

intouch

The Newsletter for all UNISON Stewards and Activists in the North West Region

Autumn
2011

VOTE



TO PROTECT YOUR PENSION

As soon as possible after the 11th October – check your members have received their ballot paper asking them to vote for industrial action to protect their pension – their retirement is at stake.

Speak to your members and encourage them to vote YES. The proposed changes simply aren't fair.



Stand Firm, Vote YES for industr

This is it. The ballot has been called. The battle to protect public sector pensions has begun as an attack on your pensions an attack on your terms and conditions. You as UNISON activists must help deliver the yes vote. Only a strong yes vote and high turnout will send a clear message that we will stand up to protect our pensions.

Ministers want all public sector workers to pay more, work longer and get less – making decent pension schemes unsustainable, unattractive and unaffordable in the process. UNISON has negotiated with ministers in good faith and will continue to negotiate. But we also know that public sector workers are already enduring pay freezes, the threat of privatisation, reorganizations and cuts in services. Public sector workers deserve the pension they are already entitled to.

By voting **yes** in large numbers we will do three critical things;

- We send a powerful message to the ministers.
- We show solidarity with all public sector unions balloting or preparing for industrial action on November 30th.



- We give negotiators new strength to support our demands.

It is vital that members **vote yes** and in large numbers – this will be the first opportunity for us to send a collective message to ministers through the ballot result with a yes vote and a massive turnout.

Our pension schemes were changed just a few years ago to make them affordable and sustainable for the long term. Official government figures show that the cost of public sector pensions is falling.

Remember that one of the proposals is that members should pay more – hundreds of pounds for most workers and thousands for some – but none of this extra money will go in to the pension scheme. It will go to the Treasury to pay off the bankers' debts. This is an additional unfair tax on public sector workers and is deliberately disguised as money for the pension schemes, which they falsely claim to be unaffordable.

Don't forget that the ministers we're negotiating with, without agreement,

have already imposed changes on public sector pension schemes by changing how they increase with inflation – this has already wiped 15% off their value.

Our pensions must not be sacrificed for the bankers' financial crisis!

We're balloting across all of our membership – that's over a million people in health, local government, schools, further and higher education, the police, the voluntary and environment sectors and the private sector too. But UNISON is not alone in saying that enough is enough. Other trade unions across the whole of the public sector including teachers, head teachers, lecturers, civil servants and the fire brigade are also balloting for industrial action.

UNISON will continue to negotiate, but how will ministers take us seriously without a massive **yes vote**?

The strength of the union comes from the members; they are the union. This is why all activists need to talk to your colleagues and help deliver the **yes vote**. UNISON nationally and regionally will be contacting members too

ial action

via email, a special U magazine and advertising campaigns. But it will be no replacement for you getting involved amongst your colleagues and friends and making sure they **vote yes**. There is help available and you need only contact your branch office. There is information online too: www.unison.org.uk/pensions/protectour.asp

Because of the severity of the proposals we have decided to ballot for industrial action and will only take strike action as a last resort. We will do everything in our power to ensure no harm occurs to clients, patients and users of services but we need to send a message that we will stand up to protect our pensions

However this is a call to action.

You must get out amongst our fellow workers and recruit, talk to members who may not understand what is at stake, spread the message, deliver the result. There must be no member that doesn't know why they have received a ballot paper.

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

A message from the Regional Secretary



It's here. The biggest dispute most of us will ever be involved in. We are still in negotiation – so, don't let anyone tell you different – but those negotiations are glacial. The ballot has been called and we have to deliver a massive turnout and significant YES vote. The challenge is, we have to do that in less than 14 days. Our activists have never let us down in the past and I know you will deliver this time.

All experience tells us that most people vote within a few days of receiving their ballot paper.

Our job as activists and staff of the union, is to instil confidence in our members, to reassure them and to let them know that it is essential to vote YES now.

Getting that yes vote is phase one – phase two starts when we get the results and have to convince the wider public and the media that our cause is just.

We have plenty of materials to help you with these two phases and if you need more, simply ask. We need our members to believe that there is an alternative. Ministers cannot destroy our future as our members deserve a decent pension when they retire.

VOTE YES is the answer and talking face-to-face to our members about what matters to them is what we all need to do in the days to come.

Frank Hont

Frank Hont
Regional Secretary

Key dates

Tuesday 11th October – Ballot opens and ballot paper posted to members

Monday 17th October – If members have not received a ballot paper by this date they should call UNISONdirect on 0845 355 0845

Monday 31st October – Noon deadline for members requesting a ballot paper via UNISONdirect

Thursday 3rd November – Ballot closes at 10am

Wednesday 30th November – The Day of Action

VOTE
YES X
TO PROTECT
YOUR PENSION

What do YOU need to DO?

- Get the message across that public sector workers are being asked to **PAY MORE; GET LESS; WORK LONGER** to pay for the banking crisis.
- Speak to your Branch Secretary to find out if there is a branch Pensions Campaign Committee.
- Find out who the branch Pensions Champion or Pensions Contact is. If there isn't one why not do it yourself or make sure someone takes on the role?
- Find out what meetings the branch has already set up and encourage as many colleagues as possible to attend.
- Organise workplace meetings and make sure that your colleagues know when and where the meetings are and ask them to encourage others to attend.
- Speak to other UNISON stewards and stewards from other unions to find out what they are doing and ask them to speak to as many colleagues as possible.
- Talk to members and non-members face to face on a daily basis – you need to speak to as many colleagues as possible and recruit those that aren't members of a trade union so that they can strengthen the campaign for a YES VOTE.
- Make sure you've got a ready supply of 'VOTE YES' flyers and other materials. If you haven't, contact your Branch Secretary.
- Make sure that flyers and posters get onto notice boards, desks and the hands of your colleagues – the campaign must be highly visible to be winnable. Ask members to play a part by delivering flyers and posters in their work areas so that you aren't overburdened.
- When you receive the ballot paper make sure you vote right away and make sure you vote 'YES'.
- There is help available and you need only contact your branch office or get information online at: www.unison.org.uk/pensions/protectour.asp

Above all – make sure that when you talk to members or potential members that they get the message loud and clear to vote 'YES'. The result of this ballot will be critical to determining how seriously we are taken. UNISON representatives have a responsibility to the members of the union and have a vital leadership role within that.

There must be no member who doesn't know why they have received a ballot paper! They must be in no doubt why we are asking them to **VOTE YES!**

VOTE
YES X
TO PROTECT
YOUR PENSION