

4 April 2024

From the President

I write this column in the middle of the strike ballot on our national campaign. Our demands for better pay, pensions justice, and job security are as necessary now as they were when we first went to ballot as part of this campaign back in 2022.

In the autumn of 2022, you gave us the mandate to take action, smashing through the 50% threshold for the first time in our group's history, and we used it to good effect. The combination of three days of national action, co-ordinated with other unions, sustained targeted paid action in places like Doncaster, Liverpool, Bolton, and Glasgow and the levy that supported that targeted action, allowing PCS to take a record number of strike days, forced concessions from the government.

Despite your action helping deliver more money from the Treasury and forcing the government to withdraw its threat to our redundancy terms, those gains were not enough to settle our dispute, and the subsequent talks about pay cohesion have not made sufficient progress.

We promised you that if insufficient progress was made, we would return to ask you once again if you would be prepared to take strike action to win our demands. That is why it is vital that you again give us a strike mandate when the ballot closes on 13 May. As over 24,000 of you once again receive a National Living Wage uplift to take you onto the bare legal minimum, we cannot afford to miss this opportunity to leverage the current government ahead of the Treasury pay guidance being issued. The union is growing, and a successful ballot can give us a decisive advantage. I urge every member to vote, smash through the 50% threshold, and deliver another massive YES vote.

Of course, there are other huge issues facing our members in DWP that aren't covered by the national campaign. Our ongoing demand for 30,000 more staff, and the haemorrhaging of our existing workforce have continued to be an absolute priority for the GEC, and we have been holding roadshows in our regions and nations seeking to grow the campaign. The GEC has made clear we are prepared to lead our members into action wherever there is support for it, and branches should be holding members' meetings to test that mood.

The stress levels amongst our membership are unacceptable, and we are seeing a huge turnover of staff across our group. We have been working with other campaign organisations to help get the message across that our members are on the receiving end of hostile government policies, just as much as those who we serve in our communities, and the deterioration in the mental health of many of you is the result of too much work, unachievable government demands, and not enough staff.

As the government and our employer once again seek to “incentivise” our members in Jobcentres and introduce easements, we must continue to argue that if they were serious about incentivising their staff and providing additional support to help claimants find work, they would give us the pay rise we deserve and the staffing we need.

From 18 April you will also be receiving your ballot paper for the PCS NEC elections, and a week later you will be able to cast your vote either online or by post to elect your group executive committee. Due to the anti-union laws the NEC elections have to be by post, but if you have a registered email address with the union you can vote online for the DWP GEC. The democracy of our union is something we should all be proud of, but it is a reality that turnouts in union elections are not what any of us would want them to be. I would urge every member to cast your vote in these elections, as it really does matter who you elect to represent you both nationally and in our group.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to thank you once again for your continued support of the union and our group. This is my final column as your group president after five years elected in the role. We have shared some testing times over that period, not least during the pandemic when the world was turned on its head, but it has never been anything other than an honour and a privilege to serve as your president and lead this amazing group, the biggest in our union.

You deserve so much more than you get from this government and department, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to collectively achieve the very best for you and your families.

In solidarity