



the next step

Newsletter of PCSU Socialist Caucus in the DWP

11,000 JOBS GONE IN DWP - WHERE IS THE GEC CAMPAIGN?

New Labour intends to cut 30,000 of the overall civil service job cuts target in DWP, the largest group in the union. Contrary to the government's line, the cuts are directly affecting frontline services. Districts are facing cuts in headcount of more than 20% in many cases. So-called "backroom" job cuts are causing delays in processing of benefits, leading to hardship and more incidents in our offices. Exit packages targeted at the most experienced staff will only exacerbate the crisis.



The Job Cuts In The DWP Are Equivalent To Six Rover Plants Closing!!

DWP: The story so far..

DWP management hailed the three-year pay deal as heralding a period of industrial peace after the bitter pay and PDS dispute. Given the programme of intended cuts, few believed that such a peace was possible. However, the reality is that an increasing number of serious activists are questioning the GEC's campaign strategy. To be exact, as the department lurches from one crisis to another, our reps are wondering when the GEC will begin to provide the leadership required.

Certain facts are clear. Mottram, DWP's Permanent Secretary, is able to boast on the department's Intranet site that 11,000 jobs have already gone in just a year. More exit packages are about to be announced, meaning that in the summer we are likely to be plunged into a staffing crisis of monumental proportions.

It is also a fact that, since November 5th, no industrial action at group, regional or localised level has taken place. Formally speaking, following the

pay/PDS ballot, we are not even in dispute with an employer intent on cutting over 20% of all posts.

The cancellation of the March 23rd strike sent the wrong signal to both members and the government. Although the action was called in opposition to attacks on pensions and job cuts, the National Executive called off the strike only on the basis of the offer of pensions talks. Meanwhile, DWP is steamrolling through massive cuts with minimal opposition from the union.

The key question is why a left-dominated GEC has deliberately taken this approach. Socialist Caucus believes it is because fundamentally the Socialist Party (SP- the key political grouping on the GEC) and their allies do not believe that we can win. Bluntly, that is why we are seeing only a token campaign. That is why branches and regions have been left to deal with the cuts in isolation. Aside from three training events last September, the GEC has resisted Caucus proposals for a national reps meetings on the cuts .

If the experience of DWP so far is continued and repeated throughout the union then 100,000 plus job cuts will be achieved at the expense of members and services.

In the absence of a nationally-led campaign, activists in London have fought to develop the mood for industrial action against the job cuts and proposed export of work under Gershon and Lyons. Any action in London may include indefinite action in Harrow. London members now need the support of members in Glasgow, Macclesfield and Belfast to make the strike fully effective.

The London Regional Committee and members in Harrow must be applauded for their efforts.

How do we fight the job cuts and office closures?

Socialist Caucus supporters in London and Harrow have played a crucial role in pressing for strike action against the cuts. They have developed links with MPs and the London Mayor that far exceed anything achieved at group level.

As a starting point, we need to be balloting members on discontinuous action, an overtime ban and a ban on temporary promotion. We need to ensure that members are not bailing out the department as it wields the axe.

Socialist Caucus also supports selective action in the Contact Centres to come out in solidarity with London and against the cuts generally. Jobcentre Plus is on the brink of collapse with CMS2, bullying in the Contact Centres and staffing shortages creating an explosive mix in our offices.

Fundamentally, Socialist Caucus supporters oppose the DWP SP view that the balance of forces between management and the union is such that we cannot stop the cuts programme.

Taking on the employer is no easy task. However, we are on the brink of a major staffing crisis. By fighting for decent staffing levels we oppose the cuts. Our bosses mismanagement and EDS' incompetence give us some advantages. We also have members who have shown in the past year that they have reached breaking point. The fightback in London can be just the start. Regional Committees need to move their focus away from the numbers and terms of exit packages and concentrate on defending services and the members left behind by acting as campaigning bodies.

We need to force the GEC to lead by linking together as activists in the branches and building on the example of London. Socialists in DWP will also need to re-visit the problems with the GEC experienced over the past year. If you can't see the campaign, just like the "Emperor's New Clothes", it is time for you to build the alternative leadership in Left Unity by joining Socialist Caucus.

The Facts Behind The Crisis In London

Official figures provided to PCS show a real staffing crisis emerging across the Region.

For example London Jobcentre Plus ended the last operational year (31st March 05) with **10,158** whole time equivalent staff (if you include the part-time staff, the figure is much higher).

By 31st March 2006 this is to reduce to **8,850** whole time equivalent staff. **Representing a cut of 1 308 WTE posts** (again this will be higher once you include part-time staff).

However this figure does not include cuts that have to be made as a result of the JCP Organisational Design Review of District and Head Office functions such as HR, Staff Training, Finance & Governance, or FPP etc.



The main causes of the Jobcentre Plus cuts in London is the decision by management to centralise benefit processing including Social Fund, centralisation of NINO processing, the relocation out of London of some of this work including contact centres. This is in addition to the efficiency savings, or staff cuts, that have to be made in headcount in most offices in order to meet the governments cuts programme target.

These issues have resulted in several hundred members in London unable to move to where the new centralised work has been set up. Members being pressurised into moving to other offices, members who leave not being replaced. And in many cases members being declared surplus or 'unassigned' as offices close and work is relocated. Worse still, members who want to move to a particular site are being 'barred' from doing so as they do not have the 'skills' that management want.

In addition to these issues, the job cuts have also thrown up a number of other problems for members. As offices close or work is relocated it is becoming increasingly difficult to voluntarily transfer to other offices, resulting in an escalation of transfer hardship applications. Some members are being locked in to particular posts knowing that the work is moving in the future. Members are being denied their rights under flexible working hours as local managers attempt to keep the doors open and phones staffed with fewer and fewer people to carry out these tasks. Those on sick leave are being targeted and in some cases dismissed. Increased performance targets and additional duties are being placed upon members. An escalation in reported incidents in local offices. We believe that these problems will increase as the job cuts take affect.

But it is not just members in Jobcentre Plus that are being affected. Right across the DWP in London job cuts are being drawn up for each part of the business. Listed below is the initial DWP London wide picture, which illustrates the grades to be cut across the DWP in London this year.

**AA 209, AO 1,207, EO 516, HEO 91, SEO 35.
Over 2000 posts to go by March 2006.**

(These figures do not include the JCP Organisational Design Review of which over 800 jobs will be cut nationally by March 06).

Management have attempted to cut the number of staff in the Region by running Voluntary Early Release Schemes. The most recent example was to offer VER to 200 AA s across the region in addition to the 350 staff at Sutton DBC. PCS London region are opposed to this approach. Whilst we appreciate some members are desperate to leave the department, the majority of members need to keep jobs in their existing locality. Despite propaganda, there are a decreasing number of admin graded civil service posts available in London as each government department is relocating work and reducing headcount at the same time. Those jobs that are available, the Home Office being a good example, do not necessarily pay the same rates of pay as the DWP. Members need to bear this in mind if they are thinking of applying for vacancies outside the DWP.

The main reasons why PCS DWP London region are opposed to this approach are threefold. Firstly, as members leave this will place further pressure on those left behind who are already struggling to deliver a service. Secondly, members do not 'own' their jobs. In effect it is not their job to sell. Thirdly, taking VER undermines our position of fighting to retain work in London.



DWP HR's Only Policy

PCS Branches across London are determined to do all they can to retain local jobs. We have no illusions about the task ahead of us in trying to achieve this objective. It is therefore crucial that members support the union in this process.

The London demands are for the retention of DWP work in parts of London where work is planned for relocation. It is also for a transparent staffing basis scheme in local offices. This is an important demand as the cuts will, if they go ahead in their entirety, damage local services. The other key demand is for equality proofing of the proposed job cuts and office closures. The job cuts will disproportionately affect women, (approximately 70% of the DWP workforce are women) Black and Ethnic Minority staff. (40% of those being affected by the job cuts are BME

members particularly in London). The campaign also needs to highlight the effect of public sector job cuts of this scale in local communities. Despite popular perception, London is not an economic success story in many parts of the capital. London still experiences some of the highest rates of unemployment in the country. The DWP cuts in London as well as those that will be experienced in other civil service departments will have a damaging effect in many local communities.

The strike action, if it does go ahead, will be for discontinuous and selective action starting with a one day strike in July. But any action in London must act as a spring board for action across the rest of the country and across the rest of the civil service. The experience of members in London is not unique. Job cuts are occurring or planned in every part of the country. Only national civil service wide action will have any chance of rolling back the Brown proposals.

Stop The Victimisations!

For all the talk of partnerships, one of the legacies of the pay and PDS disputes is the victimisation of key union activists by DWP management.

Charlie McDonald, London Regional Organiser and Socialist Caucus member, has faced a total of four sets of allegations by management. In each case, management has chosen the hard-line option, to the point now where every allegation made against Charlie leads to a formal investigation, almost irrespective of the evidence.

When Charlie was accused of a breach of the electronic media policy for emailing reps a leaflet to Jobcentre users he was disciplined. However, the particular decision maker didn't disclose the fact that she had already made a separate complaint against Charlie for harassment on the picket line. Charlie won his appeal against the penalty on the basis of the breach of the requirement to be impartial.

When it came to the consideration of three complaints for picket line activity during the pay strikes, management did not even bother to have an investigation before moving to disciplinary action. DWP policy demands that an investigation should take place when the facts are unclear. In this case, there were three separate and unsubstantiated complaints. In each of the cases, Charlie's rep, GEC member Steve Lloyd, was able to show that the evidence favoured Charlie's account.

Charlie made a counter complaint, claiming that the SEO who had disciplined him under the Electronic Media Policy, and again for an unfounded picket line allegation, was victimising and harassing him.

Management then made a further attempt to discipline Charlie, including an allegation that he had bullied a scab on a picket line. Again this was unsubstantiated. A second claim was the allegation that Charlie had subsequently harassed the same scab by not giving him union circulars about the strike days he had scabbed on! In a further allegation, management found that Charlie had harassed another scab who had attempted to persuade casual staff into coming into work on strike days, suggesting they may be sacked. Charlie denied all allegations of harassment but the Decision Maker imposed a five year penalty and a compulsory move.

Prior to the penalty being issued, members at the Stratford office took part in a well-supported one day strike and agreed to take indefinite action if management tried to sack Charlie. London activists are in little doubt that management were deterred from dismissal by the threat of more action.

One of the strangest aspects of this case was the Decision Maker's refusal to provide an explanation for her decision. The union wrote on several occasions seeking the reasoning for the penalty as required in the rules. Representatives had to submit an appeal without knowing the detailed thinking behind the decision.

Dealing with **Difficult** People

DWP's View Of Activists

Charlie then discovered that, during the investigation into his counter-complaint, the Grade 7 Decision Maker accompanied the SEO in her investigation interview where she was questioned about the bullying allegations!

Charlie has now been given a further right of appeal and the reasons for the original decision. A central part of the appeal is the obvious lack of impartiality of the Decision Maker. By siding with the SEO who had taken the action against Charlie, the Grade 7 she had proved that she was previously involved in the case and clearly against Charlie, irrespective of the evidence.

Charlie's is not the only victimisation in DWP. There are many serious cases that potentially could see key activists sacked. There are dozens of other incidents where management have refused to take action, even when cars have hit pickets and our members have been abused, threatened and had objects thrown at them when on the picket line.

There are key issues to be tackled by the union in defending our reps. Firstly, the requirement to contact the union prior to a penalty being imposed is hardly worth the paper it is written on at present. In Charlie's case it was a quick phone call just to inform the full timer of what management were about to do. Socialist Caucus supporters on the GEC have argued that the GEC should demand that a meeting should be arranged to discuss the case in detail prior to any penalty being issued. At the moment, the Employee Relations managers that contact the union claim to know nothing about the cases in question. If that is the case, they are unable to re-assure the union that the penalty is not an attack on the functioning of the union as required in DWP guidance.

Secondly, when it comes to legal challenges, we need to ensure that legal representation is provided from the start and that we aggressively take on management through the courts. A victimisation should not be treated like any other potential ET case. It is a way of sending a message to management that we will fund any victimisation case.

Thirdly, this case shows that management's victimisation attempts need to be met with strike action in the office or branch concerned.

Finally, we need to be clear that the employer is not our partner. They see neutering militant union activity as a vital part of their job cutting strategy. Yet when the GEC wrote to management about unfair treatment of reps the union said:

"Within any partnership between management and unions we have to ensure those who take on a representative role are not treated in any way that disadvantages them"

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