

21 May 2024

# Conference fringe: Social security - The case for radical reform

The case for radical reform of the social security system was made at a fringe meeting ahead of the start of annual delegate conference in Brighton today (21).

PCS acting national president Martin Cavanagh and DWP group president-elect Angela Grant introduced a [short film](#) on the subject.

Opening the meeting Martin said: "This is a really important issue and it's a really important issue for those caught up in the benefits system. We need a fundamental radical reform of the social security system."

The film detailed the history of the government's railroading through changes to the benefits system regardless of the cost to claimants or our members who administer the system.

Our members spoke in stark terms of the impact on their working lives, on poor morale in the DWP and low pay and loss of prestige working as a civil servant. The film outlined that 8% of PCS members are using food banks.

## **Impact of Universal Credit**

Guest speaker, Brett Sparkes, from Unite Community, is researching the impact of Universal Credit on members in sectors of employment covered by Unite. He said that 92% of those affected are women, in industries dominated by women that are the hardest hit. He said that: "40% of UC claimants are in work - we've developed an economy where wages are not enough to live in. Social security is no longer a safety net, it's a subsidy for bad employers."

"Those are real stories [in the film] from our members and what they deal with in the benefits system," Martin said. "These are people who are passionate, all they want is to be paid properly for it."

He said that the system needs to have the resource - you cannot take money out of it and reform it and expect it to function. "There has to be an acceptance the in

a civilised society that there will always be people who need that support. Otherwise, we will see destitution and poverty ramped up like never before.”

He outlined the need to have a campaign for reform across the trade union movement and campaigns groups, and that unions were realising this: “This is no longer an unemployed workers’ issue – this is about their members, people who are unable to make ends meet.”

**Find essential information about conference on [the ADC 2024 web page](#) and follow our website for further updates throughout the week.**