

Friday 2nd March 2012

Media release – For immediate release

Photo opportunities on Saturday 3rd March across the UK,
including 11.30am meeting outside BHS on Oxford Street

Workfare protests to take place in thirty five locations on Saturday 3rd March

Thirty five protests against workfare are planned to take place on Saturday 3rd March in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England in a day of action called by Boycott Workfare to escalate the campaign against forced unpaid work. More locations are expected to be announced by the end of today, as different groups across the country get involved. [1] [2]

The protests seek to highlight that despite concessions by the government on Thursday, workfare is still taking place on a huge scale in the UK; thousands of people are forced to work without pay on threat of welfare sanctions in a range of government schemes. [3]

The peaceful protests will step up the pressure on High Street stores still involved in workfare to encourage them to join the growing list of chains to commit not to accept workfare. [4] A variety of creative actions are expected to take place including a chain gang march, guided tours of workfare providers, teach-ins, colourful pickets and info stalls to let unemployed people know their rights.

Steve Shortt, a member of Boycott Workfare commented:

“It is staggering that while unemployment continues to rise, the government is replacing paid work by pushing out workfare on a massive scale. The organisations profiting from free labour can afford to pay a wage but are choosing not to. Actions this weekend will show that they risk their reputation if they do not withdraw from workfare.”

Describing the reasons for the Day of Action, he said:

"The mass public action of the last few weeks is rolling back workfare in the UK. That thirty five actions are taking place shows the scale of public concern that forced unpaid work is seeping onto our high streets. Workfare affects all of us; it drives down wages and replaces paid work. That is why hundreds of people will be taking action on their high street this weekend."

Noting that some groups may choose to take action against those companies using DWP Work Experience workers, he said:

“The Work Experience scheme is still a cause of concern. As the government has made clear [3], there are still sanctions involved in this scheme. This means there is still the element of compulsion. George Osborne has stated “Young people who don’t engage with this offer [of work experience] will be considered for mandatory work activity” [5]. The Work Experience scheme is still linked to sanctions directly and indirectly, and remains unpaid. We need pressure on companies to withdraw their support and to offer real paid jobs!”

Notes to editors:

[1] Boycott Workfare is a UK-wide campaign to end forced unpaid work for people who receive welfare. Workfare profits the rich by providing free labour, whilst threatening the poor by taking

away welfare rights if people refuse to work without a living wage. We are a grassroots campaign, formed in 2010 by people with experience of workfare and those concerned about its impact. We expose and take action against companies and organisations profiting from workfare; encourage organisations to pledge to boycott it; and actively inform people of their rights. We are not affiliated to any political party and are open to all who share our aims. More info:

<http://www.boycottworkfare.org/>

[2] The list of places involved in taking action on 3rd March can be found here. Actions were organised by different groups throughout the country: <http://www.boycottworkfare.org/?p=359>

[3] There is a range of government workfare schemes unaffected by Thursday's announcement:

- **Mandatory Work Activity** – The scheme mandates four weeks' unpaid work for up to 30 hours a week. Although the government claims it is "community work", its definition of this includes working "[for the profit of the host organisation.](#)" [24,010](#) people were mandated to take part in MWA between May and November last year.
- **The Work Programme** – Figures are not available for the number of mandatory work placements under this programme, but 370,000 people were referred to the Work Programme between June and November 2011. Ingeus (owned by city financiers Deloitte) [force people](#) to do six month long workfare placements. The Work Programme, is [expected to cost](#) the taxpayer £5 billion pounds.
- **Community Action Programme** – jobseekers are referred for up to 30 hours unpaid work per week for six months.
- [The Work Experience component of sector-based work academies](#) – Placements can last up to six weeks
- The [government has stated](#) that "The sanctions regime remains in place" for DWP Work Experience. It has yet to give details that show that unemployed people will be able to opt out of the scheme without sanction.

[4] A list of the companies to have withdrawn from workfare or shifted their position can be found here, with hyperlinks to the sources: http://www.boycottworkfare.org/?page_id=16

[5] George Osborne's comments were reported in the Telegraph:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/budget/8924626/Autumn-Statement-2011-young-jobless-will-get-work-experience.html>

[6] For links to DWP documents that show that workfare schemes are mandatory and that workfare does not improve job outcomes, please see Boycott Workfare's "The Facts" page:

http://www.boycottworkfare.org/?page_id=663

[7] It was reported in the Mail on Sunday that Iain Duncan Smith has asked the police to act against workfare protests: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2106601/Tories-order-police-halt-workfare-demos-MP-makes-formal-protest-BBC-bias-favour-hard-Left-militants.html>