

5 August 2024

Activate: ISS members eyeing insourcing after winning dispute

Learn from outsourced ISS reps and members about how they won an inflation-busting pay rise and concessions on leave entitlements - and hope to turn this momentum into a move in-house.

As announced recently, PCS members employed by ISS at Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will receive a pay rise that takes them above the London Living Wage. But this huge win did not appear out of nowhere. These members have been campaigning for better pay and terms and conditions since 2018.

Ever since PCS launched a campaign to organise these outsourced workers, member Lee has noticed the steady growth of PCS in his workplace.

"We didn't have a big membership in our location but I helped and persuaded a lot of people to join PCS because the more of us there are, we'll be stronger together," he says. "What we try to do is spread the word around about PCS. We tell them what PCS is all about. We try to talk about the union three or four times a week."

Inspired by recent rounds of industrial action and the many organising conversations he's taken part in, Lee has set himself a future target of becoming a rep.

'A matter of self-conviction'

Already active as a rep in ISS is Toyin, who, although she has played an exemplary role in recent organising efforts in her workplace, admits that it "hasn't always been rosy [recruiting members] as it is matter of convincing people".

The other week, she had a conversation with a colleague "about what the union is for and what we stand for". She asked if she was interested in joining the union and she replied, 'No, no, no'. But Toyin believes in perseverance.

On the morning that PCS interviewed Toyin, she had spoken to a receptionist in his building to ask them if they would like to hear more about what the union can do for him. His colleague noted that he had recently joined. "You win some and you lose some," says Toyin.

In her view, organising members in his workplace means trying to have face-to-face conversations with colleagues.

"When you tell people over WhatsApp about why they should join the union and what the union can do for them, you can't see their reaction and their body language," she says. "It is a matter of self-conviction because when I myself was first approached by the union, I told them I wasn't interested. But later on, I changed my mind," she adds, proving the importance of building a tangible union presence in the workplace.

According to branch officer Kate, however, the branch WhatsApp group has also been key to their success. It is used to keep members regularly updated as most ISS members "aren't sat at a desk like civil servant and so being able to agilely engage with them in the way they like to engage has been crucial".

Another factor in the success of this campaign has been regular engagement – members "need to know what we're doing, have a route to feed in views, and feel part of the wider membership", Kate says – and the provision of strike pay.

Insourcing is next

Speaking just days after winning an improved contract, Lee is clear about the next phase of organising: "Our next step is to go in-house. That's what we want and Labour has now promised that."

An insourced contract would allow for members to be, in Lee's words, "treated like a member of staff - a civil servant."

Toyin summarises the appeal of insourcing for her and her members: "Under the government, we would have more rights. For example, in [many public sector jobs], you are entitled to one week of bereavement leave. Here right now [at ISS], we are entitled to just one or two days. For hospital appointments, [public sector contracts ensure] you are paid. But here, they will say do you want your annual leave or not go."

For Toyin, the next months will involve trying to convince people of the merits of joining PCS and to keep encouraging her fellow members to stay engaged and

active. Any new addition to the team will be approached.

"The aim of joining the union is - basically - winning. And that's what people want to hear," she explains of the impact of recent wins on recruitment.

Lee, meanwhile, is vowing to speak to the Secretary of State based in his building to remind the government directly of its commitment to insourcing: "We have to hold them to their promises."

Outsourced workers in London and the South-East can register for a PCS course called [Workplace Reps: Essential Building Blocks \(outsourced FM workers only\)](#). This training course will take place in PCS HQ in Clapham Junction in London and will last six days on 1, 2, 3, 15, 16 and 17 October.