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Report from the mass picket of the Dept. Education

Workers Solidarity Movement

25 November 2009

From before 8a.m. this morning, members of the Irish National Teachers Organisation were on the picket line outside the Department of Education and Science in Dublin's Marlborough Street, alongside Special Needs Assistant colleagues, members of IMPACT, and workers based in the DES building itself, members of SIPTU, CPSU and PSEU.

By 8:15a.m. the number of picketers had risen to about 100, by 8:30 to nearly 200. The numbers on the picket line averaged 200 until 10a.m. At that time union members began to gather in Gardiner St. for a rally and march. By the time the march from Gardiner St. arrived around the block outside the DES building in Marlborough, it was well over 2,000 strong.

For the rest of the day, the picket on the DES averaged 500 to 1,000 — an impressive and determined show of strength. Union members from Dublin City North, Dublin North West and Dublin North East branches were rostered to spend 2-hour periods on the picket but many members spent much longer periods there, a testament to the feelings of solidarity and comradeship which people felt by taking part. We were also joined

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by many colleagues from union branches from the southside of the city. In total up to 5,000 teachers and SNAs took part in the picket at some stage during the day.

Teachers on the picket line were determined that today would just be the start. Nobody was under the illusion that the government was going to back down after one day of action but all were convinced that we were no longer going to allow ourselves to be scapegoated. Today's strike and picket was seen as the first step in making a stance, and members left the picket this afternoon determined to begin to organise for next Thursday's second day of action.

The feelings of solidarity and comradeship which union members took away from today's picket will be the building blocks on which the next phase of action will be built. Members of INTO, and indeed all unions, need to remember this sense of solidarity and need to keep the pressure on union leaders to follow through on the promised continuation of the battle begun today.

Text of leaflet produced by Districts XIV and XV INTO and handed out at today's demo

Thanks to all who have come in to be on the picket & take part in the rally.

Today's public sector strike shows the potential strength of our movement. The courage shown by teachers & other public sector workers in standing up for our rights should be a source of pride for every one of us.

We have been attacked by politicians, economists & by political commentators. They have attempted to drive a wedge between us & private sector workers & have tried to pin the blame for the financial crisis on us.

The reality, however, is different. We did not cause the crisis & we cannot now be made to shoulder all of the cost. Economic

stability will only be restored if serious attempts are made to ensure that the wealthy face up to their responsibilities.

1% of the Irish population owns 34% of the wealth. If the government seriously wishes to deal with the financial crisis, they must take measures to deal with this wealth disparity.

Today's strike has shown our strength. We know, however, that the government is not going to reverse its course as a result of one day's strike. That's why we need to keep our resolve & be ready to take further action.

Whatever the government do in this year's budget with regard to pay cuts or changes in our working conditions, we know that their agenda involves even further attacks in coming months & years. By our action today we have shown that we are united & that we have to be taken seriously. If, however, the government believes that we are content with just taking one day's action, they will be content.

But public sector workers, along with our private sector counterparts, must stay strong and determined. Further action will be necessary and we must be prepared to take it. The strength of today's action is that it shows our power. Let's build on this and let's show the government that we will not continue to be scapegoated.