

# June 30<sup>th</sup>: it's time to take control of our own struggles!

Why are nearly a million workers – from education, the civil service, local councils – preparing to go on strike on June 30th?

For the same reason that half a million workers marched through the streets of London on 26 March. And for the same reason that tens of thousands of university and school students took part in a whole movement of demonstrations, occupations and walk-outs last autumn. They are more and more fed up with the never-ending attacks on their living standards being organised by the government, whether in the form of cuts in healthcare, rising tuition fees, growing unemployment, wage freezes or – a major issue in the June 30 strike – an assault on pensions, so that teachers for example will pay more towards their pension, retire later, and get a smaller pension at the end of it.

Workers and students, the unemployed, pensioners...are also less and less convinced by the justifications offered by the government (and, with few tiny differences, the Labour 'opposition'): 'we need to make these cuts to get the economy going again, so really they are in everyone's interest'. People have been making all kinds of sacrifices in response to similar arguments for a long time now, and still the economy keeps going downhill and our living standards with it.

And the idea of striking together, of making the response to the attacks as widespread and as inclusive as possible, has also appeared more and more logical to a growing number of us, given that we are all facing the same attacks, and given that so many isolated, dispersed struggles have been doomed to defeat.

But there's another question raised by the planned 'day of action'. What are the real motivations behind the decision of the official trade union machinery to call this strike? Do they really want to organise an effective response to the government's attacks? If this were the case, why did they put all that energy into bringing so many thousands of workers to London on 26 March, only to march them up and down, subject them to hypocritical speeches from the likes of Ed Milliband, and send them home again? Why do the trade unions sell us the illusion that the problem of the cuts is something specific to this present government, implying that Labour would be able to offer an alternative?

And why are only a part of the public sector being called out? What about the rest of the public sector and all the workers in the private sector? Are they also not under attack? And why just a one day event? Could it be that, like on 26 March, the trade unions want to provide us with a semblance of action, a mock-up of fighting back, which will have the net effect of reinforcing divisions and wasting our energies?

## **The ruling class has reason to fear us**

The ruling class has good reason to fear that its attacks will provoke a bigger response than it can comfortably handle. It has in front of it the evidence not only of what happened in Britain in autumn, and the numbers who turned out on 26 March, but also the growing tide of revolt that has swept across North Africa and the Middle East, and has now hit Europe with the massive movements in Spain and Greece, where tens of thousands, the majority of them young people facing a very uncertain future, have occupied city squares and held daily assemblies where participants are free to express their concerns not only about this or that government measure but about the whole political and social system that rules our lives. This movement is not yet a "revolution" but it is certainly creating an atmosphere where the ques-

tion of revolution is being discussed more widely and more seriously.

Little wonder that the state in Britain wants to keep resistance trapped inside the safe walls of official protest. The trade union apparatus has a key role in this, keeping us to the strict guidelines laid down in the trade union rulebook which stipulates: no strike action to be decided by mass meetings; no solidarity strikes; if necessary, cross picket lines of workers in other sectors because otherwise you might be engaging in illegal "secondary action"; only strike if you are a properly paid up member of the union, etc etc.

## **Take the struggle into our own hands!**

Does this mean that the action on 30 June is a waste of time?

No, not if we use it as a means to come together, discuss and decide on more widespread and effective forms of resistance. Not if we use it to overcome our fear of taking charge of our own struggles.

The examples of Tunisia, Egypt, Spain or Greece are there in front of us: when people gather together in large numbers, when they occupy public spaces and begin to demand the right to speak and to take collective decisions, they can overcome their fear of repression by the police or of punishment by the bosses.

They offer us the 'model' to follow - a model which in any case is not a new invention but which has appeared in all the major workers' struggles of the last century: the open general assembly, which maintains control of all its delegates or commissions by making them elected by a show of hands and recallable at any time.

Before June 30th, we can call for general meetings at work, open to all employees regardless of job or union, where we can decide how to spread the action as widely as possible. In the schools and colleges, there is a real need to overcome the divisions between teachers and non-teaching employees, between staff and students, and to work out how to bring everyone into the struggle. In the councils and government departments, the same applies: discussion groups and general meetings of all kinds can help to overcome these divisions and make sure that the struggle involves many more than are 'officially' on strike.

On the day of the strike, we need to make sure that pickets are not just token affairs but are used to widen and deepen the movement: by persuading everyone in your workplace to join the strike; by sending delegates to other workplaces to support their struggle; by acting as a focus for discussion about how to take the struggle forward in the future.

Demonstrations must not be passive parades ending in a ritual rally. Demonstrations provide an opportunity to hold street assemblies where the aim is not to listen to pre-arranged speeches by politicians and union hacks but to allow as many people as possible to exchange their experiences and express their views.

There's much talk, especially from the 'left', about how the cuts and other attacks are not really 'necessary' and are 'ideologically' driven. But the truth is that for capitalism in crisis it is totally necessary and unavoidable to try to reduce our living standards. What's necessary for us, the exploited, is not to try to convince the exploiters that they should organise their system in a better way. It's to resist their attacks today and tomorrow, and in doing so to gain the confidence, the self-organisation and the political awareness needed to pose the question of revolution and the need for the complete transformation of society.