



PUBLIC DISORDER

A quarterly bulletin written by local government workers for local government workers

Autumn 2011 - Pensions Special

WHAT IS GOING ON WITH OUR PENSIONS?

The government is trying pass pension reform that would make every public sector employee PAY MORE, WORK LONGER and GET LESS. All the major unions are balloting in local government for strike action and many more unions in the NHS and civil service are preparing for action.

What will the government's plans mean for me?

PAY MORE – over the next 3 years there will be increases in our monthly contributions. For workers earning over £15,100 this means paying an over 25% more on the current deal. A worker earning £18,500 will pay £127 a month instead of £100. Higher earners will see much sharper increases. In exchange for this deal, we get nothing but further attacks. Essentially this is a pay cut.

WORK LONGER – the government want to increase the retirement age. This will happen gradually so older workers will have to continue until 66 years old whilst younger workers will not be able to retire until they are 68 years old. If we want to retire before this time there will be significant financial penalties.

GET LESS – on top of all this, the government is introducing a number of changes to the way they calculate our pension entitlement which mean that we get much less money when we retire.

To give some idea of the sums, workers can

expect to receive up to 50% less on their pensions. Over the course of a 20 year pension you could lose anything between £50,000 and £200,000.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Vote YES to strike action

The unions have been in negotiations with the government for over 6 months and have not won a single concession. A large YES vote for strike action will mean over 3 million workers standing together to force the government to back down.

Talk to your colleagues about it

The government is putting out a lot of propaganda to try and convince us to accept this attack. The best way to counteract this propaganda is through discussing the issues amongst ourselves. Turn over the page and see the “Mythbusters” section.

Get involved in your union

This dispute will not be won by a single day of strike action. It will be won by union members getting active and working together. This is our dispute - our strength lies in organisation and unity. We should call on our union officers to organise mass meetings of all union members to discuss what to do on 30th November and how we organise to take things forward.

We must build links across unions and have open democratic meetings where we can discuss concerns and make imaginative plans for the big days of action.

PENSIONS MYTHBUSTER

we all shared in the benefits of technological progress then we could all work shorter hours and retire early.

Myth 1: Public sector pensions are gold plated

According to the government's own figures, the average public sector pension is just £5,600 a year. The average pension for a woman in the local government is just £1,600. Compare this to a backbench MP who can take home a pension of £24,000 after just 15 years service!

Myth 2: Public sector pensions are not affordable

If no more money was paid into the local government pension scheme it could continue to meet its obligations to pensioners for the next 20 years. A government report published in May 2011 predicts that the cost of public sector pensions will actually decrease over the course of the next 50 years. The only way the schemes will become unaffordable is if the government make pensions so worthless that we all opt out.

Myth 3: Its not fair that public sector workers have much better pensions than private sector workers

It is true that we have a better pension scheme than most workers in the private sector. But if we lose our existing pension rights, then it will not make things any better for other workers in the private sector. In fact, it will create a race to the bottom. We must campaign for fair pension provision for all.

Myth 4: The population is aging so we have to work longer

Back in the 1960s, people used to puzzle about how we would all cope with "the leisure revolution". New technologies were reducing the work-time needed to produce the necessities of life. Since then we've seen huge improvements in technology — through microelectronics and otherwise — but working hours are rising. Instead of increasing our leisure time or lowering the pension age, the extra wealth has been seized by the super-rich. We now live in a world where the top 1000 richest families own x of the wealth. If

Myth 5: We all have to tighten our belts to get the country out of debt

There is no evidence that austerity is the answer to the current economic crisis. If the government makes the majority of the population poorer, through cutting jobs, pensions, pay and benefits then people stop spending money. When people stop spending money, businesses go bust and the government collects less tax. When this happens the financial markets penalise governments. Greece has imposed the most far-reaching austerity on its population and it is still an economic basket-case.

Support the Southampton strikes!

Southampton council workers' long-running battle against their Tory bosses' cuts plans show how we can take democratic control of our disputes. Strike strategy has been decided on by mass members' meetings and strike committees, not dictated by unaccountable union officials. They've used tactics designed to apply maximum pressure to the council's revenue streams, and have made sure everyone who needed it had access to strike pay to keep the dispute going for as long as it takes to win. That level of democratic control and fight-until-we-win attitude will be needed in the pensions dispute too! For more, see soton-unison-office.org.uk

*This bulletin was produced by supporters of Workers' Liberty a socialist organisation that fights as part of the labour movement for an alternative to capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy. If you would like to be involved in producing future editions of **Public Disorder** or would like to help distribute the bulletin then get in touch. awlundison@gmail.com, www.workersliberty.org, 0207 3948923*