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PCS women: let's play our part on pay

Angela Grant, DWP assistant group secretary and NEC representative on the PCS National Women's Forum, shares her experiences of living with the pressures caused by low pay – exacerbated for many during the Covid pandemic – and calls on the union's women to use their organising and campaigning skills to lead the charge on pay.

The coronavirus pandemic brought a realisation to many that the working class – those on the frontline sitting at the bottom of the pay ladder – are essential to the running of the country. It was all the more galling, then, to hear the Chancellor announce the 1% pay cap for our NHS workers, the very people that have been risking their lives to protect our families and friends.

With our communities in severe economic decline, workers from many industries now unemployed as companies have been forced to close, and a worrying rise in domestic violence as poverty came into the homes of those already struggling from 11 years of austerity, we saw families turning to the welfare system.

As parents struggled to provide food for children now at home for weeks on end, bored and wanting more than the normal weekly budget allowed, we saw Universal Credit (UC) claims rise by more than 2m, and government workers step up to the challenge of delivering payments, pulling out all the stops to ensure those that needed support, many of whom were using the system for the first time, received financial assistance.

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PCS has long reported that 40% of the government workers that deliver UC are in receipt of that benefit themselves. It's not just in DWP; we have in-work benefit claimants across our membership, many are single parents, and they are

predominantly women.

I have experienced first-hand the financial difficulties of the poorly paid; my children are grown now, but still there are times when emergencies hit – new school uniform for the grandbabies, school trips, or a global pandemic when my children have found themselves unable to work and having to rely on the system themselves. Car payments are not covered by UC, self-employed grants have helped but they hardly cover the house rent for the period, let alone the rent for business premises. The ‘bank of mum’ is ever necessary. In turn, I sometimes need the bank of my mum – and thanks to a 0% pay rise I’ll continue to turn to it, as I have throughout the past 11 years of pay restraint.

Enough is enough

PCS members like myself feel the pressure of low pay every day and being forced to shield and work from home has brought its own issues. As the cold weather arrived members were finding fuel metres guzzling payment, spending up to £50 per week on gas alone. Normally at work every day, this was a new and immediate expense, and when an unexpected expense arrives, that decade of pay restraint means there is no safety net of savings. Members have found themselves sitting on Zoom and Teams meetings wearing jumpers, gloves and wrapped in blankets from the waist down, some have spoken of keeping the camera off as they would be embarrassed if colleagues knew they could not afford to heat their homes.

Enough is enough. We have been continually hammered on pay, and the government has fixed legislation to frustrate our attempts to take industrial action – so our reps and members must organise from now to ensure we clear that 50% voting threshold next time out; and PCS women, we must play our part.

Women know how to organise and campaign, and as the gender pay gap clearly shows women are still held back on pay we should be leading the charge, pushing forward, building in readiness for industrial action when the NEC makes its call.

The PCS parliamentary pay petition gathered more than 104,000 signatures, raising massive awareness of the plight of our members – that is a fantastic start, so let’s get out, talk to our colleagues, agitate the membership on the reasons that we deserve better, and let’s win ourselves a pay rise.

[Take action: email the chancellor now](#)