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# Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network

The attack on welfare benefits has grown wider and deeper. UK ministers boast openly about making the unemployed work for nothing and imposing a sanctions regime that has deprived hundreds and thousands of households of the means of survival. This return to Victorian-style poverty has been backed up by a populist media that is always ready to promote the image of benefit recipients as pampered scroungers and to ignore the great mass of people struggling to survive on a pittance. Even potentially sympathetic writers prefer to focus their words and anger on the frightening growth of in-work poverty, so helping the UK Government to divide people in work from the unemployed. But, as we have said so many times before, the vast majority of people who are out of work, and also well enough to work, are desperate to find a job. It's simply that the jobs aren't there. Even the decrease in unemployment that the government loves to crow about is due not only to low paid and part time work but also to people escaping the pressures and humiliation of the job centres by becoming 'self-employed' even though earning next to nothing, or forgoing their right to benefits altogether.

As our first article observes, this is an attack on the essence of the Welfare State – and it's an attack that is meeting a growing resistance. The next three articles discuss campaigning against sanctions in Dundee, standing up to the new authoritarianism in Glasgow, and combining public protest with practical assistance in Edinburgh.

Our network aims both to publicise the real situation affecting the unemployed and to help to bring together campaigners in different areas to support and learn from each other. In the last months we have organised stalls outside the jobcentres in Partick and Dundee, we have taken part in stalls and protests organised by Glasgow Against Atos, Dundee Against Welfare Sanctions and Clydebank Against Benefit Sanctions, we are planning a stall with campaigners in Aberdeen, and we continue to learn from Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty. As in the days of the powerful Unemployed Workers' Movement in the 1930s, we can be strongest when we work together.



*This picture is from our new history of unemployed protest,  
'How Welfare was Won'.*

*Pick up a copy from our stalls or see  
[www.scottishunemployedworkers.net/history](http://www.scottishunemployedworkers.net/history)*

Please find us on

**[www.scottishunemployedworkers.net](http://www.scottishunemployedworkers.net)**

(where you can also link to our Facebook Page and Group)

and contact us on **07803 052239** or at

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Tony Cox of SUWN looks at

## GREAT BRITAIN PLC: WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

The wave of sanctions currently being endured by benefit claimants is clear proof that the poor and vulnerable within British society are being lined up within the cross hairs of Tory austerity mongers. If anyone doubts this statement, take the time to visit your local job centre and watch the reaction of those benefit claimants who leave the building. You will witness people in tears of frustration, humiliation and shame. You will also see many people attempting to control their anger; older men and women who have been lectured on their duties as jobseekers by advisers young enough to be their children - of whom many, if not most, will be on short, six-month contracts and who are themselves under threat of being on the other side of the desk if they do not meet the (secret) sanctions targets that are being set for them by their line managers. Welcome to the future that IDS and the ConDem coalition have plotted out for British jobseekers; a future without a welfare state or social security safety net.

This is certainly the conclusion that we have drawn during the course of campaigning outside Dundee Jobcentre. Indeed, we have not so much glimpsed this future, as had it forcibly rubbed in our pussies. We have been approached by dozens of claimants who have complained of a punitive regime of sanctions for petty reasons such as turning up a few minutes late for an interview. One of the most common complaints from claimants is that they have been left without any resources - apart from the miserly, and discretionary, hardship allowance - as a

result of being sanctioned for non-appearance at interviews that they were never notified about.



Struggling to Dundee Jobcentre

Talking to many of the claimants who have been caught within this Kafkaesque dilemma, it is also clear that the DWP sanctions regime is having a massive psychological impact on them by 'messing with their heads' - as the Loaves and Fishes spokesmen Denis Curran recently put it whilst giving evidence to the Scottish Government. What is equally clear, however, is that this intolerable situation can, and will, be transformed only when benefit claimants actively fight back, firstly by informing themselves of their rights, and, most importantly, by coming together in order to organise themselves. Remember that you are not alone, get active and join the resistance.

Michael Taylor of DAWS describes the birth of

## DUNDEE AGAINST WELFARE SANCTIONS

In March of this year an initiative came out of the internet that called for joint protests against Atos and DWP sanctions on 1 April. Dundee Against Atos had already been campaigning outside the local Greenmarket office where medical

assessments were being carried out by the discredited multinational. We were meeting disabled people in fear of losing their disability benefit and being declared fit for work despite full medical evidence and support. The mother of a lad who had

fallen from a height in the course of work and broken many bones was outraged at Atos's perverse decision that he was fit! We decided to move our protest directly to the DWP offices at the Wellgate Jobcentre and to build for the joint event.



*Stewart Hosie MP speaking at a DAWS protest*

Within minutes we were meeting person after person who had been sanctioned. Sanctions can be applied for a month, three months or three years - and we have met people in every category. We met a single mother of three kids who had just been sanctioned for being late for signing on. Her first priority was to make

Sean Clerkin of Glasgow Against Atos warns against

## GROWING AUTHORITARIANISM

Glasgow Against Atos has steadfastly defended the rights of the poor, sick, disabled and dying against the mass of social injustices that have been done to them by Atos. Atos have acted as the boot-boys for the Westminster Tory-led coalition. They have effectively stolen the meagre benefits from 600,000 people, 3,500 of whom have died through suicide or illness. Alongside this has been the systematic harassment of Glasgow Against Atos by Police Scotland, who have come to our meetings and (we believe) also used electronic eavesdropping. We have had three people arrested for engaging in freedom of speech - two for using a megaphone (see Newsletter 9) and myself for attempting to protest against Atos sponsorship of the Commonwealth Games. As soon as I produced a banner at the Queen's Baton relay in Barrhead five men jumped on me and floored me. I spent 20

hours in police custody before being charged with breach of the peace and being banned from all Commonwealth Games venues as part of my bail conditions.



We will continue to campaign against Atos and to take on any attempt by Police Scotland to destroy our right to protest.

Mike Cormack of Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty describes

## MUTUAL AID AND RESISTANCE AGAINST AUSTERITY ATTACKS

In Edinburgh claimants and low-paid workers are organising through Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty to support each other and take action to resist workfare, benefit cuts and austerity attacks.

Occupations and blockades have hit companies and charities exploiting claimants through the government's compulsory 'work-for-your-dole' schemes. Recent actions targeting Learndirect - provider for Community Work Placements, the new workfare scheme - included a disruptive hour-long occupation of their offices at shiny Conference House on 12th June, followed up by an equally disruptive blockade on 3rd July.

Last summer demonstrators besieged Leith Jobcentre protesting against benefits sanctions, and some protestors briefly invaded the building before being evicted by the numerous police present. Actions at jobcentres need to balance effective direct action with the need to avoid disrupting activity, such as getting signed on, necessary for claimants to receive their benefits.

One tactic which has been used is the delivery of a letter, containing demands to the manager, to the Job Centre reception by a large group, who then fairly rapidly leave, but with the threat that the action will be stepped up if no concessions are made. Another option could be to target the DWP District Office, a higher level of the bureaucracy who do not actually process claims; however in Edinburgh the District Office is hidden somewhere within the Leith Jobcentre - they don't seem to want to be found!

In other Edinburgh actions protestors have besieged Atos, responsible for the notorious Work Capability Assessments which deny many ill people their rightful sickness benefits. Now ECAP members have initiated the Disability Solidarity Network to take forward the fight.

Weekly drop-in solidarity sessions at the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh are the basis for every-day mutual aid to support individuals facing a punitive benefits system, debt, housing issues and other poverty-related problems. 'Never face them alone' say ECAP, as activists accompany claimants to the dole, Atos, fraud interviews, council housing appointments and the like - and, vitally, encourage people to attend such appointments with their own friends.

If 'official channels' don't get the desired result the ECAP Solidarity Network phone tree can launch action. Late last year a claimant was sent on Mandatory Work Activity at the Salvation Army charity shop on Leith Walk. By 'coincidence', his reporting for (unpaid) duty coincided with the shop's invasion by a dozen anti-workfare demonstrators parading placards and banners down the aisles of second-hand clothes!

ECAP is keen to make links - recent solidarity visits ranging from Dundee to Milan! ECAP activity is not a single issue, but part of the wider fight to assert human need over profit, and to challenge and ultimately overthrow capitalism. As our banner cries: 'It's our world - let's take it back!'

[edinburghagainstpoverty.org.uk](http://edinburghagainstpoverty.org.uk)  
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[www.scottishunemployedworkers.net](http://www.scottishunemployedworkers.net)