



# UNISON FIGHTING FOR DECENT PENSIONS

## UNISON members vote Yes to action

UNISON members have voted Yes to industrial action to defend pensions in the biggest trade union ballot ever held, by 245,358 votes to 70,253.

Commenting on the result, general secretary Dave Prentis said: "The decisive Yes vote in the ballot, reflects the deep concern that our members have over government ministers' proposals for their pensions.

"Yesterday's statement in Parliament was a marked improvement on earlier proposals.

"But, it is important to understand that the statement has to be translated into offers in the scheme-specific talks.

"We still have had no offer in those negotiations, where such an offer can legitimately be made.

"We support the TUC day of action on 30 November," added Mr Prentis, "but will be negotiating right up to then and beyond to get a fair deal for our members."

Senior lay officials of the union met throughout Thursday afternoon to discuss the latest government statement on pensions and to decide what action to take as a result of the strike ballot.



The union balloted members including nurses, teaching assistants, social workers, care assistants, paramedics, police staff, school dinner ladies, probation workers and cleaners.

The turn-out was 30% in local government, 25% in health and 48% among members covered by the Civil Service scheme.

In local government, the votes were: Yes 171,428, No 54,500 - 76% in favour. In health, the figures were: Yes 73,930, No 15,753 - 82% in favour. The civil service scheme ballot saw an 87% Yes vote.

A massive thank you to all members for their hard work in achieving such a decisive turnout.

# Making the kids pay: The government's policies and children and young people

A briefing from SERTUC

## **Access to key public services: disabled children and children of disabled adults**

On first reading the welfare benefit entitlements of disabled children under 16 are largely unaffected, the biggest long-term change being the up-rating of benefits by CPI rather than RPI, which will have a significant impact through time.

However, the Government's claim that disabled families are being protected from the cuts is disingenuous, and it is clear that disabled families will typically suffer a dramatic decrease in their household income. Demos, in a report called *Destination Unknown*, calculated that 3.6 million disabled people and careers will lose £9.2 billion in welfare support in the next 5 years. Moving people from Incapacity Benefit to Job Seekers Allowance, seems to be a reform designed primarily to cut government spending and not to better assist the unemployed, and will be the source of half of that welfare cut.



Demos further suggests that the family of a disabled child will lose £2000-£3000 in the years up to 2015. Possible causes of loss of income include up-rating on benefits by CPI from April 2011, the replacement of means-tested benefits with Single Universal Credit, the abolition of Disability Living Allowance and the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment, the removal of special youth provisions for contributions based on Employment Support Allowance and the abolition of Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants.

Added to which are the loss of services previously provided by local authorities, such as supervised play for disabled children and respite care. For example, Kids Active has adventure playgrounds for disabled children at Lady Allen Wandsworth, Hackney, Haywood and Chelsea, as well as others in the South East. It reportedly has cuts to services for teenagers and it expects to be indirectly hit by cuts to social service departments which will reduce budgets available for individual children and might prevent them taking up play places. Surrey County Council's children's services supports approximately 900 children with complex needs, of which some 350 children and their families use short-break respite services. There were to be 3 respite centres in Surrey: Applewood House, which is newly built and has been moth-balled for a year; Ruth House and Squirrel Lodge. The estimated cost of running all 3 centres was £2.4 million. The Tory County Council has agreed a budget of £1.6 million for Applewood House and Ruth House. Squirrel Lodge will be closed and the site sold.

The impact of the retrenchment of local authority services to disabled children will be further compounded by the increase in household utility bills and especially increasing fuel costs. In total, the Government's austerity measures could cost disabled Londoners up to 35% of their income according to research by the Office for Public Management. 32,000 Londoners will lose their Disability Living Allowance if the Government achieves its intended 20% cut in the number of recipients. Children in households with a disabled adult who loses their DLA or suffers reductions in family related benefits and tax credits will suffer obvious detriments.

## **Access to key public services: legal aid**

The proposed cuts to legal aid will cut £50 million of funding from Citizen's Advice Bureau and community law centres.

The cuts to legal aid, which include any entitlement to advice for debt, welfare benefits and clinical negligence issues, will be detrimental to the welfare of vulnerable children whose welfare and future will be decided by court hearings. More than half the proposed cuts are expected in the area of family cases like child access, non-violent domestic disputes, divorce cases and welfare.



The Citizen's Advice Bureau service could be devastated because of budget cuts. The CAB chief executive has said that the service could be looking at a 45% drop in funding as a result of cuts in local and central government support. Local authorities provide the core of funding for the CAB.

A number of CAB centres will close, or fear closure, following councils' announcement of their spending plans and their funding for local CAB, legal and advice services. For example, the Central London CAB is closing, in this case because the Corporation of London withdrew funding. For over 45 years its services and projects offered advice and advocacy that was free, impartial, non-judgemental and non-discriminatory. Alongside its core services it offered a number of specialist services such as tackling domestic violence sessions, Macmillan Cancer Support at St Bartholomew's Hospital and Newham University Hospital, the Chronic Fatigue Unit advice sessions at St Bartholomew's Hospital, and a discrimination advice service. It must be remembered that the Majority of CAB staff are volunteers and so when the infrastructure goes, the volunteers are lost too.

In parallel to the cuts to CAB services, other sources of advice that vulnerable families might use for debt advice, welfare advice, welfare benefits advice or legal advice and representation are also suffering from cuts in grant funding and possible closure. For example, Brent Law Centre is threatened with closure and Hammersmith and Fulham Council withdrew all its funding to Hammersmith and Fulham Community Law Centre. Legal Aid cuts mean that many law centres might close. Evidence from clinical experts in public law cases will be severely restricted whilst legal aid for clinical expertise in private law cases where families are in dispute will be abolished. "Cuts to legal aid in family courts will result in even less funding for the impact of clinical experts to protect future Baby Ps"- Dr Judith Freeman et al in *The Guardian*, May 2011.

## **Access to key public services: relief and residential services for victims of domestic violence**

Domestic violence services, which are mainly funded by local authority grants, have been devastated by cuts that result from the Government's 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. Women's Aid estimates that 70,000 women and children who would have needed to access services could be without support as a result of the cuts. There are approximately 400 refuge space in England— a 60% cut would reduce that to 160. Domestic violence charities report that 200 women a day are already unable to access a refuge places. The cuts could lead to a rise in murders, rape and assault. An estimated 40% job losses are predicted across the domestic violence sector according to a survey by Women's Aid of 89 organisations that presently employ 800 full-time and part-time staff.

## Action on 30 November still on

Public service unions have welcomed movement by the government on pensions, but stressed that so far the TUC day of action on 30 November will go ahead.

A statement from the TUC Public Service Liaison Group, chaired by UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said:

"At the meeting on Wednesday Danny Alexander and Francis Maude outlined a number of new proposals to the TUC negotiating team, including an improvement in the proposed accrual rates within the major public service schemes compared to their previous position, and new proposed transitional protections for those closest to retirement. They also indicated a long-term commitment to any agreed reforms not being reopened within the next 25 years.

"The PSLG welcomed this movement in the government's position which has come as a direct result of the strength of feeling and determination shown by public sector workers and the groundswell of support for the TUC's day of action at the end of this month.

"These proposals, and their detailed implications for the pensions offer within each scheme, will now need to be considered in detail within the sector specific negotiations, alongside all the other issues including proposed contribution increases, increases in the pension age, and the impact of the indexation change from RPI to CPI on which the government's position remains unchanged.

"All the unions have indicated throughout this process their determination to reach a negotiated settlement on all these issues. That remains the position and unions will engage intensively in the coming weeks. But unless and until further real progress is made and acceptable offers are made within those negotiations, unions remain firmly committed to continuing their preparations for the planned day of action on November 30.

"A further meeting of the PSLG will be held in November to consider reports on any progress made within the sector talks."

## Local businesses show their support for UNISON members

The Randolph Hotel in Oxford, part of the McDonald Hotels group, have offered their support and understanding for local members in the current pensions dispute.

Working with Michael Holder, the Communications Officer for Oxford Brookes University Branch, the Randolph Hotel have offered a 3 course dinner and wine for two local members in a prize draw.

It is extremely encouraging for members to receive such support— especially when they are faced with job cuts, pay freezes, contract changes and the attack on their pensions. It is heartening to see local communities backing their public sector workers and helping to dispel the myths surrounding public sector pensions. Our thanks once again to the Randolph Hotel in Oxford.



## **Age UK: Women over 55 falling out of love with Cameron**

Nearly half of women over 55 are dissatisfied with the way the Prime Minister, David Cameron, is doing his job - nearly double last year's figure (48% up from 27%) - according to a recent political poll from Ipsos Mori. At the same time polling conducted by TNS for Age UK shows that one major area of concern for these women is unfair changes to the state pension age. Two thirds of the women affected are concerned about the proposed move to make women wait up to two years longer to receive their State Pension. The move goes against promises made in the Coalition Agreement by the Government that it would not start to increase state pension age for women until at least 2020.

Michelle Mitchell, Charity Director at Age UK says:

"Polling commissioned for Age UK shows that unfairly increasing the state pension age is a big issue for many of the women affected. Many women in their late 50s are deeply worried to hear that they could have to wait a further two years for their pension than they had planned and angry that the goalposts have been moved in a way that has not given them enough time to prepare for retirement. Many of these women do not have safety nets like wealthy husbands or private pensions to fall back on. Some have been made redundant and are struggling to find another job while many are caring for older relatives. We want the Government to stick to the coalition agreement and not increase the state pension age for women before 2020."

The Age UK Poll by TNS showed that nearly half (46%) of those interviewed who were concerned about the changes said they were worried due to health problems, care responsibilities, unemployment or because they had already scaled down their hours in preparation for retirement. For many to work longer was difficult or impossible. Of those interviewed 15 per cent admitted they were counting on their state pension to give them more time to care for others, such as older parents, a sick or disabled partner or grandchildren.

All women born between 6th April 1953 and 5th April 1960 will be affected by the changes. State Pension Age will be increased for 2.6 million women but 330,000 women across the country will be hit hardest, having to wait between 18 months and two years longer for their state pension. The 33,000 women who will have to wait an extra two years will lose on average £10,000 of state pension income as a result. These women have already been asked to move their State Pension Age to 65 and this is the second time they will face having to retire later.

## **What does it mean locally? Here's what some of your Arun colleagues have to say about it.....**

**Alison Moss, Housing Finance Officer:** "As a working mother of two young children I have plenty of things to spend my money on. If the government goes ahead with its plans to increase my pension contributions by 50%, I'll have much less to spend on essentials for my daughters. That's why I'm backing Unison's Pension Campaign"

**Tony Owen, MultiSkilled Team Supervisor:** "As an employee whose job involves a tremendous amount of hard physical labour, the thought of working until I'm 68 or even older before I can draw the pension I've paid for fills me with dread. That's why I'm backing Unison's Pension Campaign"

**Eve Hearsey, Planning Team Leader:** "I'm being made redundant next year and at least being able to draw my pension will make things easier. But I'm already worse off because of the change from RPI to CPI- over the lifetime of my pension I'll be getting 15% less than I planned on. That's why I'm backing Unison's Pension Campaign"