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Voting NO to Croke Park — what happens next?

Andrew Flood

March 20, 2013

The government says if we vote No to Croke Park they will impose it anyway. Many of the union leadership try and scare us into voting Yes with this threat and by saying the only alternative is strike action. Both are right. If we just vote No then the government will attack us. And when they do, the only way we can win is if we are willing to fight back — that will mean industrial action. It will almost certainly mean at least the credible threat of an indefinite strike.

They are hoping the word strike will terrify us. They know that apart from the one-day strike on November 24, 2009 almost none of us under 40 have any experience of going on strike. They know that many of us were frightened of that one-day strike and worse, that although we may have stayed out of work that in some cases we didn't join the picket lines but stayed at home or went shopping. They know they were able to scare us out of going on strike again for fear of losing a day's pay and force us into accepting Croke Park I. With hindsight that was a foolish thing to be scared of because the cuts they imposed have cost us about 18 days pay each and

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every year over the last 3 years. Losing one day's pay to save 54 days' pay seems cheap now and will seem cheaper still in a decade.

But there are good reasons for our fear. The cuts already imposed have meant many of us have exhausted our savings and are behind on our mortgages. The last thing we can afford is to lose more pay through pointless industrial action just to "make our voices heard" or "express our anger".

That is why it's important we don't take that approach. We will be taking action not to express how unhappy we are, but in order to force the government to back down. We may lead into it with targeted local and national action that falls short of a strike, but we must show our determination to launch an indefinite national strike if that is what it takes. And we will take all the steps needed to win, not just staying out of work and picketing empty buildings but by engaging in mass civil disobedience to ensure all the country is brought to a standstill. There are quarter of a million of us, we can ensure that every system of transportation is blockaded from railways to bus termini to the LUAS and DART.

We must achieve this through working with the unemployed and private sector workers whose anti-union bosses make it hard for them to act without fearing the consequences. The media will try and whip up hostility to us, we must be very clear that we stand with the unemployed and with all workers in a common defence of the public services we all depend on and the fight for more, not fewer, jobs.

If that is how we are willing to fight then that is how we will win. How long could the government and employers hold out if every workplace had to shut because the schools were closed and blockades of roads and rail meant no-one could get to work? Three or four days perhaps. Less than the cost the cuts will inflict on us in a single year, never mind over the next decade. The government is trying to use fear to force us to accept Croke Park — let's use our numbers to strike terror into them.