

29 August 2024

Newcastle Regional Centre management attacks union reps

The most difficult decision any member will be asked to take is to join strike action.

No one wants to lose money, no one wants to impact the vital services we deliver for the public. But after a decade of below inflation pay rises and a cost-of-living crisis, our members reached a financial breaking point. Even then many members will have doubts about taking part in action. That is where our 100s of branch reps in HMRC are vital. They support members, answer their concerns, give confidence.

In 2023 the reps at Benton Park View led sections of their members in targeted strike action, that played a role in winning a 4% pay rise for all colleagues. The reps and members in Benton Park View performed a service for all civil servants and deserve our thanks.

Yet the reality has been very different. Disgracefully some managers are targeting reps at Benton Park View. PCS caseworkers have seen evidence of managers doctoring evidence to make HMRC's allegations stick. So far three reps have been dismissed and three more have been subjected to investigations.

Make no mistake, what is taking place in Benton Park View is vindictive and cruel. Natural justice no longer has a place there. Morale and goodwill have dwindled. There will be long term negative consequences in industrial relations due to the actions of a minority.

It is important to emphasise the issue has arisen because of a minority of people in a position of power. Most managers at Benton Park View are honest, respectful and decent. We don't want every manager to be tarred with the same brush. If you are one of the good majority then please, stand up and ask the difficult questions - challenge poor behaviours of those in power when you see them. Be allies for the reps and for your fellow members. That will be a powerful message and help to rebuild the bridges at Benton Park View.

No one would have blamed the branch executive committee for losing hope in the face of such attacks, but reps in Benton Park View are brave fighters and they aren't about to let these attacks go unanswered. The branch sought support from the group and national executive committees for a campaign to get their reps reinstated and to end victimisation.

What now?

PCS group and national conferences carried emergency motions in May to deliver a campaign. The group executive committee met on 11 June and agreed a campaign plan and a subcommittee to oversee it. Meanwhile the majority on the national executive committee sought an emergency meeting which was held on 10 July and agreed to provide national support for the campaign. We've now seen a number of actions taken to utilise legal, political and industrial avenues.

All three sacked reps have been given legal support in submitting tribunal applications and they are receiving financial support from PCS. The general secretary has written to the new prime minister to intervene. An Early Day Motion has been tabled to be debated in parliament. MPs have visited the branch during leafleting sessions at the gates of Benton Park View. There have been a huge number of messages of solidarity from across the trade union movement. A members' meeting was held on 13 August to provide an update, where over 130 attended.

Our strongest weapon is the 3,000+ members at Benton Park View. Plans are being developed by the branch for members' action and these will be communicated shortly. The campaign is building and the pressure on HMRC is mounting.

When targeted strike action took place at Benton Park View, that branch was acting on behalf of us all. Now we can all return the favour by supporting the branch's campaign to get the reps reinstated and end rep victimisation. Please:

- Use the e-action to ask your local MP to support Early Day Motion 52 (<https://action.pcs.org.uk/page/154072/action/1>),
- Continue to send messages of solidarity with the branch,
- If you're at Benton Park View then make sure you read and share the information that is being given out by the branch,
- Continue to attend the meetings called by the branch and support the campaign as it picks up momentum.

Let's show HMRC that we have your support so that HMRC realises they are in a fight, not with six people, but with more than 3,000 determined PCS members locally and the full might of PCS nationally. Solidarity with Benton Park View.

JP Rosser, GEC member