UK public sector pension strike: Demonstrators in Peterborough and Cambridge describe social conditions

Our reporters
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Yesterday, the *World Socialist Web Site* posted comments from public service workers in various parts of the UK engaged in a one-day general strike November 30.

The WSWS also spoke Wednesday to workers and students in Peterborough and Cambridge.

In Peterborough, Richard Roberts, a former council worker, explained, "This is an attack on the public services. The government talk about pensions, but there are also another 710,000 people losing their jobs.

"Will the private sector employ them? They will be like me, unemployed and not paying tax. People in Athens, Paris and Italy are fighting for their rights. We can march today, but tomorrow they will be gone.

"Where are the other unions? If they fully supported this stand, they would have something to fight with. People here didn't cause the crisis. It was caused by the banks."

Firefighter Andy Barber said, "The strike is important not just for pensions. The government is trying to cut the welfare state.

"A general strike is needed. It is the only way our voices will be heard, especially if the government does not negotiate."

Socialist Equality Party supporter Steve Woodbridge, refused use of the megaphone to speak to the strikers in Peterborough, addressed the crowd who remained following the conclusion of a rally. "The capitalist system has had it," he said. "Governments don't know how to resolve their economic problems other than to shove these problems onto your backs.

"The trade unions talk about unity. The only way you can achieve unity is to call a general strike on the basis of a socialist programme. Form rank-and-file committees. Nationalise the banks under workers control, and do the same for industry."

In Cambridge, Justin, a student, told us, "I am here as part of a larger struggle. I would never want to cross the picket line.

"I am with the Cambridge defend education group, and we are currently occupying Cambridge University lecture hall as part of today's strike.

"More people are standing up because the situation is getting worse. The governance of the university needs to be democratised, as it is incredibly corrupt. One day of strikes is all well and good, but it's a bit symbolic. The strike should be indefinite. However, I have never seen this many people out in support."

Elma Jenkins, who is currently looking for work, said, "I am involved today for lots of reasons. A united movement is going to be stronger, and I want to be part of that.

"People should not be allowed to work longer for a smaller pension. Why are we being made to pay for someone else's problems? The government is letting Vodafone and other companies off paying taxes, which should be used to help resolve the problems.

"This strike is just a warning sign to the government, saying beware of what you are doing."

Janette Evely said, "I am striking because I am a primary school teacher and I do not want to be working till I am 68.

"After paying for pensions, why should we have to retire later and get paid less?

Hopefully, the government will come back with a better deal. I hope they will, but I think if the whole of the country went on strike, it would make a huge difference."

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Jane Ryall said, “This is my first time out on strike. I am with the GMB union. The government is not listening to the people. Most people did not vote for this government; they are not representing the majority of people. They are pursuing policies that are not working.

“It is clear that pensions are affordable, but instead, we continue to bail out the bankers and it is just not fair. I have had enough of the cuts and austerity. I needed to do something to show my anger.”

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