis has said this was the issue that there would be united national action on.

Public sector workers forced the New Labour government into a retreat on pensions in 2006 - now we can do the same to the Con-Dems. A massive strike that could force the government to back down would give enormous confidence to workers that this government can be beaten.

A Unison member

Wales TUC leadership tries to stifle action to stop the cuts

THE WALES TUC (WTUC) special conference against the cuts on 26 November would have disappointed any trade unionists who came looking for a real campaigning strategy to defeat the cuts in Wales.

Katrine Williams,
PCS Wales chair, personal capacity

General council speakers stressed the need to back the Labour ministers in the One Wales Coalition Assembly government and their draft budget and to cancel the WTUC conference next year.

We have a referendum on more powers for the Welsh Assembly in March and then the Assembly elections next year but a number of the trade union bureaucrats are absolutely opposed to us having a clear industrial response to these events and the movement against the cuts.

Instead they want to tail-end New Labour and stifle any movement against the cuts. The timing of the conference was worked around Assembly (WAG) ministers' availability so that we could spend the whole morning listening to speeches. Although politicians should take note of the Scottish TUC general secretary's speech. He stated that if you sound like a Tory, act like a Tory then you may as well be a Tory.

In fact the most critical speech about the disgraceful actions of two Labour councils, Neath/Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff, who have issued redundancy notices to their entire workforces, from a Labour Party member was from First Minister Carwyn Jones. But he was intent in differentiating the WAG Labour



photo Socialist Party Wales

politicians from Labour councillors attacking their workforces.

However the WTUC bureaucracy were unable to stifle debate as several Socialist Party members and left trade unionists from PCS, RMT and the trade councils made it abundantly clear that there already is vibrant, active campaigning against the cuts.

Andy Richards, WTUC vice president and Unite secretary admitted that in six months of campaigning against the ConDem government, the WTUC so far has supported the lobby of Westminster on 19 October and produced just one leaflet!

However they are obviously concerned about the amount of campaigning taking place. There have been numerous rallies outside the Senedd (WAG headquarters), the successful demos in Cardiff and Wrexham on 23 October and

numerous anti-cuts committees springing up.

But rather than joining the campaigning, the WTUC bureaucracy seems to be intent on stifling and controlling the anti-cuts campaign. They want to replace the anti-cuts committees with their own accredited and trained coordinators who will identify appropriate campaigns to support and "ensure that narrow or fringe political groupings" do not use the campaign as a platform for their views.

The WTUC general secretary specifically attacked the Socialist Party in his speech when he moved the debate on cancelling the WTUC conference. He attacked those who advocated a larger scale Liverpool approach for Wales - whilst Welsh Labour councils are currently attacking workers conditions and rights and issuing thousands of redundancy notices!

Working class communities don't have time to wait for the officials to get on board. Public sector cuts and the knock-on impact on private sector jobs could mean the loss of 72,000 more jobs in Wales.

We will campaign hard to oppose all job losses and all cuts in services. We will fully support all trade unionists and community campaigners fighting the cuts and continue to build a strong anti-cuts movement in Wales.

We will continue to put pressure on the Wales TUC and Labour/Plaid politicians to fight the cuts and demand back the £300 million in funding stolen from Wales and prepare for coordinated industrial action to bring this Con-Dem government down.

Bucks hospitals strike

Workers employed by Medirest in the Wycombe and Amersham hospitals have voted by 90% to strike in a row over pay. The hospital trust and Medirest have failed to increase pay and conditions to the level required by the Agenda for Change agreement. The last Labour government agreed that all staff, including those working for private companies, should be paid at these rates and it put the money into hospital budgets.

Over the last four years of negotiations, Medirest and the local hospital trust have been stalling and saying that they do not have the money.

This is despite Medirest's parent company increasing its profits last year by over £100 million to over £800 million.

Messages of solidarity for this low paid multi-cultural workforce would be great as would donations to Bucks Health Unison hardship fund.

• For more information please ring the Unison branch office: telephone 01296 565568

Newsquest strike

On 7-8 December, NUJ members at the Southern Daily Echo will strike again over a pay freeze which has lasted since July 2008. This is in spite of healthy profits being made by Newsquest. They were on strike for two days on 9-10 November.

Staff at another Newsquest paper - the Brighton Argus - will also be out at the same time as the possibility of a wider strike of Newsquest workers grows.

Isle of Man ferries protest

On 23 November, 50 demonstrators gathered at the Pierhead in Liverpool to protest about the German-owned Manx-based Kohle company, which is undercutting the Isle of Man Steampacket services and endangering the supply of goods to the Island. Already, Tesco's and other suppliers have switched to Mezzaron, which is operating two freight-only ships on behalf of Kohle. They are exploiting the eastern European workers by paying seafarers £3.78 an hour and cooks £2.90 an hour - well below the national minimum wage. The demonstration was organised by the RMT and supported by the northwest TUC.

Fightback in Greenwich

Over 50 people attended a meeting on 24 November to set up a campaign to save services in Greenwich, south east London. The council is making compulsory redundancies and is trying to force every council worker to accept poorer terms and conditions. They are also attacking the Unite branch secretary, in an attempt to silence one of the unions fighting the cuts.

The meeting called for unity of all local unions in organising the fightback, including the local branch of Unison which is being run by regional officials, as a result of the witch-hunt against Socialist Party members in the union.

A lobby of the council is being organised in December and a demonstration in the new year.