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Members in the PCS Home Office group based at Heathrow airport ballot for strike action

Group secretary Mike Jones explains why Heathrow members are being balloted.

Over 600 PCS members at Heathrow airport are being balloted for strike action after the Home Office Heathrow Change team has refused to make any meaningful changes around the introduction of a new roster.

The new roster that is due to be imposed on 29 April means hundreds of members will be unable to continue to have their legacy terms, reasonable adjustments or contractual flexible working arrangements honoured. Staff have been told to accept the new terms or they will have to find a job elsewhere in the Home Office or leave - basically threatening people with fire and rehire. Over 160 experienced staff, with years of service at the airport, have already felt compelled to take voluntary redundancy as they can't sign up to the new terms and shifts being imposed.

A report commissioned by Priti Patel and written by right-wing Australian former politician Alexander Downer is being used to drive through the changes. The employer has insisted it must implement the report's recommendations, but PCS members in the Home Office group will be all too aware of countless other reports that recommended positive changes that the employer has simply ignored.

Members at Heathrow have indicated they are not prepared to take this lying down and are fighting back. The ballot runs until 22 March and, if the vote exceeds the anti-union 50% turnout threshold, members will begin to take strike action in April.

There is still the opportunity for the Home Office to avert the strike if they listen to members and make the reasonable changes to the roster that PCS has put forward. There is still opportunity for the employer to implement a roster that is fit for purpose, retains terms and conditions and doesn't penalise staff with disabilities, caring responsibilities or part-time working patterns.