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HARD COPY



EDITORIAL

Hello and Happy New Year.

I have been asked if I would like to do a guest editorial so here it is. 2011 was a very busy year, especially towards the end of the year with all the reviews, the job cuts, and attacks on our Pensions (having to pay more, work longer and receive less).

Did anyone hear my live radio interviews about the jobs, pay and pensions?

Unfortunately I had a particularly difficult to shift sinus infection for the last month of the year which meant that I sounded a bit like Frank Sidebottom, well that's what I thought, thankfully doing live interviews means that you don't get any feedback.

The sinus problem went over Christmas so I now sound like I normally do.

I hope that you enjoy this edition of the newsletter.

Duncan



Mick's in a Pickle Quick quiz

Help I have been Micksed (Mixed) up in the Pickle Jar; all you have to do is to put an X on me, the nearest to centre of my face will win a mystery prize.

Please send your X on the picture (or is that Mickture) together with your name and details to Jacqui "I am not really sure which one is Mick, is he a cauliflower, Mickle or Gherkin, I'll have you know" Dunkerley Room 7233 Norcross to arrive no later than Friday 16th of March 2012.

The winner will receive a mystery prize. Please remember that only members of the Fylde Central Benefits and Services Branch, excluding Branch Executive Committee can enter the quiz.

Quiz Results

Count Grant McClure's (say it fast) Halloween Quiz



Here are the totally scary answers to my blood curdling quiz:

Answer 1

Terry Scott did the voice of Count Duckula in the 1980's cartoon.

Answer 2

Christopher Lee played Dracula in a string of Hammer films

Answer 3

According to legend, you could kill a Vampire with a steak through the heart

Answer 4

Transylvania is in Romania

Answer 5

Max Von Sydow played Nosferatu in the 1922 classic film of the same name

Answer 6

Bram Stoker wrote the novel Dracula.

The winner was Katie Bainbridge from Norcross who won a mystery prize.

I'm off. Fangs aren't what they used to be around here.

Count Grant McClure (say it fast).

Jacqui's Quick Quiz

I went for a beach holiday and saw my daughter Vicky in September 2011 and I went to Ibiza, Spain.

The winner was Lesley Tague from Warbreck who received another splendid mystery prize.

Right go to dash, plane to catch, going skiing again.

Jacqui



Jon Says...

When asked by our intrepid reporter did Jon Calgon like Valentine's day, Jon's reply was:

"Nah".

Unpaid overtime equivalent to 1m extra jobs

The two billion hours of unpaid overtime worked last year would be enough to create over a million extra full-time jobs, the TUC has calculated. It says the total amount of unpaid overtime worked last year was 1,968 million hours - worth a record £29.2 billion to the UK economy. If workers who regularly put in unpaid overtime worked all their hours from the start of the year, the first day they would get paid would be Friday 24 February. The TUC has designated this date Work Your Hour Proper Hours Day (WYPHD). In the run-up to WYPHD 2012 the TUC will publish information and advice for staff and their bosses to try and cut out these unpaid hours at work. The TUC will call on employers to mark Work Yours Proper Hours Day by thanking staff for the extra hours they're putting in. It says that although reducing the amount of unpaid overtime does not translate precisely into extra jobs, the TUC is concerned that persistent and excessive hours of unpaid overtime are holding back job creation. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said that 'while many of the extra unpaid hours worked could easily be reduced by changing work practices and ending the UK's culture of pointless presenteeism, a small number of employers are exploiting staff by regularly forcing them to do excessive amounts of extra work for no extra pay.' He added: 'This attitude is not only bad for workers' health, it's bad for the economy too as it reduces productivity and holds back job creation. No-one wants to see us to become a nation of clock-watchers. But a more sensible and grown up attitude to working time could cut out needless unpaid hours and help more people into work.' Long working hours have been linked to chronic health problems and increased injury rates.



Warning as deadly stress set to soar

Unions and campaigners have warned of soaring stress levels among both the employed and unemployed as government-imposed cuts take hold. Thousands of workers are either worrying about losing their jobs or facing longer hours, increased workloads, wage reductions and reduced pensions while increasing bills and rocketing unemployment add to the misery, say occupational stress campaigners. Speaking before the UK National Work Stress Network's annual conference last month, network co-ordinator Ian Draper said: 'Survey after survey tells us what we've known all along - work is getting more and more stressful. It is no surprise our website is regularly visited by over 15,000 people every month. People at work are feeling the pain and an increase in work-related suicides is the awful evidence of how much pain. For those people whose job is on the line it is worse. For the unemployed it must be unbearable.' Unite's senior health officer Rachael Maskell stated: 'The recession has brought widespread job and financial insecurity with rising inflation, capped wages alongside increases in pension contributions and extension to working lives.' She added: 'There are continuous attacks on employment rights and insidious, pernicious assaults on the entire health and safety agenda. Overall workers are being exposed to greater and greater risks.' Hazards Campaign spokesperson Nick Green said: 'We see ourselves as central to the struggle against the austerity measures being thrust upon us by government who failed to stop the gamblers of the finance industry from robbing us all. We should not be paying for others' criminality or negligence.'

Government axes apprenticeship safety measure

The government says it is to end apprenticeship health and safety measures that 'go beyond' the legal minimum and that were introduced after a spate of deaths in 2003. Business secretary Vince Cable told an Association of Colleges conference last month that from the start of 2012, training providers and employers offering apprenticeships will no longer have to comply with any requirements that go 'above and beyond' health and safety legislation. Announcing measures forming part of the government's Plan for Growth, Vince Cable said: 'From the start of 2012, training providers and employers will no longer have to comply with any requirements which go above and beyond health and safety legislation.' The commitment was repeated by the chancellor George Osborne this week in his Autumn statement. He said the government would 'remove all unnecessary health and safety requirements for apprenticeships', a move Unite said 'heralds a steady erosion of health and safety legislation.' The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) currently expects training providers and the employers they work with to meet not only the health and safety standards required for all employees but also additional requirements for apprentices. As part of the measures, which were not subject to a government consultation, it is believed the 25-strong SFA safety unit that monitored apprenticeship safety standards has already been dismantled. The enhanced health and safety regime was introduced in response to nine work-related fatalities among apprentices in 2003. The move was welcomed by Adam Marshall of the British Chambers of Commerce, who said 'health and safety constraints' were an obstacle to small firms. But it was criticised by safety professionals' organisation IOSH. Head of policy and public affairs Richard Jones said: 'Inexperienced workers are more at risk of workplace accidents and need to be properly trained and supervised. This is nothing to do with 'red tape' - it's just common sense and sensible preservation of life and limb. Sadly, over the last decade, we've seen, on average, five under-19-year-olds killed at work, 1,257 major injuries and 3,917 over-three-day injuries annually. We need to do better than this.'

The following has been supplied by PCS:

Lack of Financial Regulation

Financial assets have been around almost as long as civilisation. James Meadway senior economist at the New Economics Foundation, says they have become too powerful and destructive. In this article he looks at the financial markets, their role in the economic crisis, and considers the alternative.

“Financial markets” refers to the trade of different forms of financial assets like shares and debt. Many institutions and individuals participate in trade like this, from major banks and insurance companies to wealthy individuals. Among the first examples of writing are records of financial transactions dating from 3200 BC in Mesopotamia. But it was the appearance of a distinctive form of organisation of society – capitalism – that pushed the use of financial assets into their central position. They became powerful as a result of their central location within the system, but also potentially destructive, perhaps most catastrophically so in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Loosening regulations

In response to the crisis of the 1970s regulations that were imposed on financial markets – partly in response to the crisis of the 1930s – were loosened.

Banks and other financial institutions were increasingly free to develop new and more exotic ways to create and market credit. Markets expanded hugely, particularly in countries where deregulation had gone furthest like the US and the UK as investors looked to make quick and easy profits. The relationship between a trading room and the real economy can be complex. On a day-to-day basis it may not have much immediate impact: some companies and assets will perform better than others and prices will wobble up and down. What we are seeing now is the other side, after the bubble burst.

All the debt that has been created over the decade remains to be paid, and it is the requirement to repay the debt that is helping drag down activity. Households and firms restrict their spending to repay debts. As their spending falls the economy starts to seize up.

Irrational exuberance

There are two principle dangers inherent to financial markets.

The first is their tendency towards “irrational exuberance”. Because financial assets are not necessarily directly linked to real economic activity their prices can accelerate a long way from what the rest of the economy is doing. Traders can start to bid prices up and, as they rise, more trading is encouraged – pushing prices up still further. But when the bubble bursts the entire process unwinds and can damage real economic activity.

The second danger is something called “systematic risk”. As the markets are deeply interconnected a failure in one part of the system can spread rapidly. The entire system can freeze up, as happened towards the end of 2008. What has happened now is an extension of that crisis. The decade-long bubble burst leaving banks and other financial institutions holding assets that were suddenly devalued.

Although austerity has been hailed as the only way to keep markets happy, since it implies that governments prioritise paying the debt over paying for anything else, there is a growing sense that because it weakens their ability to meet their debt obligations that it is not the best course to follow.

There is also a growing belief that financial markets are too dominant in the economies we live in. Pressure can force government U-turn.

There are ways in which markets can be stopped. Capital and exchange controls can help prevent destructively rapid movements of capital. Closing down tax havens would both help raise revenue for government and start to restrict the ability of huge, unregulated pools of wealth to wreak havoc.

Banks can be placed under firm public supervision and control. It would be good to make banking and finance boring again. These institutions should act like public utilities, providing a necessary service, not like drunken gamblers. It is within the government’s power to act like this but it requires a major act of political will to do so.



Members' Meetings

The Fylde Central Benefits and Services Branch has a commitment to keeping its meetings as informal as possible to encourage the views of everyone. However, there are a few principles that must be followed to ensure fairness and help the meeting run smoothly.

Never be afraid to give your opinion, it is precisely why meetings are held and as union members we are there to encourage you in a supportive atmosphere. Please remember the PCS is fully committed to its Equal Opportunities policy statement and will not tolerate behaviour which goes against it.

If you want to speak at a meeting the Chair will ask if there are any questions (usually after a guest speaker has finished) or if you wish to speak on a motion to be debated; raise your hand and wait for the Chair to ask you to speak.

Where possible, motions are sent to members before a meeting. It helps the Chair keep to the agreed timetable if members read the motions before attending the meeting.

The Chair

The Chair of the meeting is there to ensure the meeting runs smoothly and that the correct procedures are followed.

Motions

A motion is a statement to set or back up existing union policy. Motions are directed to the Branch, the Group or National Executives. A motion must be proposed and seconded.

Guest Speakers

At a General Meeting, particularly the Annual General Meeting, there may be a guest speaker. If the speaker is from the PCS they will usually concentrate on PCS matters. However, the Branch may have a speaker from outside the PCS who may concentrate on wider issues.

Proposing a motion

The person who has proposed the motion (or speaker on behalf of an Executive Committee) will explain why they want you to support the motion. Sometimes if there is nothing to add to what the motions says the proposer (also called the mover) may move the motion 'formally'. This means they do not actually speak unless someone else later in the debates opposes the motion. In this case the proposer has the 'right of reply'.

Seconding a motion

The person who has seconded the motion will also have the right to say why they want you to support it. Sometimes the seconder may say 'formally, reserving right'. This means they do not want to speak then may seek to speak if anyone opposes the motion.

Right of reply

If anyone opposes a motion the Chair may ask the seconder to speak, if they have seconded formally.

The proposer of the motion has the final 'right of reply' picking up the points of opposition. Once the proposer has had their 'right of reply' the motion must be voted upon.

Voting

Usually at a General Meeting voting will be by a show of hands. However in some cases there may be a ballot.

'Tellers' appointed and agreed at the start of the meeting will collect any ballot papers or count the number of hands shown if requested by the Chair (this will only normally happen if the vote is close).

In the case of a vote being equal the Chair will make their casting vote.

This is a very broad outline of members meetings. If you want to know anything more please contact the Branch office.

These details have
been supplied by the: **TUC**

Sickness review ups pressure on ill workers

A government commissioned report that recommends taking responsibility for signing off sick workers out of the hands of GPs and handing it to a new Independent Assessment Service (IAS) could lead to damaging pressure on sick workers, the TUC has said. Commenting on the review of sickness absence carried out by Dame Carol Black and former business lobby leader David Frost published this week, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: 'The current method of sickness absence certification and pay is not in need of a major overhaul. Unions are concerned that however well-intended this report, there is a danger it will be seized upon by some rogue employers as an excuse to force people back to work before they are good and ready.' He added that the report, which has been welcomed by the government, 'while very limited in its remit, recognises that the current sick pay scheme is broadly fit for purpose, but makes a number of recommendations in respect of job-brokering and an independent assessment system which could be used to force sick and injured employees back to work far sooner than is good for their health. While employers need more advice and support in dealing with sickness absence, the biggest gains can be made by supporting workers through early access to rehabilitation, as well as increasing prevention measures to stop them becoming ill or injured in the first place. Unfortunately, because of the narrow remit that the government gave to the review, these issues are not covered.' The report comes a week after a research report in the USA showed that the absence of a sick pay

system resulted in a cost to the US economy of over \$1 billion a year

Sickness plans are not about healthy workers

Workplace health campaigners have said a report for the government aimed at reducing the cost to business of sickness absence should have instead looked at preventing workers becoming sick in the first place. The findings of the government-backed review conducted by Professor Carol Black and former British Chambers of Commerce head David Frost, which include a recommendation that people should be signed off for long-term sickness by an independent assessment service and not by GPs, have been welcomed by government. Welfare reform minister Lord Freud said: 'The economy loses £15bn in lost economic output each year due to sickness absence and we cannot continue to foot this bill. But even more important is the impact of needless inactivity on people's lives; the damage to their aspirations and their health and the damage to their families and communities.' He added: 'The government will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the Review's findings and recommendations with the view to publishing a response during 2012.' But Hazards Campaign spokesperson Hilda Palmer commented: 'Instead of setting up more systems to punish workers who are on sick leave trying to recover - often from illnesses caused by their work - emphasis should be put on preventing them being made ill in the first place. Putting workers under more stress and punitive scrutiny while they are ill is the politics of the workhouse and this report feeds into the current 'blame the workers not the real culprits' thinking and policy-making that will send us down the road to utter bankruptcy even faster.'

Workers can't afford to be sick

Workers cannot afford to be off sick and rush back to work because of financial fears, new research has found. Insurance giant Aviva found over half (52 per cent) of UK workers could survive financially for only three months on statutory sick pay. Around a third (30 per cent) said they'd survive for less than a month. Aviva, who undertook a nationwide survey of 1,000 British employees and 500 employers, found two-thirds of workers (65 per cent) cite financial concerns as the main reason to get back to work quickly if they are off sick. Regaining a sense of purpose (28 per cent), getting well (21 per cent) and providing for their families (16 per cent) were also high priorities. Aviva said the research highlighted the simple steps employers can take to help their employees. Just under a half of employees (47 per cent) said their fears would be allayed if they knew that the proper support was available and a quarter (24 per cent) said they'd be happier if they knew that their boss would work with them to ease their return to work. However, just 25 per cent of employers agreed the rehabilitation process is vital and only one in ten bosses said they would consider how they could adapt workers' jobs to aid their return to work. Steve Bridger, head of group risk at Aviva UK Health said 'few people have the savings available to support themselves and their families for very long. Employment and Support Allowance can come to as little as £67.50 a week - even less than Statutory Sick Pay - which in many cases would hardly cover a family's food shopping, let alone their mortgage and other necessary expenses.'

The following has been supplied by the PCS DWP Group:



Sickness absence and untaken annual leave: PCS advises members to protect their right to carry over untaken leave

PCS sickness absence advice

Legal advice on two conflicting judgements from Employment Appeal Tribunals has been published on the national PCS website.

Protect annual leave rights

PCS advises that it is important that anyone who is off sick and approaching the end of their leave year without having taken all of their leave, acts to protect their right to carry that leave over or to request permission to take the leave, if they are on unpaid sick leave:

- Where a member is on sick leave at full pay rate, they need to make an application in writing to their manager, before the end of their current leave year, stating that, as they have been prevented by their sickness from having an opportunity to rest and to enjoy a period of relaxation and leisure, they wish to carry forward their untaken leave to the following leave year.
- Members on sick leave on full pay in DWP can ask to exercise their right to take leave during their annual leave year but this would not reduce their sickness absence under the DWP Sick Leave Policy. A deduction would be made from both annual leave and paid sick leave entitlements.
- Where a member is on sick leave at less than full pay rate, or nil pay, they can choose either to designate a period as annual leave, for which they should be paid their full pay rate or, alternatively, may write to their manager, in the same way as outlined above, to carry over untaken leave to the following leave year.

DWP annual leave and sickness

DWP Annual Leave Procedure confirms that:

- Employees cannot be compelled to take annual leave during sickness absence (11.3)
- On return to work from sickness absence, employees must try to take their remaining annual leave before the end of their leave year. Managers must do all they reasonably can to facilitate this. If the employee has the opportunity to take their leave but does not ask to do so, any untaken leave will be lost (over and above the normal 10 days permitted carry over). (15.1)
- Employees who are off sick for the whole of their leave year can carry forward all of their untaken contractual leave into the next leave year. (15.3)

PCS will issue further guidance when the legal position has been resolved.

Mick and Grant's Slightly Post-Valentine Love Quiz

Mickeypie and Grantypops here with a quiz about Love, it's what makes the world around after all. We are so much in love, but not with each other, we hasten to add.

Here are our questions about matters of the heart:

Question 1

Where did Rihanna find Love in 2011? Was it?

- a) In helpless space
- b) In Mick and Grant's embrace
- c) In Peyton Place
- d) In a hopeless place
- e) In outer space

Question 2

Why do birds suddenly appear. Is the opening line of the "song close to you". Which by the way is our favourite song, but who sang "close to you" was it? The.....

- a) Masons
- b) Joiners
- c) Coopers
- d) Fletchers
- e) Carpenters

Question 3

Which football team used to play at Love Street in Paisley? Was it?

- a) Queen of the South
- b) Falkirk
- c) St Mirren
- d) St Johnstone
- e) Clydebank

Question 4

Who starred in the series Lovejoy from 1986 to 1994? Was it Ian.....?

- a) McNabb
- b) McGeechan
- c) McHenry
- d) McShane
- e) McKellen



Question 5

"What's love got to do with it" is a biographical film about which singer? Was it?

- a) Tina Arena
- b) Tina Turner
- c) Tina Charles
- d) Tina Hobley
- e) Tina O'Brien

Question 6

The original strap-line was "All because the lady loves". But which product was this for? Was it?

- a) Toblerone
- b) Thornton's Continental
- c) All Gold
- d) Dairy Milk
- e) Milk Tray

Please send your answers together with your name and details to Jacqui "I am partial to the odd choccie myself, but I have never had mine delivered to my house by a tall dark stranger, I'll have you know" Dunkerley Room 7233 Norcross to arrive no later than Friday 16th of March 2012.

The winner will receive a mystery prize. Please remember that only members of the Fylde Central Benefits and Services Branch, excluding Branch Executive Committee can enter the quiz.

Mickeypie and Grantypops



These details have
been supplied by the:



Assaults at work increased last year

Physical assaults at work increased last year but threats of violence fell, official statistics have revealed. A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) report, based on British Crime Survey (BCS) and RIDDOR reports, reveals there were an estimated 341,000 physical assaults to British workers during the 12 months prior to the interviews, up 10 per cent from the previous year. The BCS statistics for 2010/11 used by HSE also reveal there were an estimated 313,000 threats of violence to British workers during the 12 months prior to the interviews, down 15 per cent from the previous year. Almost half of those affected (43 per cent) were repeat victims. A total of 6,078 injuries resulted from violence in the workplace, RIDDOR statistics showed. Those working in protective services, such as security guards, police and prison officers, were most at risk. But HSE notes care assistants, home care workers, teachers, nurses and drivers were also at a significantly increased risk. HSE points to BCS figures that suggest in over a third of assaults at work (35 per cent), the victim believed the offender was under the influence of alcohol and in a

quarter of cases (25 per cent) under the influence of drugs. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of assaults on workers were perpetrated by a stranger, with the next highest grouping being clients or members of the public known through work (21 per cent). The BCS returned higher figures than RIDDOR for a number of reasons, says HSE, in part because not all injuries are reportable under RIDDOR and because of under-reporting by employers. HSE adds: 'Only physical injuries resulting from acts of violence suffered by people at work are included as reportable under RIDDOR. Therefore cases where a worker suffered shock from witnessing an act of threatening behaviour would not need to be reported.'

Enforcement works, non-enforcement kills

A drastic cut in the UK's already under par workplace safety enforcement activity will lead to more death and injuries, the TUC has warned. The union body believes that the government's instruction to enforcement agencies to slash workplace inspections, cutting unannounced inspections by a third, 'will simply mean more deaths, injuries and illness. The biggest increases will be seen in those sectors where the HSE is withdrawing from pro-active inspections.' These include supposedly 'low risk' workplaces - a designation TUC describes as 'a myth' because they often

have high risks of violence, occupational disease and other serious problems - and notoriously hazardous sectors including agriculture and quarrying. In a second information bulletin published ahead of a 28 April 'Day of action to defend health and safety', TUC notes the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has stated 'the expected 'lower level of enforcement' would mean a consequent decrease in health and safety standards throughout Great Britain, with ensuing costs to society.' TUC warns the UK's enforcement coverage is already below par. 'The International Labour Organisation says that it is a matter of concern if the number of inspectors in an industrialised country is less than 1 per 10,000 workers. In Britain it is one for every 15,615.' The briefing explains research has demonstrated that proper regulation and enforcement deliver safety improvements. 'Good employers have always supported both regulation and enforcement because it means that their competitors cannot take short-cuts with people's safety and undercut them,' TUC concludes. 'It is only unscrupulous or incompetent employers who fear consistent and fair regulation of health and safety.'



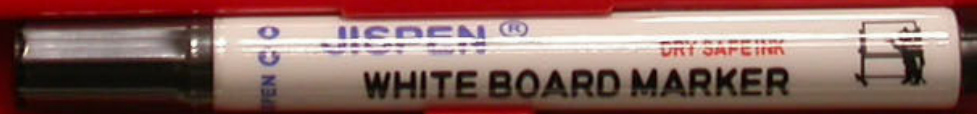
Report supports safety law; ministers see red tape

A government commissioned report that concluded Britain's workplace safety laws 'are broadly right' and which found 'little evidence' they are 'goldplated' is being used by the government to attack those laws and to skew the system away from employer responsibility and towards 'personal responsibility'. Responding to the Löfstedt report, the government said it would begin 'a major cut back of health and safety red tape as early as January' and 'will begin an immediate consultation on the abolition of large numbers of health and safety regulations and intends to have removed the first rules from the statute book within a few months.' It says 'health and safety regulations will be reduced by a third rising to over a half over the next 3 years, through combining, simplifying and reducing the approximately 200 existing regulations.' These measures were not called for in Professor Ragnar Löfstedt recommendations, which found instead there is 'no case for radically altering health and safety legislation'. The government also said from 1 January it will establish a new 'challenge panel', another measure going beyond anything recommended by Löfstedt. Ministers say the panel 'will allow businesses to get the decisions of health and safety inspectors overturned immediately if they have got it wrong.' The government's intention to go well beyond the recommendations of the report were confirmed this week in chancellor George Osborne's Autumn Statement, in which he stated the government 'accept the recommendations of Professor Löfstedt's review of health and safety regulation and look to go further as part of the Red Tape Challenge.' Employment minister Chris Grayling, speaking at the launch of the review findings, said the government would 'ensure our reforms put an emphasis on personal responsibility,' adding the government would implement the report's most controversial recommendation, to exempt self-employed workers from health and safety law where their work 'poses no potential risk of harm' to others. 'By accepting the recommendations of Professor Löfstedt we are putting common sense back at the heart of health and safety,' the minister said. 'Our reforms will root out needless bureaucracy and be a significant boost to the million self-employed people who will be moved out of health and safety regulation altogether.' The review was commissioned by the government in March, but with a remit limited to making recommendations on reducing health and safety burdens on business.

Safety report ducks the real issues, says TUC

The TUC has welcomed the Lofstedt report's conclusion that the UK's health and safety laws 'are broadly right', but it says it has major concerns that the proposals to exempt some self-employed workers could have a 'devastating impact' on their safety. The union body is also disappointed that the report makes no suggestions as to how the protection of employees in the workplace could be improved. Commenting on conclusions of the government-commissioned report, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said 'Professor Lofstedt was only asked to look at the 'burden' on business, not the burden that the failings in the current system have placed on the two million people whose health has been made worse because of their work. Nor has it considered the more than 20,000 people whose lives are cut short every year as a result of a preventable work-related injury or illness. Because of this, not one life will be saved as a result and not one injury or illness prevented. This is very much a missed opportunity.' The union leader also expressed concern at the proposal to remove up to one million self-employed workers from the protection of current safety laws. 'These people, who often work in the most dangerous of jobs, are already much more likely to be killed or injured. There is little doubt that removing the self-employed from the regulations will increase their risk of illness and injury and lead to a rise in the number of bogus self-employed in sectors like construction,' he said. 'While we welcome comments in the report on the need to address the major occupational health problems in the UK and to support union safety representatives, it is regrettable that no recommendations have been made on how to go about doing this. It is time the government stopped tinkering around with regulations to save business from non-existent 'red-tape' and instead started looking at what positive steps it could take to improve Britain's health and safety record.'

TUC 



A Living Wage



What is a living wage?

A living wage is the minimum hourly wage necessary for housing, food and other basic needs. Unlike the minimum wage (£6.08 an hour), the living wage – worked out using a standard methodology and taking account of real living costs – is £8.30 an hour in London and £7.20 an hour elsewhere.

Campaigning for a living wage

An innovative campaign is persuading the largest companies on the London Stock Exchange to become 'living wage' employers. This article looks at its achievements so far and how people get involved.

The responsible investment charity FairPensions has been involved in some cutting edge campaigns. So when PCS was invited to be a partner in JustPay!, along with Unite, Unison, Prospect and Citizens UK, we knew this would be no ordinary campaign. From the outset it was clear it had several strands, involving 'shareholder activists' as well as the wider public and using more traditional methods such as targeting MPs.

FairPensions' campaigns have been diverse – targeting Shell and BP because of their involvement in 'dirty oil' and the pharmaceutical company Novartis to ensure the continuing availability of low-cost drugs to treat AIDS and cancer in developing countries. What they share is their method: a focus on 'mobilising the power of savings and investments'.

Become a shareholder activist

The aim of the campaign is challenging: starting with the FTSE 100 companies, to get living wage standards embedded right across the UK private sector. The campaign kicked off in March 2011 with a 'Become a shareholder activist' training day held at the PCS learning centre in London. The aim was to show activists how they can use annual general meetings to ask questions about a company's financial, social or environmental performance, why this form of campaigning is effective, and to find out more about becoming a 'shareholder activist'.

The launch of the campaign on 2 May 2011 coincided with a letter to all FTSE 100 companies, signed by 21 investors calling on them to become living wage employers. An online action was also launched asking people to 'activate their money' by demanding that financial firms that provide pensions and savings accounts pay a living wage to all their staff, including those employed by contractors.

Next the campaign targeted AGMs attending 21 in total. PCS wanted to target those private sector companies where we have members and these included Capita and Mitie. PCS members on the DWP cleaning contract and Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service security staff spoke at the Mitie AGM in July 2011 and were given a public commitment by management to meeting PCS to discuss making the outsourcing company a living wage employer.

PCS rep Helen Wightman who attended the Capita AGM said: "I attended the AGM along with another PCS rep. I was able to meet chief executive Paul Pindar and non-executive director Martina King after the meeting to put our case for a living wage. They both committed to discussions with PCS about Capita paying the living wage on the DWP Filestores account where I work. If Capita adopted the living wage it would make a real difference to my colleagues which is why I got involved in the campaign."

Companies sign up

More traditional campaign methods were also used. A postcard campaign was launched in the summer targeted at Lloyds, the UK's largest retail bank. And in July FairPensions got a parliamentary early day motion (EDM) tabled which has been signed by more than 60 MPs.

The campaign has written directly to each of the FTSE 100 companies calling on them to become living wage employers and is in continuing dialogue with 43 companies. A growing number have indicated that they are taking steps to become a living wage employer with two – Standard Life and Standard Chartered – making a public commitment to paying their workers a living wage.

Obeying safety rules is a responsibility, not a burden



Health and safety regulation is not the burden on business the prime minister suggests, but something any responsible business should embrace, the TUC has asserted. 'Regulation should not be seen as a burden on business,' a TUC briefing confirms. 'It is a responsibility, just as paying taxes is a responsibility, and no business should be able to operate unless it can do so safely.' The briefing, the first in a series of TUC bulletins to be issued in the run up to Workers' Memorial Day on 28 April, adds 'there is no evidence that, despite all the complaints, health and safety regulations impose even a minimal hardship on businesses.' TUC says David Cameron's claim that businesses are burdened by a tide of risk assessment forms every year 'is nonsense. The vast majority of employers never carry out any kind of written risk assessments, and for those that do, there is easy-to-understand advice available from the Health and Safety Executive on how to do them.' It adds the government's 'attack on health and safety laws destroys the consensus that has existed around health and safety for the last 40 years. It will make it harder to get the laws we need in areas where there are new risks and could lead to Britain having some of the lowest levels of protection in Europe.' This threat has led the union body to declare 28 April this year 'a Day of Action to defend health and safety.' TUC adds: 'Join any events in your area on that day and demonstrate that we will not give up our right to a safe workplace.'

UK still high in the long hours league

UK workers remain among the most overworked in Europe, new official statistics indicate. An analysis published by the Office of National Statistics found the average working time in the UK for April to June 2011 was shorter than the European Union average (36.3 hours a week compared with 37.4) - but this is because the UK has a higher percentage of part-timers, 27 per cent compared with 20 per cent in the EU as a whole. When ONS examined the position for full-timers, people in the UK work longer than the EU average (42.7 hours compared with 41.6), with only people in Austria and Greece working a longer week, both at 43.7 hours a week. The shortest full-time hours were in Denmark at 39.1 hours per week. Commenting on the figures, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: 'These figures shine a light on the valuable but too often unrewarded extra hours that UK workers put in every week. Employers should do more to recognise the unpaid overtime that their staff do, which contributes £29bn to the UK economy every year. But while average hours are falling across the economy - both as a result of the recession and changes in working practices - UK workers are still doing the third longest shifts in Europe, with only Austrians and Greeks working longer.' The union leader added: 'Smarter working practices and an end to pointless presenteeism would help make staff more productive and get a better work-life balance.' The TUC estimates that a record 5.26 million people worked unpaid overtime last year, worth £28.9bn to the UK economy.

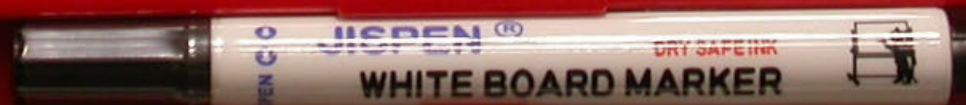
Civil servant gets payout after office fall

A civil servant has received £8,000 in compensation after needing surgery following a fall in the workplace. PCS union member Marilyn McKenzie, 58, needed an operation on her left knee after she tripped over the lid of a socket hatch embedded into the floor at her offices at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in Sheffield. The lid was often left up after the offices were cleaned by property management giant Mitie. Mrs McKenzie suffered a torn cartilage and later needed surgery to repair it. Colleagues reported they had also tripped on the socket lid. After Mrs McKenzie tripped over it a second time she contacted her union. She wasn't injured in the second trip but felt that something needed to be done to stop the further injuries. Lawyers for the union argued Mitie had a responsibility to ensure it left the workplace in a safe condition. Mitie settled the claim out of court. Mrs McKenzie said: 'At first I was uncertain about claiming compensation but when it became clear that the problem still hadn't been addressed I felt it was important to claim to make sure it didn't happen again.' Carl Banks, health and safety officer for PCS, said: 'We hope this claim will prompt Mitie to address its health and safety policies.' Nick Martindale from Thompsons Solicitors, the law firm brought in by the union to act in the case, added: 'This should act as a warning to other employers. Something as small as a socket lid can cause a painful injury if it is not stored away correctly. Care must be taken to ensure the workplace is free from all hazards, no matter how small.'

Union safe case gets a promising reception

MPs have heard that work is set to get more dangerous as government cuts in the official safety watchdog's resources continue. The warning came at a reception in parliament in December 2011, organised by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors' union Prospect. Jim Sheridan, chair of the all-party health and safety parliamentary group, opened the discussion by condemning tabloid efforts to portray health and safety as 'red tape'. He added: 'It's a fundamental right for people to leave their homes in the morning with the clear understanding that they have the right to return home safe and uninjured.' Prospect HSE branch chair Neil Hope-Collins, an HSE field inspector, warned that government workplace safety policies 'have consequences, whether intended or not, that will be damaging and detrimental.' Businesses liked the fact that HSE was an approachable, accessible organisation from which they could get 'knowledgeable, relevant, pragmatic solutions, preferably before the event, so people go home healthy at end of day,' he said. Cutting proactive inspections by a third would be a 'huge hit' for industry, he added, with vital intelligence and local knowledge lost. He said an HSE cost recovery system, due to take effect in April, could hit those firms that want to be compliant while 'the rogues will still fly under the wire.'

These details have
been supplied by the: **TUC**



The following has been supplied by PCS HQ:



Tax avoidance has landed us in crisis

PCS members are playing a leading role in the fight for tax justice, campaigning for a properly-resourced, fair tax system to support quality public services and help to eradicate poverty. Prem Sikka, professor of accounting at the University of Essex, says this revenue is essential for social justice.

In the last few years a new movement has emerged to highlight tax avoidance by corporations and rich individuals. Its key message is that tax revenues are essential for governments to redistribute wealth, alleviate poverty and make social investment.

Tax revenues are under attack by a global avoidance industry in which accountancy firms are key players. This creates nothing of social value, but spreads misery all over the world as people are deprived of education, healthcare, jobs, pensions and social investment necessary for a fulfilling life.

The US government is losing about \$345 billion a year of tax revenues. It has prosecuted some firms. KPMG admitted “criminal wrongdoing” and was fined \$456 million. A number of its personnel went to prison.

Senior people from other firms have also been jailed.

Their hands in our pockets.

The UK has done comparatively little to check the tax avoidance industry, even though it is estimated to be losing about £100 billion of tax revenues each year because of avoidance and evasion. This is bigger than the savings of the current austerity programme.

Companies make money in the UK but then pretend to be resident in a tax haven and so avoid UK taxes. They secure PFI contracts and then book them into these havens to dodge taxes.

Some years ago, a firm designed a scheme under which directors of companies paid themselves in gold bars and platinum sponge to avoid income tax.

Economic elites advised governments that they should reduce headline tax rates. The argument was that this would take away the incentives for tax dodging. Now we have rampant tax avoidance and low taxes for the rich. Corporation tax rate has declined from 52% of taxable profits in 1982 and will hit 23% in 2014. The top rate of income tax declined from 83% to 40%, though a 50% marginal rate was introduced last year for annual incomes above £150,000. The combined result of tax dodging and concessions is that the government’s tax revenues have declined from 45.1% of GDP in 1982–83 to 37.2% in 2011.

Paying for a civilised society

Governments have shifted tax burdens to labour, consumption and savings, as evidenced by higher rates of VAT, national insurance contributions and freezing of income tax bands. The result is that households in the bottom 20% of income distribution pay 35.5% of their gross income in direct and indirect taxes compared to 33.7% for the top 20% of households.

Governments can easily tackle the tax avoidance industry. For example, instead of taxing companies on the basis of residence they should be taxed where they generate their revenues. No public contract should be awarded to any tax-dodging company.

The UK is the biggest sponsor of tax havens and the government can easily reform them to end secrecy and tax dodging. Sweden and Finland publish the tax returns of wealthy elites so that people can see that they are paying their democratically-agreed share of taxes. The same should happen here. Tax authorities should have unrestricted access to the files of accountancy firms so that they cannot hide behind laws of privacy while robbing the public purse. Tax enforcement is labour intensive, but by hiring more tax inspectors to check the avoidance industry, outcomes would easily pay for the investment.

Tax is the price that we pay for a civilised society, but wealthy elites and corporations are opting out of the democratically-agreed bargain. The results are economic crisis, austerity programmes and higher tax burdens for the poor. The £100 billion, or any portion thereof, would enable governments to reduce taxes on the less well-off and boost their purchasing power. The revenues can be invested in new industries.

The following has been supplied by the PCS DWP Group:



DWP Promotion and Recruitment Exercises – Appeal and Grievance Rights

A number of enquiries have been received concerning processes for Appeals and Grievances resulting from the current promotion/recruitment exercise. The processes are outlined below for information.

Internal Exercises

In the case of internal exercises applicants have the right to raise a grievance against a line managers decision using the usual DWP grievance process and it should be raised within 15 days of the decision.

Individuals also have the right to raise an appeal but only on the grounds of mismanagement and this must be made within 28 days of the decision.

The process - taken from DWP Selection procedures (para 12)- is as follows

- Applicants must put the complaint in writing stating their reasons for believing that the process has been mismanaged and send it to the manager with responsibility for the recruitment exercise
- It must be made within 4 weeks (28 calendar days) of the decision or 4 weeks from the date that the individual became aware that an aspect of the process concerned them
- If the complaint is received after 28 calendar days then the circumstances should be taken into account. If a decision is made not to consider the complaint because it was received out of time, the applicant must be informed in writing
- The selection manager or business partner should deal with the complaint unless they are named in the complaint. In these cases the complaint should be referred to their immediate manager or another nominated employee
- If no mismanagement has been found, then the applicant should be informed in writing that the original decision has been upheld
- Where mismanagement of the process has occurred, it will need to be decided if the mismanagement has affected the outcome, then the appropriate action must be taken depending on:
 - What stage of the process the mismanagement occurred
 - When the complaint/appeal was received
 - What stage the overall selection exercise is at when the mismanagement was discovered.

If the complaint of mismanagement is found to be unfounded there is still a right of grievance

External Exercises

For an external exercise applicants can complain if they are unhappy with the process or the outcome as follows (extract from DWP Selection procedures para 12) –

- Applicants who are unhappy with the outcome. These complaints will be dealt with and replied to in line with normal delivery business customer service standards. If the complaints are about the selection policy, it may be useful for Line managers to liaise with the relevant HR Business Partner
- Applicants who feel that some or all of the selection policy or process has not been adhered to (i.e. mismanagement). The applicant will need to give specific reasons as to why they feel the selection policy/process has not been followed.

Equality Monitoring

The DWP is required to conduct equality monitoring and keep complete and comprehensive records of any selection exercise for audit purposes to ensure that the process is fair.

We will be asking for these statistics once the exercise is over to ensure that the DWP has had due regard to the Equality Duty.

Little Micks'

Pop quiz



It's the Little Micks here with a quiz about Pop, pure Pop and nothing else. The way we like it.

Yes we won the X Factor, can you believe it. The first band to win.

Here are our poptastic questions:

Question 1

Little Mix won the X Factor in 2011, but who was the runner up? Was it?

- a) Amelia Lily
- b) Matt Cardle
- c) Marcus Collins
- d) Jedward
- e) Leona Lewis

Question 2

Who had a hit with "She makes me wanna" in 2011.

- a) ELO
- b) INXS
- c) XTC
- d) KLF
- e) JLS

Question 3

Rihanna asked "What's my....." in the 2010 hit?

- a) Point of view
- b) Hair colour
- c) Name
- d) Shoe size
- e) Favourite food

Question 4

Who had a number one hit Price Tag in 2010? Was it?

- a) Lady Gaga
- b) Katy Perry
- c) Madonna
- d) Jessie J
- e) Emma H

Question 5

Lady Gaga was on the "Edge of...." what in 2011. Was it?

- a) Insanity
- b) Glory
- c) Reason
- d) The Cliff
- e) The Knife

Question 6

Katy Perry's hit single in 2010 was a "Fire.....". What was it?

- a) Walker
- b) Lighter
- c) Cracker
- d) Starter
- e) Work

Please send your answers together with your name and details to Jacqui "I like all the modern songs, but don't necessarily know who sang them, but Lady Gaga is one of my favourites I'll have you know" Dunkerley Room 7233 Norcross to arrive no later than Friday 16th of March 2012.

The winner will receive a mystery prize. Please remember that only members of the Fylde Central Benefits and Services Branch, excluding Branch Executive Committee can enter the quiz.

Little Micks