

NORTHERN IRELAND UNISON NEWS

November 2011



UNISON Members Tell Government 'HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS'

Across Northern Ireland UNISON members are coming out on November 30th in their thousands to force government back to the negotiating table. Proposals mean that workers will have to pay an extra 3% into the pension scheme. This is an extra £200 pa from your net pay for band 3 health and social care workers and for classroom assistants. It rises above £1600 pa for senior managers.

As well as causing UNISON members financial hardship, it may force some people out of the pension scheme because they cannot afford it and it will also take millions of pounds out of the Northern Ireland economy.

The other proposals include a retirement age of 66 for anyone now under 57, then 67 for anyone now under 42, then 68 for anyone now under 33.

As part of the shift from 'final salary' to 'career average' schemes, ministers want to change the 'accrual rate' – this means the amount of pension income you

earn with every year you pay your contributions could be as much as 25% lower.

Those members earning below £15,000 will not have their contributions increased but will still be affected by the increased retirement age and will get less as a result of career average earnings.

UNISON has been negotiating with government since March and shortly before the UNISON ballot result, an offer was made to unions to exempt those with ten years service left from the proposals. This was rejected by the unions. We need to get the government back to the negotiating table to produce a better deal for members and for future generations.

The government is robbing you to plug the deficit which has been caused by the bankers.

The following unions have voted to also take strike action on November 30th—Unite, GMB, NIPSA, PCS, UCATT, NASUWT, ATL, INTO, NUT. This will affect hospitals and social care services, schools, civil service buildings, tax offices, buses and trains.



Naomi Carton , Band 4 Day Care Worker, Valley Centre, Derry

“Day to day work with adults with learning disability is a demanding job. It has its rewards but they are not financial. We never have enough resources. I am a band 4 and for me the changes will mean paying almost £300 a year more towards my pension. How can I afford this with prices rising, the cost of petrol through the roof? Now I won't be able to retire until I am 68. It can't be done.”



Sally Kelly, Public Relations Officer Band 7, HSCB

“I started working as a Personal Secretary in health and social care over 20 years ago. I now work as a Public Relations Officer. The government wants me to pay an extra £700 per year from my pay after tax – that’s less money for me to spend in local shops and businesses. They are also proposing career average pension calculation instead of final salary, which is unfair to many people who have gained promotion.”



Jack Brown, Senior Assistant Technical Worker, Band 3 CDU Musgrave Park

“The Central Contamination Unit is very hard, physical work. I am lifting huge trays of instruments to keep the theatres running. It is very demanding and stressful. At the moment we are working with a reduction in staffing levels and now the government is expecting me to pay more in my pension and work longer for less.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I only received a ballot for the strike in October, am I still covered?

Yes, the ballot for the October action included terms and conditions so is valid to allow people to go out for Pensions

Will it make any difference?

We believe that it can make a difference. The government had planned to push through these proposals, but even before the UNISON ballot result was announced, they offered a small compromise. The purpose of the strike is to force the government back for meaningful negotiations. This is a collective show of people’s strength to stand up for what is fair.

I didn’t vote, can I still go out on strike?

Yes, 245,358 UNISON members did vote for action, so we have a mandate.

Will I lose pay?

Yes, you will not get paid for the day you take strike action. We are aware that this is difficult for people but if these proposals go through, members stand to lose a lot more.

Do I have to inform my line manager that I am planning to take industrial action?

You are not obliged to inform your manager as employers have been told that UNISON members are taking action. However, you may wish to inform your manager or inform your local steward.

Do I have to picket?

This is not an obligation but it is important that we have a good presence at picket lines as employers and the media will judge the success by the numbers of people who attend. We are asking members to come down for a few hours and/or attend one of the rallies. Children are welcome at picket lines and rallies.

Do I have to go to my workplace picket line?

No, you can go to the nearest picket line which could be a local health facility, school or university.

My school is going to be closed, will I lose pay even if I don’t strike?

You can report for work and may be asked to provide cover for another facility.

I have only recently joined UNISON, can I still take action?

Yes, as long as you are a UNISON member by the day of the strike, you can go out.

What is happening on the day of industrial action?

We are asking members to picket at their school or local health facility in the morning and then go to one of the rallies for lunchtime. There are people travelling from Ballymena to Belfast (meet at bandstand at 10.30am)

Remember to wrap up warm.



Anne Blake, Dining Room Assistant, Holy Cross Boys Primary School.

“I work in the kitchen in a busy school. The price of everything is going up, but our wages aren’t. And now we would need to work longer to get our pension!!! We’re all coming out on the 30th.”

SUPPORT YOUR FUTURE!

RALLY FOR PEOPLE, JOBS & SERVICES

**1pm WEDNESDAY 30th
NOVEMBER 2011**

BELFAST CITY HALL 1.00PM

Feeder marches from:

Royal Victoria hospital (Governor Road)

Belfast City Hospital (Lisburn Road)

Central Train Station (East Bridge Street)

UU Art College (Donegall Street)

Assemble at all points from 11.45

Rallies outside Belfast:

1pm, Newry City Hall. – 12.15 pm main entrance Daisy Hill Hospital; march to City Hall

1pm, Guildhall Square, Derry

12pm, Millennium Square in front of the St Patrick's Heritage Centre, **Downpatrick.**

10.30 -11am, the Bandstand Ballymena

1pm, the Courthouse, Omagh

11am, Carngrove Hotel in Seagoe industrial estate, **Craigavon**

11am, the Diamond, Magherafelt

2pm, Post sorting office -Cookstown





Pensions: Busting the Myths

MYTH - People are living longer which means they're claiming their pensions for longer - this needs to be addressed.

The schemes were revised to take account of this three years ago - so scheme benefits and costs are now 25% lower. In addition, life expectancy has increased, but less so for manual workers and the low paid.

MYTH - There's a big public sector pensions deficit that has to be repaid.

There is no funding gap - the public sector schemes were assessed for long term risk and adjusted accordingly three years ago and are now very secure. Both the local government pension scheme and NHS pension scheme are currently cash rich with income far exceeding outgoings - some £2 billion in the case of the NHS pension scheme.

MYTH - Public services and public service pensions are causing the financial crisis.

It was the banking sector's reckless risk taking and excessive greed that caused this global recession.

MYTH - We're all in it together. Everyone has to make sacrifices right now - why not public sector workers?

We are all facing cuts to our public services - on top of this public service workers are facing unprecedented job cuts and a pay freeze. We will all end up paying more tax if people drop out of the scheme to end up relying on the state in their old age.

MYTH - It's not fair, why should the public sector get good pensions when the private sector doesn't?

The average director of a FTSE 100 company has a final salary pension worth £3.6m or £174,963 a year, while the average occupational pension generally is £9,500 a year and the average public service pension is £7,800 a year. That's the real unfairness. UNISON thinks everyone deserves an adequate pension, including workers in the private sector. We should improve bad schemes rather than make good ones bad.

MYTH - Public sector workers have it too good with huge pensions.

The average public service pension is around £7,800 a year, for women working in local government the average is £2,800 a year, while the median for women working in the NHS is £3,500 a year: hardly huge pensions. Saving towards an occupational pension in many cases means a person is receiving fewer welfare benefits during retirement, saving the taxpayer money.

MYTH - Taxpayers are paying for public service workers' pensions. That's not fair.

Everyone's taxes are used to pay for all public services - stethoscopes in hospitals, the salaries of primary school teachers, people to change the light bulbs in street lamps, and part of these people's pay is their pension. A pension is part of someone's salary package and is no different than an annual salary, a car, or the London weighting allowance. It's not fair to change something in a job contract after someone accepted the job. One in five people working in the UK works in public services. They are taxpayers too.

MYTH - Public service workers retire at 60.

The normal retirement age in many of the public service pension schemes is already 65. Raising the retirement age hurts some people more than others. In general we're living longer, but that doesn't mean everyone will have the same quality of life. Many public service workers have jobs that are physically demanding or stressful, making it difficult or even impossible to continue working into old age. Similarly many low paid workers simply don't have the option of retiring early because they can't afford it.