



## LANCASHIRE UNISON CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT OUR PENSIONS

### CO-ORDINATED CAMPAIGNING VITAL TO SUCCESS

#### Local Government Pension Scheme

UNISON has welcomed the news that the order to revoke the regulations that ended the 85 year rule, effectively increasing the local government pension age from 60 to 65, has been laid.

The regulations sparked off a ballot of UNISON's 800,000 local

government members in March, in which 75% voted to strike. The order to revoke the regulations is backdated to 1 April so that anyone caught by the changes will be recompensed.

General Secretary Dave Prentis said he was pleased the

Government had kept its pledge to withdraw the regulations adding that we can now get into talks about securing the future of the local government pension scheme. These talks will obviously be shaped by the Public Service Forum negotiations.

#### Fresh start pension talks begin

In March 2005 following threats of strike action, the government abandoned plans to force through increases in public sector pension ages, promising instead 'fresh start' negotiations to be chaired by Secretary of State Alan Johnson MP. Key to the unions agreeing to withdraw the planned strike was a commitment to negotiations on all aspects of our pension schemes, with nothing ruled out, and nothing ruled in.

The first of a planned series of special meetings took place on the

11 July 2005, under the umbrella of the Public Services Forum (PSF). Alan Johnson chaired the meeting and was accompanied by John Hutton MP, member of the Cabinet and Public Services Minister.

UNISON's General Secretary Dave Prentis led the discussions for the trade unions. The TUC unions tabled a set of key principles that we strongly argued should underpin the discussions and negotiations on pension 'reform'. These included the following:

- That public service pensions are a key benefit of public service employment and should continue to be good quality schemes that are sustainable defined benefit and index linked.
- We are opposed to any imposed increase in the public sector pension age or to any compulsory closure of existing final salary schemes.
- Individuals should have more choice and flexibility in when and how they retire and we should

## Fresh start pension talks begin continued

jointly explore how more voluntary working up to and beyond normal pension age can be encouraged. As part of a voluntary approach, pensions must continue to be paid when members need them, at the age when their careers come to an end

- Any across the board increase to the pension age cannot take account of the exceptional physical and mental demands of some public service workers. Also, there are major workforce organisational implications of longer working, especially in high stress and low paid occupations, across the public services and these must be addressed alongside the issue of pension reform
- Where appropriate, schemes should have member representatives involved in the decisions making process, including major investment decisions, one of our key demands in the local government discussions
- The opportunity to build retirement incomes should be extended to all those who work in the public services and outsourced public service providers, including

agency workers

- The take-up of pension schemes across the public sector should be reviewed ... and where this is a problem urgent measures should be drawn up to encourage maximum scheme membership, especially among groups of workers such as women working part time and the lower paid.
- The principle of transferability across the public service schemes should be maintained and, if possible, strengthened.
- All agreed changes should be equality proofed
- There must be a realistic timetable for negotiation and implementation to ensure that agreed changes are well thought out and that members are fully consulted and informed about them

A full set of the principles can be found on the Pensions pages of the UNISON Web site.

[www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

Alan Johnson responded positively to a number of the points and promised to give a detailed response in writing before the next meeting of the group scheduled for

later this month. Alan Johnson and his team also set out their case for 'reform' of our pension schemes arguing that:

- Life expectancy is increasing, including across all social classes
- The tax base is shrinking as the population ages
- Defined benefit (DB) schemes are closing in the private sector, with the number in public sector schemes for the first time higher than the numbers in DB schemes in the private sector.
- Pay in the private sector is on average no higher than pay in the public sector, challenging the argument that better public sector pensions are offset by lower pay
- That proposed increases in pension ages would be phased in gradually and no-one would be overall worse off
- Part of any savings would be recycled into improved benefits

We challenged and probed the assertions and evidence. We also asked for more details of the sources for the claims and this was promised before our next meeting so that we can develop the discussion.

## Next Steps

Despite some press reports, no concessions were made at the meeting by the government. The meeting was an important first step and a follow up is scheduled for late

July with a further meeting planned for September. Our aim is to agree a framework within which scheme specific negotiations can take place. All the TUC public service unions are

committed to joint campaigning and properly coordinated negotiations, maintaining the close working developed during the campaign earlier this year.