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Activate: ‘Let’s keep the spirit of defiance against outsourcing going’

In the latest issue of Activate, Fran writes about the failures of the outsourcing model and sends her solidarity to outsourced members who have been involved in disputes past and present.

It’s great to be writing this column as part of our Activate special on outsourcing. I’m so immensely proud of what our brave members have achieved so far and our track record of winning in these disputes speaks for itself.

Our members in outsourced areas of the civil service play a pivotal role in keeping the public services that millions of people rely on running. During the pandemic, when the majority of workers were able to stay at home, outsourced staff members were going into buildings to keep them safe. They heroically put the lives of themselves and their families at risk in order that during a time of national crisis, vital services wouldn’t grind to a halt.

Since the pandemic, our members in outsourced work continue to play a key role. This is a predominantly black workforce that welcomes, serves food and cleans up after some of the most powerful people in the country and, indeed, the world.

Their hard work and sacrifice are rewarded with the continuation of an absurd and unfair two-tier workforce, with staff directly employed by the civil service on superior pay and terms and conditions. It’s grossly unfair that workers who use the same buildings, share the same colleagues and serve the same public should be treated no differently.

Just like the broken pay model, outsourcing is a key driver of inequalities, particularly on race and gender. It's a system that institutionalises racism - not just in the civil service but across the public and private sectors.

It's where class and race intersect, with black workers being paid less and enduring worse terms and conditions than those employed directly, as well as having a much lower chance of progressing their career in the civil service. So, our members in these disputes are not just fighting for themselves, they're dismantling a system that is hardwired to discriminate.

It's been amazing to see the success our members' fightback has resulted in. Just the other week, the threat of action by workers employed by ISS at the Department for Net Zero resulted in a much-improved offer on pay and terms and conditions. It was another brilliant victory and will no doubt serve as inspiration to our G4S members still on strike across DWP sites at the moment.

For every single member involved in all our outsourcing disputes past and present who is reading this, and for everyone that has supported them, I want to say thank you. Let's celebrate the work you do; praise the way you've fought back and keep the spirit of defiance going as the fight continues. I can assure you that PCS will be with you all the way and for as long as it takes.