

27 October 2023

# From the president

As I sit down to write this latest President's column, we are entering a period of huge significance for our union and you, the members in DWP.

Whether it's the ongoing national campaign for better pay, pensions justice and job security, or the uncertainty recent announcements made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer have created, the union's response and members' reaction to it is of critical importance.

The group executive committee (GEC) will meet shortly to receive a report from the recent national executive committee (NEC) meeting, and discuss how our group can play a leading role in the next phase of the campaign. Whether through the three days of national strikes we took earlier this year, or the targeted action hundreds of you supported, we have shown that taking action can force concessions. It is clear though that these gains are not yet enough and we must be ready to take further action at the right time if progress cannot be made in the imminent talks with the Cabinet Office, about low pay and pay cohesion.

Of course, as a group we didn't break through the 50% threshold last time we held a statutory ballot and we cannot afford a repeat of that result next time we seek your mandate, if we are to win the pay and job security you all need and very much deserve.

The majority of you who voted in the recent consultative ballot, overwhelmingly endorsed the strategy the union has taken forward over the last year, of maximising the pressure on our employer and government and minimising the financial impact on you, as we all navigate through the ongoing financial crisis.

Now your elected GEC and every branch in the group has a responsibility to redouble our collective efforts to build on our organising strategy and increase engagement with you in the build up to any future ballot. We will be encouraging members' meetings across the group in the weeks ahead and once organised I call on each and every one of you to attend these meetings and have your say during this crucial period in our dispute.

We are also busy trying to get definitive answers to the many questions raised by Jeremy Hunt's recent announcements at Tory Party Conference. The threat of freezing resources and reducing staffing levels to pre-pandemic numbers is of great concern to us all. You have already been reporting to us that workloads and pressure across all directorates is on the increase, while we haemorrhage staff. Many of you have already responded to our survey confirming just how bad things are out there. The GEC will be discussing our response to the chronic understaffing across operations in particular, and will be using our planned engagement with you on the national campaign to talk to you about our demands for more staff.

We will also seek to re-establish our collaborative work on welfare, with comrades in Unite Community, Disabled People Against the Cuts, and others, as the government seeks to ramp up its attacks on those you provide vital services for. At a time of continued economic uncertainty, to make it more difficult to claim and then retain much needed benefits cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. An even more punitive regime could not only be disastrous for some of the most vulnerable in the country, but will make it even more difficult for you to provide the supportive service you tell us you desperately want to deliver for the public.

Finally, as we come towards the end of Black History Month, I send solidarity to all PCS black members who continue to play such a key part in our union. As we all know, black members, alongside other members with protected characteristics, continue to be under-represented in our union, and I hope you not only get involved in the forthcoming consultations, but give serious consideration to getting more involved in PCS and play an active role in your branch.

We are, always have been, and always will be, stronger when we work and pull together, and we can be even more formidable when our representative structures truly reflect our membership.

The weeks ahead will be a challenge for us all, but they also give the activists and members within DWP an opportunity to refocus and renew our energy for the campaigns ahead.

I look forward to leading our group in that joint endeavour, alongside all of you.

**Martin Cavanagh**

DWP President