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European Conference against Austerity

Mass strikes called in Britain

- IV Online magazine - 2011 - IV440 - September 2011 -

Publication date: Thursday 15 September 2011

In a remarkable move, at the annual Trade Union Congress, the major British trade unions UNISON, GMB and UNITE, who each have over 1 million members, have just launched a campaign to ballot for strike action on the 30th November to protect the pensions of public sector workers. They are now joining the smaller unions such as the NUT and UCU representing school and university teaching staff and the PCS union for civil servants who took strike action against pension reforms on the 30th June.

November 30 will mark a significant stepping up of the resistance in the war against the Tory attacks on the welfare state and instead to make the rich pay for the crisis – a great step forward when the reaction of the leaders of the larger unions over several decades has normally been to try to do deals rather than organise to resist attacks on jobs and services

The pension reforms proposed by the Tory government will force workers to pay more, work longer and receive a smaller pension. Even though they tell us that "we're all in it together", the Tories have allowed the gap between the pensions of bosses and workers to widen. The pension of Stephen Hester, director of the Royal Bank of Scotland is £420,000 while the average public sector pension if £6,500. RBS was "re-nationalised" three years ago to prevent it for collapsing.

This year Hester received a £7.7million pay package which included £4.5million potential shares windfall on top of his £2million annual bonus and £1.2million salary. With the government's drastic reduction in public spending to pay plug the deficit hole created by the likes of Hester, figures out show a dramatic rise in unemployment with a total now over 2.5million, or 8%, with those under 25 hardest hit.

These are some of the reasons why there is likely to be overwhelming support amongst trade union members for strike action – and widespread public support as well.

At the same time, the political and social crises roll on with the unending revelations about News International and with the riots in August. The outlook for the ruling class is bleak as they have no solution, and the economies are teetering on the edge of a recession.

We can expect more appeals that "we are all in it together" and that there is no alternative to a radical programme of austerity. But there is an alternative. It is to organise for trade union action and campaigns across society to defend our public services and jobs, and to tax the rich and corporations to pay for the crisis. We are not responsible for the debt and we should not have to pay for it.

The attacks are the similar in every country in Europe: pension reforms, unemployment, cuts and privatisation in public services, slashing living standards by freezing or and cutting pay, and removing welfare benefits. As the crisis is international, so must be the response of all those who refuse to make the working class and society pay for this crisis.

That's why the Europe Against Austerity conference in London on 1st October is so important. It will be the first event since the start of the crisis in 2008 where all those who want to oppose the attacks will meet. The conference will not only issue a declaration against the austerity programmes but will discuss how to organise a movement of resistance across Europe.

The Coalition of Resistance is hosting this conference jointly with the other organisations and individuals sponsoring the event. These include the European Left Party, NPA, Attac, CADTM, Union Syndicale Solidaires, Ken Loach, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Len McCluskey Unite, and Bob Crow RMT. For details of the conference and registration, go to http://www.europeagainstausterity.org/