

DWP APOLOGISE FOR CALLING POLICE – RIGHT TO BE ACCOMPANIED AT JOBCENTRES AFFIRMED

Thursday, February 27, 2014

The DWP have apologised and admitted they were wrong to call the police to eject an Edinburgh Claimants representative from the High Riggs Job Centre at Tollcross, Edinburgh. This re-affirms that claimants always have the right to be accompanied by their own choice of representative and is an important victory for claimants' right to organise.

The rep from the Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty-affiliated group was accompanying a jobseeker to an appointment to review his Job Seekers Agreement on 3rd February. A manager unexpectedly joined the interview, started aggressively questioning the rep, and then ordered him to leave. The rep refused, pointing out that all claimants have the right to be accompanied.

The manager then ordered the security guards to call the police to evict the rep. Unfortunately for the bullying manager the police took half an hour to arrive and the interview continued to its conclusion with the rep continuing to participate. When the police arrived they ordered the rep to leave and took his name, but did not charge him.

The Jobcentre manager denied claimants' rights in this way despite the fact that Edinburgh Claimants reps have been accompanying jobseekers and other claimants to such interviews for years, and do so virtually every week.

Solidarity

Edinburgh Claimants immediately made an official complaint to the DWP and later that week a group from Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty gathered for solidarity activity at the High Riggs Job Centre, displaying placards and distributing hundreds of leaflets to claimants detailing the right to be accompanied to all interviews.



The next day High Riggs

Edinburgh Claimants protest at High Riggs jobcentre

management wrote to the rep stating :

“I would like to apologise on behalf of Mr X (the offending manager) and High Riggs for the fact that you were asked to leave the jobcentre on the above date. you should have been allowed to remain as Mr Y 's representative.

We apologise for the incident and for any distress caused.....

We aim to provide our customers and their representatives with a good standard of service and I am very sorry that we did not do so on this occasion.”

(Letter from DWP dated 7.2.14)

“Claimants should not be intimidated by Jobcentre bullies. The DWP's apology re-affirms once more that ALL claimants have the right to be accompanied to appointments by the representative of their choice. This does not only apply to claimants who are particularly vulnerable or have special needs, but to everyone. And this holds true not only for appointments at the Job Centre, but also for all appointments at any DWP offices, at workfare providers like A4e and Ingeus, at ATOS, at the Council and all authorities,” state ECAP. “At a time when the government are attacking claimants with benefits cuts, sanctions, workfare and ever more harassment, we urge claimants to exercise this hard-won right. Solidarity is strength. Don't face them alone!”

NOTE

ECAP have long established the right of claimants to be accompanied at such interviews.

The DWP chief executive has even written to confirm this!

See <http://www.edinburghagainstopoverty.org.uk/node/32>

FIND US

EDINBURGH COALITION AGAINST POVERTY is based at the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE), an open campaign space, infoshop and wholefoods co-op, providing resources and solidarity.

Resources available include computer/internet access, cheap copying, free leaflets, books, pamphlets

and mags for sale, a small wholefoods shop, and a library.

Every tuesday from 12 noon till 3pm support and solidarity is available for benefits and debt hassles, housing and other problems. Please contact us at Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty c/o ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA 0131 557 6242 ecap@lists.riseup.net We invite you to join our solidarity phone tree, and get involved.

[ACE](#) is also open every Saturday 11am-6pm and Thursday 6-8pm, and other times for particular events (but the support and solidarity sessions are only on Tuesdays).