

Hacked Off!

The Voice of Hackney Workers

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ALL OUT

Unison members vote to take strike action on 30 November.

Council staff join teachers and head teachers, civil servants, NHS workers and many others in the public sector in the biggest industrial action for 85 years.

It's hard to remember a time when the news wasn't filled with the doom and gloom of the economic downturn, more so to think about the last time we didn't have to worry about our jobs being deleted.

Now the government, not content with freezing our pay and slashing our services, want our pensions too and members have sent a clear message to the Tories that we are not prepared to give them up without a fight.

So what will the changes mean for people. Well to start with our contribution rates will go up meaning that we will have to pay more into our pensions.

In real terms and considering the pay freeze over the last two years that means we will be taking home less pay every month. Changes to contribution rates are planned from next year.

We will all have to work longer before we can access our pensions as the retirement age for local authority staff rises to 66 from 2012.

Then we will be moved onto a career average scheme in 2015 which will mean the value of our pension over the course of our working life will drop considerably.

These proposed changes will affect everyone in the local government pension scheme (LGPS) and although the government announced last week a 'new offer' designed purely at dividing the workforce the changes for many will mean a retirement marred by poverty and worry.

The fact is our scheme is sustainable, it is funded and the 101 schemes across the country when combined form the biggest pension pot in Britain with a massive £165 billion in assets.

Annually we all pay a huge £4 billion extra into the scheme than is

paid out and the cost to the taxpayer is falling year on year.

All in all the LGPS is a healthy, well managed pension and the cheapest in the public sector in terms of the cost to the state. The worst thing about what the government is proposing is that of the money they take out of the scheme not a penny will go to making it more sustainable.

Instead our cash will be used to pay down the national debt which lets face it none of us played a part in accruing.

The Tories have form on raiding our pensions to pay for their follies. In the early 1990s they allowed councils to take 'pensions holidays' to fund cheaper Poll Tax bills.

That policy caused large deficits in some of the 101 schemes which have still not been made up 20 years later.

No one joined the local authority to become rich we did it to serve the community. We all pay our taxes and in Hackney we have done a good job to make the council better for everyone. But that means nothing to the government who use the rhetoric of fear to try and steal the few savings we have managed to build up in our pensions to pay for a crisis we didn't cause.

If we allow the Tories to steal our pensions again just like they did in the 1990s then we will just have to go cap in hand to the state on retirement when we can't make ends meet.

Damned lies and statistics

And don't believe the hype about fat cat council staff taking home 'gold plated' pensions. The average council pension is £4800 per year and women, who make up about three quarters of the workforce, have an average pension of just £2800 per year hardly 'gold plated'!

Then there is the myth that we enjoy better pensions than workers in the private sector but that's no reason to make a decent pension bad.

Unison believes everyone deserves a decent pension and in fact the current average private occupational pension pays around £9500 per year compared to the average public pension of £7800. Instead of protecting workers in the private sector and trying to solve the pensions crisis in this country successive governments



and greedy company boards have allowed private employers to close decent schemes and replace them with poor ones.

We should be campaigning for a comfortable retirement for all workers it just isn't fair that after 40 years of work we should have to rely on state handouts when we retire.

United we stand

We are not alone in our struggle and will be joined on the day by lots of other unions.

The NUT, PCS, ATL and even the National Association of Head teachers are taking action on the 30th and the GMB and UNITE unions are currently balloting members and anticipating a yes vote too.

The sheer size of this strike is testament itself to the massive strength of feeling public sector workers have over this issue.

This is about more than just pensions it is about the sort of society we want to live in and the sort of public services we want everyone to benefit from.

If we roll over now and let this millionaire's government steal our savings we may as well all resign tomorrow.

'I'm alright Jack'

If you think that these proposals aren't too bad you're wrong. You wouldn't accept a pay cut so why accept a cut to your pension.

With inflation running at 5.6% and a pay freeze over the past two years our pay has actually fallen over the past few years.

TUC research carried out recently set out that public pay would need to be increased by 18.6% by 2014 just to maintain current living standards so by reducing our pension now the government is just storing up a problem for the future.

This is an official national strike of all Unison members and we expect all Hackney Unison members to be on strike during the day.

Unison will support anyone facing financial hardship as a result of taking industrial action. So if you think you can't afford to strike your wrong the changes being proposed will decimate your pension and so you can't afford not to strike. We all got a vote and the majority decided to take action.

The union is us, you and me and although it may sound clichéd if we stand together we can make a difference.

The pension changes will mean you pay more, you work longer and you get less, a bad deal for everyone!

Let's send this government a message they can't ignore by joining with millions of public servants and stopping work on November 30.

To find out more about the changes And how they affect you log on to www.unison.co.uk

Know your rights

Unison members have voted to take industrial action on 30 November over the governments pension reforms. If you are a Unison member then we would expect you to show solidarity with your colleagues taking action and not cross the picket lines.

We all know that taking strike action can be daunting so here is a very brief guide to your right to strike.

- Unison members do not have to come to work on the day of the strike.
- Your employer cannot discipline or dismiss you for taking official strike action.
- Your employer cannot victimise or treat you unfairly for taking official strike action.
- You do not have to inform your manager that you are taking official strike action.



You can demonstrate or picket outside of or near to your workplace on the strike day. Picketing is where employees encourage others not to attend work during a strike. Picketers are not allowed to obstruct colleagues from entering their workplace but can explain why they are taking action and persuade others not to work.

You do not get paid for the day you strike but Unison will assist anyone facing financial hardship as a result of taking industrial action.



TAKE ACTION FOR YOUR PENSION

UNISON members have said yes to strike action. Now it's time to make that action count on 30 November.

All members who were balloted should:
– talk to their steward and/or branch
– visit the UNISON website at unison.org.uk
– ask colleagues to join the union and get involved in our campaign.

**Together we are stronger.
Together we can win.**

Not a member? Join UNISON online today at unison.org.uk/join or call 0845 355 0845.

To find out more go to unison.org.uk/pensions/protectour.asp

Are You Up To Date?

When the union is contacted for representation and advice we check out if the person is a fully paid up UNISON member.

Most people who contact us believe that they are a member of UNISON and paying their subscriptions. However too often we find that subscriptions are not up to date and that union membership has lapsed. This is often because the subscriptions are paid through direct debit. The problem occurs less where the subscriptions are paid through payroll.

It is the responsibility of members to ensure that they are paying their union subscriptions. All members can easily check this by checking their bank statements or their payslips to make sure that they are paying their union subscription.

If you are paying through payroll usually the only way that your

membership can be lapsed is by the member asking payroll to stop their subscriptions. Even if you receive Hacked Off, this is not evidence that you are a member of the union.

Failure to keep your subscriptions up to date could deny your the right to union representation and legal assistance. This is not something that we would want to happen. So take the time to check your membership is up to date.

Also remember apart from representation on workplace issues there are also a lot of other benefits that UNISON membership gives you. This includes for example free wills, accident in and outside of work. Full details are available on the UNISON website <http://www.unison.org.uk/benefits/>

SO CHECK OUT YOUR MEMBERSHIP, IF YOU ARE NOT UP TO DATE YOU WILL HAVE TO COMPLETE A NEW MEMBERSHIP FORM WHICH ARE AVAILABLE FROM YOUR UNION REP OR YOU CAN CALL MARTIN COOTES OR DEBBIE PEART ON 020 8356 4071 WHO WILL ASSIST YOU.

A quick Guide to “that bunch of tents outside St Paul's” (Occupation LSX)

It became apparent in my office last week that despite the occupation being plastered all over the news, some people still didn't really know anything about it. So I thought I would write a quick guide.



Tent City! Protesters camping outside St Paul's

Who are they and what are they complaining about?

The group is mainly made up of individuals rather than one overall political group. Many groups use the space to address a variety of issues, anti cuts, anti capitalism, pro democracy. What they all do agree on is their feeling that the current system is unfair and undemocratic, serving the in-

terests of a few individuals over everyone else (which is where all that “we are the 99%” comes in).

Why put a bunch of tents outside St Paul's?

Despite what the media would have you believe the protestors don't hate Jesus.

The original target for the camp was to be the Square outside the London Stock Exchange (LSX), which is just next door. Long story short the police stopped them from getting in there, so they put the camp up where they stood.

When did it start?

The occupation started on the 15th October as part of what is being referred to as “The Occupation movement”. This refers to the spread of similar protests camps globally, apparently now happening in over 80 countries. The first of the same

type was the one in New York, The Wall Street Occupation, but actually the main inspiration was the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo during the Egyptian revolution this spring.

Is it not just a big waste of time?

Depends who you ask. At the very least it has got a lot of people talking which is normally the first goal of any protest, to raise awareness.

When will it end?

In short who knows, the government doesn't seem particularly keen to suddenly stop attacking public services, or make any significant attempts to address inequality. However for the time being the legal threat posed by St Paul's and the City of London to forcefully remove them has been lifted and the protestors still seem committed.

If you are even mildly interested I think it is well worth going down there to see for yourself. The people down there are more than welcoming, so go down and check it out whilst you still can.

Branch Elections 2012

It's that time of the year again when we elect our representatives for the coming year. Any member can stand for election to any of the posts below and all posts can be held on a job share basis. If anyone is interested in standing then they must be nominated by another member and that nomination must be seconded by another member.

Every year the branch elects members to the following posts; Branch Secretary, Chair, Treasurer, Health and Safety Officer, Welfare Officer, Equalities Officer, Membership Officer, Publicity Officer, International Officer and Education Officer. The time table for elections is set out below and a nomination form can be found attached below.

Open nominations for branch officers:	Monday 14 th November 2011
Nominations close:	Friday 9 th December 2011
Deadline for submission of motions to the AGM:	Friday 16 th December 2011
Deadline for submission of election statements:	Friday 16 th December 2011
Ballot opens:	Tuesday 3 rd January 2012
Deadline for amendments to motions:	Friday 20 th January 2012
Ballot closes:	Friday 27 th January 2012
Annual General Meeting:	Wednesday 1 st February 2012



Hackney Local Government Branch

Nominations for Branch Officers

Hackney Unison Branch invite nominations for the following Branch Officers posts:

Secretary, Chair, Treasurer, Health and Safety Officer, Publicity Officer, Welfare Officer, Equalities Officer, Education Officer, International Officer and Membership Officer

If you wish to nominate or second a Unison branch member for any or all of these posts you need to complete the form below.

Only fully paid up members of Unison can stand, nominate or second a candidate. All positions can be held by job sharers.

Officers Position you wish to nominate to

Name of Proposed Candidate

Candidates Unison Membership Number

Name of Person Proposing

Proposer's Unison Membership Number

Name of Person Seconding

Seconders Unison Membership Number

Signature of Candidate

NB: please print all names clearly using block capitals. If any of the information requested above is not provided or is unclear, the nomination will not be accepted.

Please return completed forms to Hackney Unison, Room 52, Town Hall, Mare Street, E8 1EA.