

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE JOBS NOT JSA

ISSUE 3

JUNE 1996

COUNTDOWN TO THE JOBSEEKERS' ALLOWANCE

SPOTLIGHT ON BENEFIT CHEATS

The Benefits Agency has launched the above well publicised campaign, complete with a freephone number to encourage you to grass on neighbours etc.

MUWC were quick off of the mark, and within hours we were able to grass on two well known benefit cheats. Peter Lilley and Gillian Shepherd. These high profile cheats are notorious for their attempts to cheat people out of their benefits. We are not holding our breath that the newly created Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) will take the appropriate action against these cheats.

The BFIS was created in April this year when up to 1100 Fraud investigators were transferred to the Benefits Agency, and the BFIS was created "in readiness for the introduction of the new benefit JSA in October" - BA Press Release 96/074. From October not only will draconian new measures be introduced against those on benefit, but there will be an increase in fraud investigators.

We know that there is some fraud, some of which is criminally organised, and our position remains that of being highly critical of those who carry out systematic fraud for their own criminal gain. You are scum, right.

However, much of the fraud is need driven and opportunistic by people struggling to get by on next to nothing, who see an opportunity to temporarily alleviate some of the hardship - not all of it.

One recent case brought to our attention at MUWC was of a man who was unfairly dismissed from a job. Because he was not a Trade Union member he was not aware that he could have taken his employer to an Industrial Tribunal. Following the obvious benefit sanctions and mounting debts he finally got a new job paying just

over £100 a week. As he was unable to pay back his debts out of his take home pay, he carried on signing on to enable himself to pay his debts. He was caught, and now faces a spell in prison. Justice?, I don't think so.

MUWC generated good local press coverage by press releasing that we had grassed on Lilley and Shepherd. We have since received several phone calls from claimants congratulating us. One caller told me "My husband has cancer and is unable to work, so we are claiming benefits. Our local shop has 'Spotlight on Benefit Cheats' leaflets on the counter, he also saw the full page advertisement in a local paper. He refuses to leave the house now, as he feels that everybody will point at him and accuse him of being a benefits cheat".

Any comment from us would be superfluous.

Notts Jobs not JSA looks forward to the day when politicians get standing ovations at conferences for saying that they will ensure that everybody gets a fair dignified and adequate benefit. And not for attacking those on the dole who are paying the price for their failures.

MUWC will continue to campaign for quality jobs and better benefits.



"And what have you done to look for work this week?"

CAMPAIGNING

Notts Jobs not JSA was not established to lead the campaign against JSA in Notts. From the beginning its aim was to inform, support and encourage resistance to JSA and the attack on claimants and those in work.

For details of the campaign in Notts, contact: Mansfield Unemployed Workers Centre, 2 Beech Avenue, Mansfield, Notts NG18 1EY. Tel. (01623) 424720.

Nottingham Campaign against the JSA, PO Box 192, Nottingham NG7 1FJ. Tel (0115) 9605577.

Notts Youth Against Poverty, Box 5, 118 Workshop, 118 Mansfield Road, Nottingham.

In April, Members of the above organisations attended the demo against 'Project Work' in Hull. Nottingham Campaign against the JSA are currently leafleting every claimant in Nottingham about JSA. Get in touch with them about their activities.

Have you completed a declaration against JSA? (as featured in Issue 2) If not please fill in one and return. Further copies and information available from MUWC.

THIS ISSUE OF NOTTS JOBS NOT JSA WAS ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE GMB MIDLANDS AND EAST COAST REGION

JOBS OR BENEFITS

The TUC Unemployed Workers Centres are organising a conference entitled Jobs or Benefits: The Campaign for Social Justice in London on July 1st at Congress House.

The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) is a draconian measure. It threatens people in work as well as the unemployed and undermines the principles of the National Insurance system. The conference will aim to highlight the impact of these proposals by bringing together all of the groups concerned with the effects of the JSA to explore common ground.

From this it is hoped to create a broad based consensus which can influence policy matters, now and in the future, regarding the JSA and which will be able to suggest viable policy alternatives which will locate the claimants needs, rather than the budget, at the centre of social policy.

The conference recognises that certain elements of the JSA may give rise to a legal challenge, particularly in the area of Disability. The conference will aim to pursue this legal avenue, to Europe if necessary, in order to build test case law and hopefully ameliorate the worst excesses of JSA. It is hoped that the conference could address the financing of this legal strategy by establishing a 'Test Case' fund.

The conference will aim to establish a national network of agencies/organisations to campaign against JSA and exchange information. A report will be produced setting out the issues raised by the JSA and the conclusions reached by the conference. For further details contact MUWC.

YOUNG PEOPLE RIPPED OFF

The latest issue of the Unemployment Unit's Working Brief includes an excellent article on how inflation has eroded the value of training allowances, the £10 top-up for people on schemes such as Community Action and Income Support.

Disregards

People on TT courses get a Training Allowance, which has been frozen at £29.50 per week for 16 year olds since 1989, and at £35 per week for 17 year olds since 1986. YT is the successor to YOP, introduced in 1978, with an allowance of £19.50. If this allowance had been up-rated in line with young peoples earnings, it would now stand at £66.70 for 16 year olds, and £88.60 for 17 year olds. If it had just been raised in line with inflation -like other benefits - it would stand at £59.50 and £76.80. Young people

who qualify for Income Support now receive at least £2.90 per week more than those on YT! Mind you, being young and qualifying for Income Support is harder than winning the lottery.

The Bridging Allowance, paid for a limited time to people waiting for a YT place has been frozen at £15 per week since 1988. If it had been raised in line with young people's earnings, it would stand at £19.50 per week, and if it had been raised in line with inflation, it would be worth £21.50.

Jon O'Neill - Co-ordinator MUWC said "Young people who qualify for Income Support now receive at least £2.90 per week more than those on YT. Young people are being systematically ripped off at a time when the fat cats throughout the country are plundering the nation's wealth.

It's bad enough having to work for your 'dole' but to be ripped off at the same time adds insult to injury. Our youngsters are being paid a pittance to prepare them for a lifetime of low pay and low expectations. Mansfield Unemployed Workers' Centre will continue to campaign for quality jobs and better benefits.



"I didn't mind coming here at first, it used to be a bit of a laugh."

NOTTINGHAM CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE JSA

The latest mailout from the above group demonstrates how active this campaign has become in Nottingham.

75% of claimants in Nottingham have been leafleted by the campaign, - this is some of the worst May weather for many years. They expect to leaflet the other 25% in the next few weeks.

They are also putting together a leaflet for workers in Benefit offices. The aim is to build links between the employed and the unemployed.

The campaign will also be picketing the Alfreton Benefit office on Wednesday 12th June. The Alfreton office is currently training volunteers to implement JSA. The aim of the picket is to show these volunteers where the unemployed stand on JSA.

There will also be a fundraising gig at SamFay's on Tuesday 9 July. There are already a couple of bands lined up - but if you know of any more bands who may be interested, let them know.

The campaign meets every other Wednesday in the upstairs room at the Newcastle Arms, North Sherwood Street in Nottingham at 7-30pm. Next meetings are 5, 19, June, 3 July etc. Meetings are open and friendly, get along and support.

JOBS NOT JSA

supporters include:-

MUWC CPSA NUCPS
Notts CATUC Trades
Councils in Notts MSF
Advice Group

If you wish to include any articles or campaigning activities around JSA in the region, please send them to :-

JOBS NOT JSA % MUWC 2
Beech Avenue Mansfield Notts
NG18 1EY (01623) 424720

CPSA
The Civil and Public Services Association