

# Unilever worker says: “It’s like we have gone back a hundred years”

Danny Richardson  
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At Unilever’s Warrington factory, Terry was angry that all the promises made when he started the job over 20 years ago had “been taken away one by one.”

“At the time they promised me the earth: no enforced redundancies, good holidays, paid sick leave, top notch pension and here I am stood outside on strike. One man has had two weeks sick pay taken off him because he took part in one day of strike action. That’s a guy with 25 years of service.”

The worker had received his 25-year award medal the same week.

“Every bit of benefit we have had has been shifted away. We have to take a good look around and see what we are losing.

Pickets outside Unilever’s plant at Trafford Park

“The workforce is a good one, but some people are working a seven-, eight-, nine-day week. The people in the top offices just sit there. They don’t justify their existence. They don’t care about the people in here.”

Mike has worked at the Warrington factory for 20 years, his father for 43 years, his uncle 20 years and his aunt for 25 years. He explained that workers’ earnings were drastically reduced through the loss of overtime when an annualised hours scheme was introduced. “The management’s stance now is like it or lump it. It’s like we have gone back a hundred years. We are just one step away from lining up outside these gates waiting for a tap on the shoulder that says you and you get a day’s work and the rest go home”

“They have slashed the number of workers in this factory. One person is now doing the jobs of three and they are finding it hard to cope.”

At Unilever’s Seacroft site in Leeds, Hazel explained, “Only six percent of the workforce nationally is still on FSP pensions. They are giving out

big bonuses to the top bosses. Some of those bonuses would probably cover the entire cost of FSP pensions on this site. Where is the justice in that? They have sent letters to our homes, trying to persuade us not to go out on strike. But when you read down the letter it’s a veiled threat. I tore it up!”

“The company makes its money from the shift workers and a lot of them are on less than average money. How could a career average pension scheme (CARE) adequately remunerate them, especially when you take into account the impact of shift work leading to a shorter life expectancy?”

Tom explained that as a recent employee he was on the inferior CARE pension scheme. He was on strike to “support his fellow workers defending their FSP scheme. A stand had to be taken to defend our conditions.”

John said the unions had been wrong to accept the scrapping of the FSP for new entrants in 2008.

A strike at Unilever’s PG Tips tea plant in Manchester began at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday. A good number of workers who would have staffed the night shift formed a picket line in the driving rain and hail. They were joined by colleagues coming off the afternoon shift.

Russell said, “What I would like to say, not just about Unilever but other firms, is where does greed end and morality begin? While our fight is concerned with our colleagues and workmates it’s also about the future of all our families. They have to have something to look forward to in retirement. I think what the government is doing is immoral. Basic rights should be guaranteed for all human beings.”



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