



Workers' Liberty

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30 November and beyond: fight to win

The declaration by the Trades Union Congress that Wednesday 30 November will be the next “day of action” in the campaign against government pension cuts is enormously positive and must now be a key focus for organising.

Like the June 30 strike, action in November will demonstrate to a generation of working-class people unused to seeing their class move as a visible social force that workers have real power to act in our own interests.

It is also positive and important that senior union officials are talking up the need for sustained action. The GMB's Brian Strutton said: “We're not talking about a day out and a bit of a protest. We're talking about something that's long and hard and dirty as well, because this is going to require days of action running through the winter, through into next year, following the government's legislative programme right into the summer.”

Trade-union activists must now step up the pressure to hold union leaders to their word. We have had such fighting talk from union leaders before. In advance of the June 2011 conference of the public service union Unison, its leader Dave Prentis was full of bombastic talk about levels of industrial action exceeding the 1984-5 miners' strike. Then he kept Unison out of the 30 June strike and, until recently, was signalling to Unison members that any ballot was unlikely before the end of the year. Local activists and committees should start organis-

ing now for 30 November and after, not waiting for the leaders.

The teaching unions NUT, ATL, and UCU, and the civil service union PCS, have still-valid mandates for action from ballots earlier this year.

Unions such as Unison, GMB, the Fire Brigades Union, and teachers' union NASUWT are now balloting. It is important that the ballots be for discontinuous action (rather than for a single day's strike); and activists should demand that unions name a date for a further strike *now* rather than waiting until after the November action.

RANK-AND-FILE

Workers must also start putting in place structures through which grassroots union members can take control of the dispute and provide a counterweight to any attempts by the likes of Unison leader Dave Prentis to slow down, derail or sell out the campaign.

Local strike committees of all unions balloting for action in November should be set up immediately to discuss plans for the day, including organising effective picketing and political assemblies (rather than mere rallies with a litany of bureaucratic speakers) where strikers can discuss and vote on strategies for the dispute. Shop stewards should build workplace meetings at every level possible to keep union members informed, involved and confident

about walking out on 30 November. While defending existing pension rights must be the immediate aim of the strikes, strike committees and strikers' assemblies should also begin to discuss and formulate a positive programme for our own radical reform to win fair pensions for all, including private-sector workers, people dependent on the state pension, and newer public-sector workers, who are worse off because of deals made by the unions in 2005-7.

STRIKE TO WIN

Strike strategies must be developed that can apply maximum pressure to government and public sector employers, including rolling and selective action and actions-short-of-strikes (such as work-to-rules) in between strikes.

Unions should organise strike levies and hardship funds to support action by strategically-selected groups of workers. Union members must also insist that their leaders demand a return to across-the-board negotiations on the pensions reform rather than negotiating on each scheme (local government, health, civil service etc.) separately within a fixed overall framework of increases in retirement age, higher employee contributions, worse accrual rates, and slower inflation-upgrading of pensions (CPI rather than RPI). The scheme-by-scheme negotiations push unions into haggling for concessions for some groups of members at the expense of others, and make the unions susceptible to divide-and-rule tactics from government. If the Coalition offers some concessions to workers

in one scheme, it may be hard to mobilise those workers to continue striking against reforms to someone else's pension.

The November strike must be seen as just one flashpoint in an ongoing battle that continues *until we win*. If the details and strategy of a wider programme of action are not considered until after 30 November, the government will easily be able to ride out a campaign of incidental, disconnected single days of strikes. Public sector unions must also link up with live campaigns in private-sector companies, such as the Fujitsu IT workers' battle and the fight against job losses at the Bombardier train manufacturing plant in Derby.

The government have planned their assault on our class with military precision and are on a war-footing against organised labour. We must respond in kind.

By building workplace meetings and rank-and-file strike committees to put pressure on union leaders to live up to their fighting rhetoric and to situate 30 November within a sustained campaign of action, we can begin to do that.

A rank-and-file strategy for 30 November and beyond

- **Fight for ballots for discontinuous action**
- **Make the union leaders name the next strike date now**
- **Build strike committees in every area**
- **Collect strike levies**
- **On 30 November, organise effective picketing and strikers' assemblies**
- **Develop a workers' plan for fair pensions for all**

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