

Budget cuts endanger Health and safety of prison service workers

(12 May 2016) Prison service workers are very concerned about their health and safety in the UK. That was a strong message at the annual POA Conference. After years of budget cuts as a consequences of the conservative government austerity policies, prisons are not well maintained. The prison population keeps on growing. The number of staff to take care and play a role in rehabilitation processes is going down. Staff left face heavy workloads resulting in increased stress. The prison population is changing as more people that have a mental illness, are homeless or have drug abuse issues end up in prison but do not belong there. Workers in the [West London Wormwood Scrubs](#) facility staged a walk-out. They withdrew to a safe place under health and safety regulations. The workers repeatedly face aggression including stabbing.

The [press reports](#) are quoting official reports about the prison: It has "levels of Dickensian squalor", is overcrowded and rat-infested. Workers in many other prisons are facing similar situations.

The EPSU General Secretary participated in the Conference and brought delegates the solidarity greetings of EPSU and PSI. He addressed the impact of austerity policies on public service workers. The attack on trade union rights like in the UK and in many other European countries, is part and parcel of the austerity agenda. And in response to those who argue there is no money - the funding for better standards and investment is there. Governments need to be serious about addressing the tax avoidance of the rich and corporations. EPSU is working with other unions to raise the concerns of prison service workers at European level. The EPSU [prison services network](#) is an active group of unionists. Issues on the agenda include health and safety, stress, overcrowding and staffing levels, fighting privatization, organizing workers and defending union rights.

The POA fights for the restoration of trade union rights and including the right to strike. It is abundantly clear that the government is not listening despite reports from the union and others regarding unsafe situations. Tensions are high. This was also confirmed by [the Labour Shadow Minister for Justice and Prisons Mrs. Jo Stevens](#)

. She made an impressive contribution confirming reports of the union on the unsafe situations. This also makes rehabilitation of prisoners more difficult. The workers need the right to strike to be able to raise their concerns if the employer does not listen and negotiate. Delegates in the conference expressed their solidarity with Belgian colleagues out on strike for over two weeks. Also they are stressing the need to invest in facilities, in safety and rehabilitation and staff.

The POA is the union for prison, correctional and secure psychiatric workers. Annual conference took place 11 and 12 May, 2016, Southport, UK.

 [U.K.](#)

- [Log in](#) to post comments

- [Printer-friendly version](#)

Policies

[Health and Safety](#)

Networks

[Prisons Services](#)