



Red Pill

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

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Organise to stop sell-out! Keep the pensions fight alive!

Following our strike on 30 November, the Tory/Liberal government has escalated the class war.

George Osborne's plan to slash public sector pay by scrapping national pay scales and replacing them with rates tied to local cost-of-living assessments represents a dramatic stepping-up of the government's war on public sector workers.

Many workers, including in the civil service (where departments and agencies can set their own pay) and in education (where teachers working in increasingly-common Academies or Trust Schools have to bargain with a local management) already know what localised pay structures mean: cuts, and a weaker hand in negotiations.

The government claims such cuts are financially necessary, but just like their rhetoric around pensions, they are lying. Our pensions are not "unaffordable". Last year the NHS pension fund took £2 billion profit for the Treasury. What they really mean is that NHS pensions are unaffordable for private sector bosses!

If they can slash our pensions to the poverty level of private sector provision, then it will be easier to sell off the NHS to the private business. The Hutton Report admits this: "existing public service pensions can be a barrier to the outsourcing and mutualisation of public services."

The government not only wish to turn human suffering into a profit-making opportunity. But they also seek to create a health service where access to treatment is dependent on our ability to pay, rather than the free, universal NHS that we have enjoyed since 1948.

Our fight to defend our pensions is also the fight to defend the NHS itself.

WORKING-CLASS POLITICS

The pensions dispute is part of a global assault by the rich on the working-class majority. Across the world, governments of the rich, for the rich, are claiming that there is not enough money to sustain public services or working-class living standards.

In Europe, they are suspending normal democratic process as unelected technocrats take over the governments. This is not only happening directly in Greece and Italy but also with the new EU treaty which will impose extreme austerity regardless of any democratic process.

Nobody believes that austerity will solve the economic crisis. By sacking huge numbers of public sector workers and cutting

wages (e.g. by increasing pensions contributions), governments are simply reducing the amount spending power in the economy. This creates a spiral of decline as government's take less tax revenue and have to borrow more money. As more and more working-class people are driven into poverty, more and more social wealth is going to the banks. This in turn creates more debt and further increases the grip of the banks over society.

This is not a coherent economic policy – it is an act of class war.

IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE?

The alternative is to seize the wealth of the super-rich and nationalise the banks under democratic control.

This would allow us to direct investment towards expanding public services and socially useful production (such as renewable energy). Without the parasites at the top of society, we could all work less, retire early and live in relative comfort. With democratic control over the immense wealth in our society and distribute it equally according to human need, not the needs of private profit.

This alternative is called socialism. To get there we need to build a working-class movement capable of ruling society in its own interests. This pensions dispute is the start of building that movement. After decades of relative industrial peace, the bosses are now on the offensive. If we do not step up and start fighting back, then austerity will drive us into poverty whilst deepening the crisis. Our class will suffer an historic defeat that will be felt by our children and many generations to come.

We must fight to win this pensions dispute and rebuild the trade union movement so that we are in a position to go on the offensive for working-class interests. The pensions dispute is about two competing versions of society – one in which the majority work until they drop for the profit of a few; the other where people work decent hours and can enjoy a decent retirement. Our movement must deepen its roots in our workplaces and extend its reach to link up with workers struggles in Europe and the rest of the world.

• Turn over for N30 reports and "where next?" discussion

Workers' Liberty is a revolutionary socialist organisation active in the British labour movement fighting for an alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership, democracy and workers' control. Red Pill is produced by our members who work in the health service. To get involved with producing the bulletin, or to take copies for your workplace, email awl@workersliberty.org with the subject line 'Red Pill'.



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The central fight in our unions is for more democracy and rank-and-file control. If this dispute had been run democratically from the workplace level up, senior union officials like Christine McAnea would never have been able to get away with making statements that the dispute was only ever about "damage limitation".

Every NHS union activist should:

- call cross-union rank-and-file meetings in your workplace to discuss the dispute
- pass policy opposing the government's deal and reiterating the defence of existing pensions schemes as the bottom line.
- discuss how to support any union - within the NHS or outside of it - taking further action on pensions.
- for Unison activists, get your branch to support the call from Oxfordshire Health branch for a Special Conference of the Health Service Group.

THE PENSIONS FIGHT CONTINUES

After the November strike the government radically raised the stakes in its war against public sector workers by announcing plans to slash public sector pay. By scrapping national pay scales and replacing them with rates tied to local cost-of-living assessments the government has signalled that it is seeking to press home its advantage

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The government claims such cut are financially necessary, but just like the rhetoric around pensions, they are lying. Our pensions are not "unaffordable". Last year the NHS pension fund took £2 billion in profit for the Treasury. What they really mean is that NHS pensions are unaffordable for private sector bosses.

The Hutton report told us that privatisation of the NHS was a major driving force behind these attacks on our pensions. This semi-secret agenda was made abundantly clear when a smug Danny Alexander told the House of Commons on 20 December "Because we have agreed to establish new schemes on a career average basis, I can tell the House that we have agreed to retain the fair deal provision and extend access for transferring staff. The new pensions will be substantially more affordable to alternative providers, and it is right that we offer continued access to them."

For the union officials that signed up to the Heads of Agreement, the retention of fair deal (where workers in privatised services get to keep their pension provision) was a major victory. However, really it signals the government's plans to push on with full-scale privatisation of the NHS.

Future generations will not forgive us if we meekly allow the government to destroy the National Health Service. The clear proposals of the Health and Social Care Bill are to create a health system where access to treatment is dependent on your ability to pay. If we allow the latest capitulation by our union leaders to go un-

challenged then Tories will be one step closer to that goal. Our fight to defend our pensions is also the fight to defend the NHS.

WORKING-CLASS POLITICS

The pensions dispute is part of a global assault by the rich on the working-class majority. Across the world, governments of the rich, for the rich, are claiming that there is not enough money to sustain public services or working-class living standards.

Nobody believes that austerity will solve the economic crisis. By sacking huge numbers of public sector workers and cutting wages (e.g. by increasing pensions contributions) governments are simply reducing the amount of spending power in the economy. This creates a spiral of decline as governments take less tax revenue and have to borrow more money. As more and more working-class people are driven into poverty, more and more social wealth is going to the banks and the money-lenders. This in turn creates more debt and further increases the grip of the banks over society.

This is not a coherent economic policy - it is an act of class war. The alternative is to seize the wealth of the super-rich and nationalise the banks under democratic control.

This alternative is called socialism. To get there we need to build a working-class movement capable of ruling society in its own interests. This pensions dispute and the fights to come are the start of building that movement.

Unison leaders: Desperate to undermine dissent

Alison Brown, Workers' Liberty supporter and Health Service Group Executive (SGE) member for Yorkshire and Humberside region, was banned from attending and voting in the important SGE meeting on 10 January.

The Unison bureaucracy used an imaginative interpretation of the rulebook to ensure that at least one prominent left-winger could not speak or vote at the meeting. Alison recently accepted a six month secondment as a full-time organiser for the union. According to Unison rules, union staff cannot sit on the democratic bodies of the union. This is entirely correct. But Alison is not yet a union employee as she has not started her secondment and is still working for South Yorkshire Ambulance Service!

Alison was informed of this decision just a few days before the meeting, making it difficult to mount a serious challenge. She attended the lobby of the SGE and spoke to other SGE members of their way in.

The members of her region must demand that they are properly represented on the SGE and the shady characters who make these decisions should be held to account.

Unison members who are baffled by the union's decision to accept the government's rotten pensions deal need look no further than this story to understand how it happened.

We must ask ourselves: Who controls our union? How are decisions made? How can we reclaim our union so that it represents our democratic will and fights for our interests?