

Scotland Unison calls for pensions strike

A Glasgow Unison member

The mood among Unison members for strike action on being forced to pay more for a worse pension was driven home at the Scottish local government Unison conference on 2 September.

A resolution from the Glasgow City Unison branch was overwhelmingly passed which called on the union to "move towards industrial action, starting with a one-day strike in the autumn as part of an ongoing, coordinated campaign to deliver sustained and effective action."

By a margin of 4:1 the 120 delegates representing 32 Scottish local government branches passed the motion.

Significantly, the Scottish local government executive unanimously recommended support, reflecting the enormous pressure that's building up from below in Unison.

A Unison pensions 'summit' is



Unison members marching on 26 March photo Paul Mattsson

due to take place in late September. This should be a council of war to declare the union's intention to call an immediate UK-wide strike ballot. Other regions of Unison should also be demanding immediate action on

the pensions front and for this to be coordinated with other public sector unions.

Following the success of the 30 June strike action against pension cuts involving the PCS across the UK

and teaching unions in England and Wales, Unison members demanded to know why their union was not involved.

With similar action being planned for the autumn by the teaching union EIS in Scotland there will be calls on the Unison leadership to lead a fight.

The attack on pensions has the potential to be the catalyst for a one-day strike across the whole public sector, as a first step.

Negotiations with the government and employers can only be aided by a clear demonstration by the trade unions that they intend to take effective strike action unless these attacks are stopped.

The Con-Dem government can be stopped in its tracks on pensions provided the full power of the movement is used.

The Scottish local government Unison vote shows there is an overwhelming mood to fight. What is needed is a leadership in Unison that can match up to the mood of membership.

The riots, Clarke and the "broken penal system"

'Justice' Secretary Kenneth Clarke has added to the Tories' reaction to the riots by blaming them on a "broken penal system" that has failed to rehabilitate the "criminal classes". He has defended the heavy sentences handed out. Before Clarke wrote his article, Glyn Travis and Joe Simpson, assistant secretaries of the prison workers' union POA set out some of the key issues in prisons following the riots.

Special magistrates courts stayed open night and day as the police arrested hundreds of suspects. Magistrates remanded around 75% more people into custody than they normally would and handed down custodial sentences, sending the prison population to a record high.

No one questioned whether the sentencing was just and fair, if it would be effective, or if prisons would simply become warehouses. Has this country witnessed a new policy on criminality, as the coalition government and the majority of MPs appeared to accept summary justice?

In all our time working in prisons, we have very rarely known people to be sent to prison without some form of pre-sentence or psychiatric report, as is happening now. It seems that this decision was made to enhance the coalition government's image of being 'tough on law and order'. No thought can have gone into the impact on the offender or front-line services.

Every day prison staff have to manage, support and care for the people society no longer trusts. They have to ensure they do not self-harm or take their own life, protect them from other prisoners and more importantly, prepare them to lead law-abiding lives upon release. They have to ensure their human and statutory rights are adhered to.

The long-term impact of the summary justice that was handed down following the riots will have to be assessed as it is clear that a divide has arisen between magistrates and Crown Court judges, due to the inter-



Riot police in Tottenham photo Paul Mattsson

ference of politicians in the judiciary.

Every prison will feel the effects of the aftermath of the riots for months to come. Staff must deal with prisoners' families and other organisations as they aim to achieve the Prison Service vision of keeping those in custody safe.

All of this has to be managed against the backdrop of more serious staff assaults and at a time when the budget to run prisons is being slashed and prisons are being handed over to private companies to run for profit.

Picket lines at police stations

Picket lines outside police stations – not a common sight! But police support staff in Nottinghamshire, members of Unison, recently held two one-day strikes protesting about redundancies.

170 civilian jobs have already been lost due to cutbacks. A further 746 jobs are at risk – in areas such as Scenes of Crime Officers, forensic staff, 999 call centres and police station front counters, and many other professional, technical, administrative and clerical posts. On a 40% turnout, 66% of Unison's 1,000 members voted for strike action and 81% for industrial action short of a strike.

Unfortunately, Unison's leaflet says: "We know some cuts have to be made... We want Nottinghamshire Police to talk to us and agree the best way forward for making cuts, minimising redundancies, saving money and making the Force fit for purpose." The union will get the strongest response from its members and the most solidarity from other public sector workers by clearly opposing all cuts and job losses.

Police station picket lines will be seen more often if the attacks on workers' jobs, pay and pensions continue.

News in brief

NSSN lobby of the TUC

On 11 September the National Shop Stewards Network is organising a lobby of the TUC, demanding they call a one-day public sector general strike.

Transport details are as follows: From the **North East**: Newcastle Central Station, 7am picking up in Durham 7.30am and Teesside, Middlesbrough 8am. Cost £10 unwaged or low waged, £20 waged. To book email paul.phillips1988@btinternet.com or call Paul on 07989806104

West Midlands: phone Lenny 07530429441

Southern: phone Keiran 07814184624

Wales: phone Rob 07541145108

South West: phone Dominico 07786926585

Yorkshire: phone 07706710041

All other regions email info@shopstewards.net

Wyndeham Impact, Basingstoke

Workers at the Impact printers in Basingstoke, members of Unite, have been forced to strike after a long list of attacks by management. The long-established magazine printing company has been in trouble since the collapse of the Icelandic Landsbanki and the management have been trying to make the workers bear the brunt of this. There have been wage cuts, sick pay cuts, holiday cuts and compulsory redundancies.

• Please send messages of support to the chapel rep at: keegan20001@aol.com.

Donations to the strike fund can be made c/o Steve Attwill, Unite, Transport House, 15-16 The Avenue, Southampton SO17 1XF

Unison expulsion

Socialist Party member Onay Kasab has been informed by the Unison leadership that his appeal against expulsion from the union has failed.

He was accused of 'bringing the union into disrepute' by allegedly encouraging Greenwich Unison members to leave and join Unite. Unison were unable to provide any evidence of this.

Unison members have left the union, sickened by the way the branch has been run by the regional officials.

Since the branch has been taken over by the full time officials no effective campaign against cuts in jobs and services has been mounted and there have been no democratic elections of branch officials.

A fuller report will be in next week's Socialist.

Unilever pension strike

Members of Unite, GMB and Usdaw are balloting for strike action against Unilever's plans to close its final salary pension scheme to existing members. A consultative ballot showed only 22 out of 1,459 workers responding being prepared to accept the company's plans. 5,000 of the 7,000 workforce are involved.

Check our website!

The Socialist Party's website: www.socialistparty.org.uk carries more detailed articles about strikes and other trade union news. Updates are posted throughout the week.

Portsmouth councillors threaten wage cuts

Chris Pickett

Unison, personal capacity

Learning from Tory Southampton city councillors, the Lib Dem-led Portsmouth council will decide on 13 September whether to start the process to impose wage cuts and increment freezes [annual pay increases, part of a negotiated pay scale].

The wage cuts could range from 1% to 2.7%. With the rate of inflation, increases in food and utility bills and increased pension contri-

butions, the real cut would range between 9% and 11%. Increment freezes will push this even higher.

City council workers cannot afford or accept this imposition, already 151 jobs have been made redundant this year.

The Lib Dem council, through their 'Shaping Our Future' plans or as the workforce have dubbed them 'Scrapping Our Future' intend further redundancies and cuts. These will lead to a further loss of services to the local community with probable outsourcing to private business

or charities.

The unions, Unison, Unite and GMB, are gearing up for industrial action, these cuts need to be fought. The unions need to broaden this dispute out to the local community, trades councils and other unions.

This is not only for their support in defeating these cuts, but also to bring pressure onto the TUC and leadership of our unions to call for national, coordinated strike action. Councils throughout the country are imposing cuts to pay for the bankers' debts and the ever-deepening economic crisis.

It is important for council workers to come to the lobby of the TUC on 11 September to press for this national coordinated strike action.

We are also calling on fellow workers, community groups and other unions to support a rally on 13 September at Portsmouth Guildhall Square 12 noon onwards.

• Please send messages of support to all the unions involved to: Portsmouth City Unison, Floor 2, Mountbatten Wing, Civic Offices, Guildhall, Portsmouth, PO1 2BR.