

8000 Staff strike over RSI

London, dateline 26th July 2006

Public Sector union PCS announced yesterday that 8,000 of its members across 10 taxation offices would be on strike next Monday (31 July 2006). This follows a refusal by senior management to honour a proposed settlement over the introduction of new working practices called LEAN. Amongst other grievances, staff are claiming that these new practises will lead to increased RSI.

Behind the action lies a strongly-held protest over the introduction of working practices, which the union believes will involve excessive individual monitoring, a deskilling of work, and – as a consequence – further exposure to repetitive strain injury (RSI). A key sticking point centres on the oppressive and time consuming hourly work measurement regime, (under the HMRC version of LEAN), which coupled with arbitrary targets is leading to stress and anger amongst staff. Despite talks to resolve this, senior management have withdrawn an offer to trial an alternative method which would have focussed on team outputs rather individual ones.

Commenting on the action, the PCS general secretary, Mark Serwotka, said: "Dedicated staff face their work being deskilled and reduced to nothing more than robots. Rather than introducing outmoded working practices designed by consultants for the car industry in the 1970's, senior management need to get back around the negotiating table and start acting like a responsible employer."

In further comments, a spokesman for the PCS said he was aware of a number of instances of RSI already, and this was a concern for the staff and Union. It was 'inevitable' that intensive working practises such as those proposed by HMRC would accelerate and exacerbate the instance of RSI, and that is was essential that employers understand their duty of care.

The strike, which has been postponed from a previous date, is scheduled for one day, Monday 31st July 2006, and will affect offices in Glasgow, Newcastle, Salford, Liverpool, Wrexham, Cardiff, Portsmouth, Leicester, Bradford, and Edinburgh.