

15 April 2023

All at breaking point

Karen has just finished her second week of targeted strike action in the passport office. Read what taking strike action means to her.

I live just outside of Durham with my adult son and partner. My other half works for the NHS, I am a civil servant and my son is an apprentice brickie. As you can imagine, the cost-of-living crisis has hit us hard. I will be honest, we are very lucky to have bought our home 20 years ago and this has had a huge impact on our finances; my son is 22 and I think the only way I can see him being a homeowner, is if he builds it himself!!

I have been a rep for 15 years and I thought I had seen it all: global recessions, Brexit, global pandemics, we have supported our members through one national crisis after another. But these last 12 months.... I never thought as a civil servant I would be having to support my members in accessing food banks, signposting to in-work benefits and charitable organisations. I never thought I would have to console members at breaking point, struggling to even get in to work due to petrol and parking charges. Having to make decisions about eating or heating. After over a decade of pay freezes or below inflation rises, we are all at breaking point.

The PCS strategy for sustained and targeted industrial action is a brilliant one. Our members, some on minimum wage, could not afford to take unpaid strike action for any real length of time; the introduction of the strike levy has meant we can target key areas of leverage and as we all know, passports always hit the headlines.

None of us take this action easily, our members spend every working day delivering for the public, ensuring family holidays, honeymoons, sporting events go ahead whilst ensuring the integrity of the British Passport and being vigilant for potential fraud and safeguarding concerns. So, as we bring our second week to a close, lets hope our government brings something to the table!