

Resistance is fertile



500,000 strong march through London to defend the public sector on 26th March

“To every action there is an equal but opposite reaction”, Isaac Newton once said. Whilst he may have been talking about the laws of motion, his sentiments equally translate to the situation the public sector now finds itself in.

With the exception of a few minor disputes the trade union movement has lain dormant since the 1980s, but the action of the Coalition Government in one short year has provoked a reaction not seen since the days of Thatcher.

First we had the cuts in funding that led to cuts in services, redundancies and attacks on staff terms and conditions throughout the public sector. The cuts united public sector unions like never before, with marches and demonstrations taking place throughout the country, including a 500 strong march and rally through Pontypridd. On 26th March around half a million people marched through the streets of London in opposition to the cuts and to promote the fact that there are alternatives to the government's austerity measures.

Campaign groups made up of unions, community groups and local people have formed all over the country and strikes are breaking out in resistance to the cuts, including UNISON strikes in Southampton, Birmingham, Doncaster and Camden.

With an arrogance that makes Thatcher look left wing, the government has now decided to take on the whole of the public sector at once with proposals to attack our pension schemes. They want us to work longer, pay more and get less.

With a bombardment of media spin and propaganda they have tried to make out that our 'gold plated' pensions are unaffordable. The facts however, tell a different story. For several months UNISON has been producing literature that undermines the myths being put about by the government and the right wing media, we now all need to make sure our side of the story is heard. Inside this issue of Branch Line you will find some facts and figures you may find handy to throw into the conversation next time

you are confronted by Liberal-Con propaganda.

The government often refer to the green shoots of the economic recovery, which is good news, a healthy economy is good for us all; but it is important to remember the economy is there to serve the people, not the other way around.

We are also seeing the green shoots of resistance. On 30th June we saw over half a million public sector workers on strike over pensions. UNISON did not join them but make no mistake, if the government continues with its firm approach, a ballot for action is on the way

Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary has stated, “Pension schemes across the public sector are very different and the nature of how the pension contribution increases will be calculated and determined will vary. UNISON will need to see the full details of the proposals before we can establish with whom we have a trade dispute and the nature of it. It is only at this stage if discussions break down that UNISON will consider taking steps towards lawful industrial action to protect our member's pensions. We know that teacher trade unions and some civil service trade unions have already taken industrial action. It is likely that there will be a rolling programme of different trade unions taking action at different times as the issues become clearer. There may be coordinated action through the TUC public services committee or through trade union staff sides in the LGPS or NHSPS but we will have to wait and see how all of these issues develop”.

The battle lines are being drawn. We do not enter into strike action lightly, but the government's 'we will not move' attitude might leave us little choice.

If you tolerate this, then your pension will be next

Branch Secretary, Peter Crews, talks about the last nine months in RCT



Hundreds march through Pontypridd in opposition to cuts locally and nationally

Peter Crews, UNISON branch Secretary, has been involved in the trade union movement for over thirty years and thought he had seen it all, but events in RCT since last October have been a bit of an eye opener for him. Branch Line recently pinned him down for a chat about the implementation of the new terms and conditions.

“Shocked”, Peter told us bluntly, when asked about his reaction to the issuing of the ‘Section 188 notice’. “This was closely followed by shame”, he continued, “we are one of only two Labour councils in Wales and I was amazed they had taken this approach. It was not long before anger took over and frustration was not far behind.”

“Prior to this we had always had a very good working relationship with the Council and even after we were issued with the 188 notice, I still expected the negotiations to be meaningful. How wrong I was. It had been stated from the outset that a collective agreement was the preferred option but it soon became clear that by that they meant they wanted us to agree to their proposals. There were no meaningful negotiations, we were told what they were going to impose and that was it. We did not agree on anything.”

If the changes were not bad enough in themselves, the implementation was incredible, with staff feeling blackmailed and intimidated. Some staff even had Human Resources calling around their homes in the evening to get them to sign contracts without complaint, or face dismissal.

Media spin was the order of the day, with statements being made in the press claiming UNISON wanted a double digit council tax rise (we have never suggested anything of the sort) and that only 17% of staff were suffering as a result of the changes (neatly ignoring the impact the loss of enhanced over time rates would have on people who *have* to work weekends). There was even an attempt to blame the trade unions for Job Evaluation.

“To be against Job Evaluation is to be for the continuation of a situation where low paid female workers earn less than men carrying out work of similar value. The unions are not against Job Evaluation, we are against the

unfair way it is being implemented with no transparency as to how the new grades were arrived at” Peter explains.

“The council’s tactics showed a total lack of understanding for how people were feeling”, says Peter, “a lot of people are worried because of the national situation, with jobs thin on the ground and money in short supply, people were scared and the Council took advantage of that situation. Morale hit an all time low and is not showing any sign of recovery. They are hoping that staff and their families will forget about it by the time of the next election but people will not forget this for a very long time.”

We tried to get to the bottom of why things had been done this way. “I think the Council lost control the moment they handed over power to the Chief Executive”, Peter speculates, “they absolved themselves of any responsibility and lead officers in the Council were given too much power with no democratic accountability”.

Taking a similar line to the Coalition Government, we were told that there was no alternative to these changes to terms and conditions, despite the fact that no alternatives were considered. “We asked staff for ideas for efficiency savings and some of them came up with some very detailed proposals that would make significant savings. But for some reason, none of them were ever considered.” Peter believes a responsible union should be helping find savings as a matter of course, not just in times of crisis.

“The Council had to save £14 million this year. The logical thing to do would have been look at how savings can be made then look at terms and conditions to make up some of the short fall. What actually happened was the council randomly decided it was going to save £5.4 million from terms and conditions but to date we still have no idea where the rest of the savings are coming from”.

The new terms and conditions have kicked in and there are already signs of discontent with some staff now refusing to work overtime for single time. In some cases contractors are being drafted in to work instead. “It’s early days yet”, Peter ponders, “new policies are being implemented and we are already finding they are open to interpretation. For instance, there are obviously going to be staffing issues in some areas next Christmas now that enhanced payments for bank holidays have been reduced. Some managers have taken it upon themselves to ban all leave next Christmas, which is clearly unacceptable and we are taking steps to put that right.”

As Peter said from the outset, he has found this very frustrating not just as a member of staff, but as a member of the Labour Party. “They are the main group within the council”, he tells us pragmatically, “so we have to find some way of working with them. As party members we need to take a more active role to ensure this sort of thing does not happen again because what we have seen has not been the actions of the *true* Labour Party. And we need to start building those bridges pretty quickly,” Peter concludes, “because our local disagreements are going to be dwarfed by what lies ahead and the battle over pensions that we will be engaged in later this year.”

Conference 2011



The nation's media out in force to hear what UNISON's General Secretary has to say

The General Secretary's speech to conference is always the spot that attracts attention, but this year not only was the hall full of UNISON delegates, visitors and staff, but the eyes of the British media wanted to see what the leader of the UK's biggest public sector union had to say about fighting cuts, strikes and the fight back.

And disappointing, it was not. It was an emotive call to arms to fight back against the ideologically driven cuts by the Tories and the Lib Dems.

Unsurprisingly the Coalition came under fire, particularly Danny Alexander for his speaking to the media whilst still in negotiations over pensions. "Danny", Dave stated, "if your intervention last week was designed to enrage our members and increase the chances of a strike - it worked!"

"Make no mistake, these are true blue Tories", Dave pointed out for anyone in any doubt. "Forget the PR, the smiling faces. They're cutting further now than Thatcher dared. For them it's unfinished business. They've declared war on our public services. With Tory donors, City firms and hedge funders back in the heart of government".

"Financiers like John Nash whose private equity firm, Sovereign Capital, buys and flogs care homes for the fun of it. John Nash, who chaired Care UK. Who grabbed NHS contracts. Who funded Andrew Lansley's private office. Who wrote the White Paper. John Nash, who was invited to The Treasury by George Osborne to help draft the spending review. To privatise, to then bid for the contracts. A sordid spiral. With spivs and speculators ruling the roost. A country of favours and freebies for Cameron's friends and funders".

The message to Cameron, Osborne and Clegg

was, "Don't underestimate the outrage and anger of our members, at the savagery of your gratuitous attack on our pensions - to pay more, get less, work longer. The anger and outrage of our members at the crude efforts to set public sector against private - to start a new race to the bottom".

But it went further, there was also a message for the Labour Party, who have recently warned against industrial conflict—with a message to Ed Balls, "When we want your advice Ed, we will ask you for it".

Looking to the future and the prospect of industrial action, Dave was in a determined mood. "Make no mistake. If we need to, we will take the fight to them, Conference, this is no time for despair, no time to look back. I ask you to find within yourselves the strength, the resolve, the courage, to march on. Determined, united, one million strong. And Conference, we will win."

"We'll hear none of the emotional blackmail from politicians and the media. If this coalition is so worried about the people who use our services, they shouldn't be closing them down. If they're so worried about disruption, they shouldn't be privatising them. If they're so worried about the old, the sick, or the young, they shouldn't be shutting down care homes and stopping benefits. Stop demonising ordinary, hardworking people who've had enough of being bullied, who just want to protect what they have, what they were promised".

As speeches go, it was timely, motivating and passionate. Needless to say it was well received by Conference, but activists must be under no illusion, we now need to take his message into our workplaces and onto the street.

As Conference progressed numerous motions about fighting the cuts were passed with minimal opposition. Organising and preparing our branches was also high on the agenda. At the end of Conference we caught up with Cymru Wales Regional Secretary Paul O'shea. "This has been the most serious and thoughtful conference for many years", he told us. "In a strange way, the arrival of a Con-Dem government has been able to unite the union in the fight against the cuts and the attacks on our pensions. If we don't stand up to them this government will do serious damage to the public sector and to our communities. On the whole we have voted for some solid policies and we now need to go back and organise in our branches—particularly over pensions, on which I think the government are vulnerable."

It is fair to say everyone left Conference in a business mood. The next year is going to be difficult, but we have to prepare for a tough battle. As Benjamin Franklin said: "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail".

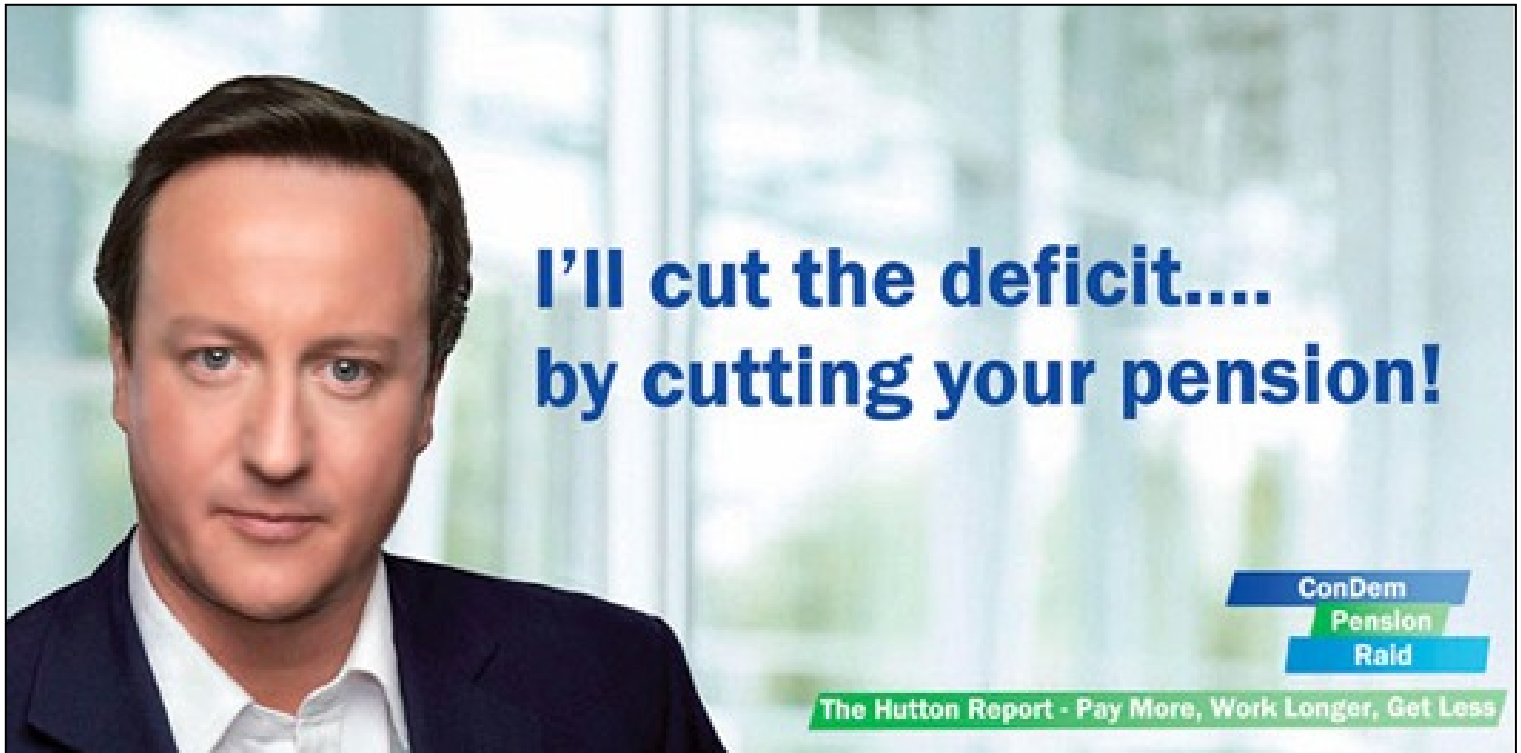
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Pay more - work Longer - get less when you retire

Is it *really* necessary?



We are constantly being told that pensions need to be reformed because we are all living longer and we therefore need to pay more into the pot. Is this actually true though?

The Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS) is fit and healthy.

It has a positive cash flow, which means income from investments and contributions exceed expenditure on pensions every year. Currently this is £4-5 billion every year and based on current assumptions it is likely to remain cash rich for at least 20 years, although major workforce reductions may change this.

Together the 101 LGPS funds hold around £160 billion in investments and assets - equivalent to almost 12% of GDP; that's the equivalent of nearly one third of the total value of all the companies on the London Stock Exchange!! It's bigger than the largest American pension fund and one of the largest investors in the world. Almost £12 billion was invested in the top 11 companies on the Stock Exchange last year, so if members decide it is not worth being in the scheme and start pulling out in any significant numbers, the stock market will be in for a wake up call as well.

The LGPS is affordable

The LGPS was reformed in 2008 and members increased their contributions as part of a new scheme. The recent scheme valuation shows that the cost of the scheme to the taxpayer is falling, so if the scheme is affordable now, it will be affordable in the future.

The Conservative-dominated cross party parliamentary committee has produced a report which states that the public sector pension scheme reforms introduced

in 2007/8 will keep the costs of our pensions stable, generating more than £67bn in savings to the taxpayer over the next five decades. Our current schemes are affordable for our economy and for us as taxpayers.

The proposed changes are actually dangerous

The cross party parliamentary committee points out the current reform process could undermine these savings. For example, the change in calculating pension increases from the Retail Price Index to the Consumer Price Index will cut our pension benefits by £84bn over the next 15 years. Devaluing pension savings in a context of the government's attack will threaten both the savings in place and future participation levels. Research indicates that between 20% to 40% of members are likely to opt out of the scheme if these increases are implemented.

Increased contributions will not improve the funding of the LGPS

We are being asked to contribute more, but the £1bn member contribution increase is not being used to improve the funding of the scheme. The central government grant to councils and devolved institutions is being reduced by the same amount as the contribution increase is intended to generate. The result is that local authorities will reduce their employer contributions to the LGPS by 3.2%, so the net effect on the scheme's funding level would be zero. However there is every reason to believe that authorities will be left worse off.

The government wants to start implementing the higher contributions from 1 April 2012. UNISON is clear that the combination of a second-year pay freeze, high

inflation and cuts to conditions will mean that many members are unable to afford to stay in the LGPS so we are fighting hard against an increase in contributions.

Local Government pensions are NOT gold plated

As for the claims that our pensions are 'gold plated' – an average pension of £4,200 and £2,870 for women who are the majority of the scheme members. We don't retire early either, The normal retirement age in the LGPS is 65 and has been for many years

"The price of this financial crisis is being borne by people who absolutely did not cause it, now is the period when the cost is being paid, I'm surprised that the degree of public anger has not been greater than it has."

Mervyn King (*Governor of the Bank of England and Chairman of the Monetary Policy Committee*)
addressing the Treasury Select Committee

SO WHAT EXACTLY ARE THE PROPOSED CHANGES?

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and The Independent Public Service Pensions Commissions Report (The Hutton Report) has made many recommendations for changes to public sector pension schemes. There are three key recommendations that will affect you directly:

Pension contribution increases

The government has cut funding to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) by £1bn and expect scheme members to fill this gap by increasing their contributions.

How will this affect you? Depending on how much you earn, you can expect to be made to pay up to 50% more in contributions. For example if you currently pay £100 per month, you will pay £150.

When is this due to take place? Contribution increases are to be phased from April 2012 to 2014. So in our example above, where the contributions go up by £50, a month it will rise by £20 in 2012 (£120), another £20 in 2013 (£140) and finally another £10 by 2014. So by 2014 a scheme member will be paying £150 per month.

Change to the way pensions are increased each year

Instead of increasing pensions every year by the retail price index (RPI) they will increase by the consumer price index (CPI) (Both CPI and RPI calculate how prices change for a typical basket of goods. Significantly however CPI excludes changes to mortgage interest, council tax, TV licence fees and vehicle excise duty) – this is a smaller increase e.g. CPI increase to pensions this year was 3.1% if RPI had remained pensions would have increased by 4.6%

How will affect you? If you are a pensioner you will get a smaller pension rise; If you have left the scheme or remain in the scheme, your pension benefits will be less than you expected when you retire.

Increasing Retirement Age

The government has already brought forward the state pension age (SPA) increase. From November 2018 the SPA will be 65 for both men and women. From April 2020, it will be 66 for both men and women. This is due to rise to 67 during 2034-6 and 68 during 2044-6. The Hutton Report recommends that public sector schemes follow suit.

What does this mean for you? For people who are 34 or younger now, the retirement age would be 68. For anyone between 34 and 42, it will be 67. For those between 42 to around 57 it will be 66.

And there's more! Privatisation

At the moment, under law (TUPE) if you transfer to a private company they have to provide you with pension arrangements that match the LGPS. Under the new proposals that requirement is being removed, so you won't be able to take your pension with you.

There is a possibility that this reduced cost for private sector employers could lead to an increase in the scramble for privatisation.

Time to stand up and be counted

If we are going to defend our pensions we need to make staff and the public aware of the effects on pensions if these changes are made. To do this we need to communicate effectively and coordinate our campaign – we are therefore asking for members around the Authority to become **Pensions Contacts** – a network of members who care about their pensions who will discuss with colleagues the issues we face, pass on news about campaign activities and ask people to get involved – They will not be asked to represent or negotiate on behalf of members – If you're reading this and thinking that you are worried about your pension but don't think you know enough about it to be a pensions contact then think again! – Full training will be provided by UNISON.

Please ring Helena Watson in the Branch Office (01443 400401) if you wish to become a pensions contact or if you would just like a bit more information about the role.

For more information about anything in this article please go to

<http://www.unison.org.uk/pensions/protectour.asp>



Health and Safety

RECORDING AND REPORTING OF ACCIDENTS AND ILL-HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

The recording and reporting of accidents and ill health at work is a legal requirement under the "Reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences 1995" (Riddor)

All employees should report and record accidents, injuries, near misses etc. The information can then be recorded and would enable the employer to gather information and help, provide advice on how to reduce injury and ill-health in the workplace. This surveillance data can also be used to put forward an evidence based rationale for the introduction of new legislation and for guidance.

"NEAR MISSES"

These are also important to record. Non-reportable near misses, incidents, workplace accidents and occurrences where no-one has been accidentally hurt, or become ill, but where the consequences could have been serious for workers. In this way it is possible to learn from such incidents so that workers are protected from harm using the old adage "prevention is better than cure."

If you have received an injury or developed illness in the workplace you should fill in an accident form and inform your manager as soon as possible.

Things to consider when filling in a form:

- Name & address.
- Place of work where the accident took place
- Telephone numbers & email addresses
- Full name and address of employer
- Date and time of accident
- Name and address of any witnesses who can give background information
- Description of work place equipment involved
- Detailed step-by-step account of what happened
- Details of injuries suffered

DON'T FORGET UNISON MEMBERS GET FREE EXPERT LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR.....

- Any accident at work
- Any accident away from work (For family members too)
- Industrial disease .

Bye Bye Dilys



Dilys is pleased to have passed her last Conference motion

RCT UNISON, one of the largest UNISON branches in Wales, has always punched above its weight in terms of representation at a regional and national level. We have a proud history of having members of the branch holding positions on various regional committees, including secretary positions, and Branch Secretary Peter Crews is the current Regional Convenor. This tradition goes back as far as the birth of the branch in 1996.

We are losing one high profile member though. In June of this year Dilys Jouvenat stood down from her position on the National Executive Committee, the union's ruling body in between conferences.

Dilys was pivotal in setting up RCT branch when local government was reorganised and was our first Branch Secretary. Over the years she has also been Branch Chair and for many years was one of the region's leading Lay Tutors.

As well as leading UNISON at the highest level, she has trained many new stewards and encouraged interested activist to step up to the plate and take on senior positions themselves. Without her it is likely that the branch would not have the profile it currently enjoys and the branch owes her a debt of gratitude. The branch would like to wish her well.

**She is not retiring completely though, she is now working in HR (Boooooo Hisssssss!).*

Are your membership details correct?

There is a very strong possibility that we will be heading for a ballot for industrial action over pensions later this year. Employers are increasingly challenging the result of ballots by identifying discrepancies in the balloting process.

Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary, recently stated, "To comply with legislation we have to demonstrate an accurate database and full ballot of members affected. This process takes some 17 weeks to complete and we must make sure that there is little room for the employers to challenge the ballot if we need one. Because of this it is highly unlikely that any attempt at industrial action will take place before the autumn".

It is therefore essential we have an accurate record of our members. If you have moved or changed job in recent years it is possible your membership details are no longer correct.

Check and update your records on line by going to
<http://www.unison.org.uk/membership/update.asp>

Alternatively ring 0845 355 0845 - or contact the branch office on 01443 400401

Dean's education column

For some time Unison has been concerned that there has not been a platform for school support staff to input into the decision making process. Teachers have their teacher panel meetings and often decisions made there affect support staff without any input from them.

Following a positive meeting with the acting director of Education, UNISON is pleased to report that a group is to be set up to discuss issues affecting all staff in schools. Following school remodelling and the introduction of the foundation phase, the number of support staff has increased and staff that undertake these roles often assume more responsibility than in the past.

Many members have concerns regarding the way in which RCT allocate the special class allowance to school support staff. Members have been concerned by the apparent lack of consistency in determining how this allowance is paid. RCT are currently reviewing how this allowance is paid to ensure this allowance is paid to those who should receive it. UNISON is optimistic this will be achieved and inconsistencies addressed.

School support staff is an increasing body of people and deserve to be recognised in the same way as teachers because they are important to the efficiency of schools and the education of pupils.

Finally, an update to UNISON's response to the abolition of the schools support staff negotiating body (SSSNB) in England that we highlighted in the last edition of Branch Line. In January 2011 Unison was due to ballot its schools members in England to agree a new framework for negotiating pay and conditions through the SSSNB. The abolition meant this did not happen.

In Wales, your UNISON branch remains committed to the establishment of a Schools negotiating body through discussions and consultation with the Welsh Assembly. RCT UNISON aims to be at the forefront of any discussions that take place, we feel it is important to address the complexities in this area of work.



Education Convenor Dean Price sits behind Peter Crews in Conference trying to ignore him practicing his Eric Morecambe impression

Branch Charity 2011



At this year's RCT UNISON AGM, Healing the Wounds was elected as charity of the year. Healing the Wounds is a Welsh Armed Forces charity, (registration number 1134594), raising funds for a much needed facility within Wales, to provide treatment for post traumatic stress disorder for Armed Forces Personnel, Veterans and their families.

The charity has raised in excess of £150,000 in its first year and during that time, has been approached by many people who are suffering from post traumatic stress disorder asking to be treated, as in many cases treatment is unavailable within our NHS system.

Unlike other forces charities all funds raised in Wales will stay in Wales.

For more information visit

<http://www.healingthewounds.co.uk/>
or ring 01656 728281

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Brunch Line

The page you can read between meals without spoiling your appetite

Major Bull

UNISON distances itself from call to 'tool up'



At an unofficial fringe meeting at this year's UNISON conference, members of 'The REAL UNISON' declared they would protect their pensions with a variety of sharp implements after Justice Secretary Ken Clarke said that **stabbing someone who is trying to take your property will not be classed as a criminal offence.**

Mr Clarke's comments that people were entitled to use "whatever force necessary" to protect their property have led to union activists asking him to clarify exactly what he means by 'property'. "The use of knives would put us in a much stronger position during negotiations" said Dai Hard, Chair of the Welsh Committee of The REAL UNISON. "On the key issues where we are taking strike action, the government has said it won't listen. I often get this problem down the pub. However, people take a more flexible approach when I pull out a machete, or an axe."

Many public sector workers have welcomed the proposed changes to the laws surrounding people's rights to defend their property. Nursery Nurse Sally Poppins told me, "It's certainly put this whole pension reform issue on a more level footing, and I imagine Francis Maude's smug expression will be a little different when facing a Japanese Samurai Sword".

Sixty four year-old Religious Studies teacher, Paris Travelodge (*pictured above*) told me, "I'd rather my pension rights stayed the same and it's a comfort to know that if the government do try to take what's mine then I'll be perfectly within my rights to cut them up."

Dave Prentis was unavailable to comment on the REAL UNISON proposals, but sources close to him say he does not condone this sort of thing.

Disclaimer: Please note, none of the information gathered for this column has ever come from phone tapping or bribing the police. Why would I need to resort to such tactics when I can just make stuff up? I can also assure you they will never be able to gag me with any super injunctions. I am, however, not averse to putting on a dress and doing the 'fake shake' thing. **Major Bull**

AN A TO Z OF TRADE UNION HISTORY

D is for democracy

There is no one definition of democracy, but most definitions allude to a government 'for the people, by the people' - a government where power resides with the electorate and where that power is exercised either directly by them or by agents elected by them.

In the UK we have become accustomed to this meaning we have a vote every few years and in between we let our elected representatives do what they want.

Defenders of the current government point to the fact that they have been democratically elected, despite the fact that no-one voted for a coalition and no one voted for the policies they are implementing. "If you don't like it, vote them out at the next election", we are told. This will be a bit late though, the damage is being done now.

Very often, even though governments have been elected to do our bidding, they end up doing the bidding of faceless and unaccountable corporations that boost party funds or offer consultancy positions. Arms companies, for instance, are worryingly influential on whether or not we go to war and private health care firms have helped draft the new health bill. Trade unionists argue that power in the hands of the people serves the interests of the people better than power wielded by unelected lobbyists.

Labour are often criticised for being in the pockets of the trade unions. This has not been the case for many years. It is no coincidence though that since the election of Thatcher in 1979 and the consequential decrease of trade union influence in how the country is run (even when New Labour occupied Number 10) Britain became one of the most unequal countries in the world.

When we fight for better pay and conditions and oppose cuts in public services, we do so because we know we cannot rely on our elected representatives. We question whether it is democratic to bomb foreign countries and invest in nuclear submarines when schools, hospitals and libraries cry out for massive investment.

Democratic structures do not function in isolation, we need to let our representatives, from MPs to Councillors, know what we want between elections, scrutinise what they do and remind them they can be replaced as quickly as they were elected.

