

Motion: A call to boycott workfare schemes

This Union Branch notes:

1. That there are currently several schemes which place benefits claimants on compulsory unpaid work placements. These include:
 - “Mandatory Work Activity”
 - “Sector Based Work Academies” and “Community Action Programme”
 - As part of what is mandated by the private companies who run the “Work Programme”
 - The DWP “Work Experience”, which is enforced with the threat of MWA if people do not participate.
2. Each of these schemes mandates a jobseeker to work without pay on threat of loss of benefits (“sanction”). Since October 2012, the government can stop benefits for up to three years.
3. The reform is being rolled out at a time when education and training schemes, housing benefit and other public services are being cut. Unpaid work inevitably replaces paid jobs and pushes wages down.
4. Under workfare, ‘volunteering’ loses its voluntary aspect and become compulsion, watched over by charities and companies. Placement providers are expected to monitor the attendance of people on workfare, report on their behaviour, and provide other information to the DWP that can result in severe penalties for recipients.
5. Compulsory unpaid work placements are being offered to the voluntary, public and private sectors. If unions and workplaces refuse to participate, this makes the programme much less viable.

The Union Branch believes:

1. That everyone is entitled to decent work, training and income. Benefits are also a right, not a privilege and need to be protected.
2. That we need to act in solidarity with the most vulnerable in society to protect benefits as part of defending society against a wider attack on the welfare state as a whole.
3. That many claimants wish to contribute to their communities and learn new skills through freely choosing to do voluntary work. But compulsory placements cause resentment, are against the ideal of volunteering and take advantage of the most vulnerable.

The Union branch resolves:

1. To support the call for a boycott of workfare placements by putting its name to the pledge (note below*).
2. To publicise the campaign, as well as the details of different claimants’ support groups, amongst union networks and amongst members of the branch.
3. To make a suggested donation of £50 to Boycott Workfare to help with the costs of the campaign (e.g. printing leaflets and travelling to give talks and workshops). Please make cheques payable to Boycott Workfare or get in touch to request details for a BACS transfer.
4. To raise this issue to regional/national level of the union.

*Boycott Workfare’s pledge reads: We the undersigned commit to refusing to participate in compulsory work-for-benefits placements. We want volunteering to remain just that!