

November 30th



The government estimates that 62% of state schools in England closed, 146,000 civil servants walked out, more than 400,000 NHS staff and well in excess of 670,000 local government employees were not at work on November 30th. All told up to 2 million public sector workers stood shoulder to shoulder to fight back against this government's attacks on public sector workers.

The government proposes to force public sector workers to work longer, pay more and get less when they eventually retire, this on top of a two year pay freeze and another two years to come where any increases to salaries will be capped at 1%. So after suffering what is in real terms a 10% pay cut for the last two years a public sector worker earning £26k will have to pay an additional £900 for their pension each year, but their salary will only increase by up to a maximum of £260. Every day the news tells us fuel prices are soaring, the price of food is increasing and people are forced to choose between heating and eating, where are public sector workers supposed to find this extra money?

The government's announcement of the 1% cap on pay increases only further fuelled the anger of public sector workers sick of being made the scapegoat of greedy bankers and a cabinet filled with millionaire ministers.

Many of those taking to pickets and to march along the streets were doing so for the first time. A number of those protesting for the first time were graduates of the last ten years who had not thought that this would be something they would have to do; it was something they felt was part of our history. Others though had been on strike in the 1980s and 90s and were encouraged by the

uniteNOW!

great turnout on the streets of union members young and old protesting against the blatant theft of public sector workers' pensions.

The pickets themselves were a clear sign of solidarity amongst trade unionists. At the picket of our building we were joined not only by our Unite members, but Prospect and PCS members too. Furthermore, CWU members refused to cross our pickets and deliver post to the building.

More than 35,000 public sector workers took to the streets of Birmingham, bringing traffic in the second city to a standstill whilst the protesters made their way to the rally at the NIA. Marches took place all over the UK, with over 10,000 participating in Newcastle, 4,000 in Cambridge and 30,000 in London.

Some of those in attendance at the rally in Birmingham had never seen, let alone heard the likes of Brendan Barber, Dave Prentis, Chris Keats and Tony Woodley speak. Their speeches were inspirational to say the least, but it has to be said they were preaching to the converted, those in attendance were already outraged, they already had the courage to stand up and say "no". What attendees took home with them that day was inspiration and a courage to go back to their places of work and spread the word, we will not work longer, pay more and get less.

Where do we go now? What happens next? December 1st seemed quite anti-climactic after the build up to November 30th, that is until the notification of new members began to come through. In the days following November there was a marked increase in membership with people saying they saw picketers standing there defending our pensions and knew it was the right thing to join the union and fight back.

If 2 million public sector workers took action on November 30th based on the government's attacks on our pensions, with increased membership and further attacks on public sector workers imagine how many people will stand up next time? The Government's proposes 1% cap to any pay increases in the public sector, we are facing a further 700,000 job losses in the sector and continue to face cuts in our terms and conditions. Furthermore, jobs in the sector are being sold off to private sector companies, impacting on us and the services we provide to the community.

We are public servants, we work for the community, we care about what we do and the difference we make in peoples' lives and contrary to Osborne's assertion, we pay tax too! We are going to continue to fight back, we are going to fight to protect our pensions, our pay, our jobs and the communities we serve.

Katie Whittam

Unite Rep & Activist