



Stop the great pensions robbery

● Support the council and civil service workers' strike on 23 March

● Unite the struggles of public and private sector workers to defend pensions and the welfare state

There has not been such a wave of anger amongst organised workers against the government of the day since the 1980s.

New Labour's attack on the pension rights of millions of public-sector workers has created a storm of opposition, which will culminate in the strike of 23 March.

Tony Blair and the new Labour cabinet do not care a damn if their proposals condemn hundreds of thousands of workers to an old age of poverty and want.

They are quite prepared to spend £6 billion or more on an unjustified war and occupation against the defenseless people of Iraq. But it

will be a different matter when they take on the organised might of millions of trade unionists in Britain.

The outrage felt by ordinary workers to the government's proposals to cut their pension rights has forced the right-wing union leadership into direct opposition to the government. What has brought this about is the arrogance of a government that imagines that working people will not fight back. But the prospect of mass action, like today's strike, has shown that workers standing together can force this government to retreat and will raise all workers' confidence.

come to our public meeting

New Labour's proposals will rob millions of workers of tens of thousands of pounds each. A bin worker who now retires at 57 after 28 years' service receives a pension of £15,915. Under the new scheme he will only get £5,305.

A newly qualified teacher retiring at 60 and living to the average life expectancy will lose £59,129 if the new pension scheme goes ahead.

In contrast to public and private-sector workers, the rich are feather-bedded and get even richer when they retire.

While one-in-four pension schemes in the private sector in 2003 was closed off to new starters, the average director of a FTSE 100 company gets two-thirds of their final salary as a pension. And their salary scheme receives a boost from the company equivalent to 30% of their annual salary. But the average employee who contributes 6% to a pension fund only gets that equivalent from their company (ie. 6%).

MPs voted themselves a salary hike of 26% in 2001 to ensure they get at least £40,000 a year in a pension after 20 years in Parliament.

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Stop the pensions robbery - unite the struggles

THE GOVERNMENT 'justification' for pension cuts is that people are 'living too long'. But all statistics demonstrate that life expectancy for most public-sector workers has hardly improved in decades.

This whole exercise is about the government wanting to slash public expenditure at workers' expense.

Although this is partly to cover expected future government financial black holes as the economy declines, it is also about paving the way for ending any state responsibility for the elderly and smashing the rights of workers organised in trade unions to fight back against such attacks.

The TUC estimates that the government hope to save 15% to 20% of what they spend on public-sector pensions spending now. These 'savings' will primarily come from increasing the retirement age from 60 to 65.

Myth of public sector 'feather beds'

ALL THREE main parties will seek to perpetuate the myth in the general election of a 'feather-bedded' public-sector workforce; they will seek to divide workers in the private sector against workers in the public sector.

But the idea of co-ordinated action, involving private-sector workers too at some stage, will be enthusiastically welcomed by workers across the country, who know that direct action is the only thing to make the government and bosses listen.

Workers have for decades paid part of their wages into private sector schemes and are staring into an abyss of poverty in their old age, wholly dependent on the miserly state pension which is losing its value compared

to average wages.

We call for the restoration of the link with earnings and for an immediate 50% increase in the state pension.

Mobilise private-sector workers too

OVER HALF a million workers in 380 private-sector pension schemes have been told in recent years that their schemes are bankrupt with nothing left in the coffers.

The capitalist owners of these companies took pensions holidays in the 1980s and 90s, when stocks and shares were on the up. The increased funds from stock market investments into the pension funds encouraged the bosses to stop paying into them.

Of course they didn't tell their workers what they were up to. Instead, the poor bloody worker, who thought that they were deferring some wages today for a half-decent pension tomorrow, were still expected to pay all their contributions.

The bosses saved themselves a massive £20 billion since 1987 and increased their profits by £4 billion by means of this sleight of hand, according to the TUC.

Some private-sector workers have already taken successful strike action to defend their pension schemes. They would be enthusiastic supporters of joint action between public and private-sector workers! No private-sector worker who has experienced this rip-off at the hands of their bosses would swallow the line from the government that public-sector workers are feather-bedded.

A one-day strike against the pensions attack will not by itself mean a complete retreat by the government.

In the run-up to a general election the government may hope to postpone a direct confrontation with public-sector

trade unions. But workers realise this is a real opportunity to force the government to fully retreat on all its pension plans.

Whilst unions could force the government to retreat in a negotiated settlement, the only way to achieve this is for the unions to organise the biggest possible show of strength on 23 March and prepare to escalate the action if necessary, in the run-up to the general election to ensure the government withdraws all its pension plans.

Prepare to escalate the struggle

EDUCATION UNIONS (NUT and NAFTHE) are balloting their members to take strike action against their pension cuts. They are aiming for a day of strike action sometime in April. Local government and civil service unions should be prepared to join them if the government does not completely retreat on their pension plans.

To defeat the government, there must now be real efforts to pull the whole working class into a campaign to defend pensions and the welfare state. Unions should mobilise their members in a massive national demo, involving private and public-sector workers and all those opposing the government's plans.

This would be supported by the overwhelming majority of people, young and old.

Today's strike is the first step to end the attacks on the public sector, including privatisation and job cuts. A national demo in April will ensure the issue remains firmly on the general election agenda.

If, after the election, the government doesn't drop its plans completely, then the unions should continue the campaign and prepare to escalate the strikes into two or three days to force a retreat.

● **For a national demonstration of the public and private sector**

● **Step up the strikes to two or three days if the government refuses to retreat after the general election.**

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