

Sick and disabled speak on Labour's welfare cuts: "Enough to drive people to suicide"

Our reporters
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Following the largest ever cuts to disability and sickness benefits in British history announced by the Starmer Labour government last Wednesday, the *World Socialist Web Site* has received statements of protest from readers who rely on these benefits to survive.

Labour plans to slash the rate of Personal Independence Payments (PIP) to more than 1.2 million people, tighten eligibility requirements for disability support, and is axing health benefits within universal credit to those under the age of 22.

The measures announced by Work and Pensions Secretary Liz Kendall are a downpayment on Labour's massive increase to military spending announced by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer last month.

Labour's gutting of benefits, targeting the most vulnerable in society, have produced mass popular opposition. A National Day of Action is planned this Wednesday, called by Disabled People Against Cuts, to coincide with Labour's "Spring Statement" that will deliver massive cuts to public spending.

Defeating Labour's war on the disabled means developing a mass political movement in the working class linking the fight against austerity to the struggle against militarism and war. This means rejecting the dead-end of protest politics advocated by the likes of Jeremy Corbyn, breaking from the Labour Party and taking up the fight for socialism.

We appeal to readers of the WSWS to send your response to Labour's measures and the political issues it raises before the working class. Share your views here.

All names below have been anonymised.

Heather: I am incredibly worried about the changes to disability benefits. I am a single parent without any local family support and am a carer for my two disabled children with Long COVID. We currently receive

carers' allowance for myself and DLA [Disability Living Allowance] for my eldest. I was home educating both, since neither is well enough to attend school full time. I am very concerned we will not receive PIP for my eldest when the time comes (currently 14 yrs old) and the effects the change in income will have on us. We would be left destitute.

If we do not have DLA or PIP, I would lose carers' allowance and we would then be subject to the benefit cap. Our rent is £1,400 a month, the cap is £1,835. We would be left with £435 a month for a family of three to live on.

I am so scared. We would really struggle on this amount (I don't think it's possible) and likely be made homeless. Because of this possibility and the fact that I would no longer be able to fund their home education lessons at £300 a month (that's the total for both), I have today applied to the council for EHCPs [Education, Health and Care Plans] and EOTAS [Education Otherwise Than At School] for both children (this will cost the council about £20,000 per year), so that I can be certain they will still have an education should we not receive PIP. I don't think Labour has thought about all the ramifications of making PIP so much harder to receive. It will just put more pressure on social care direct budgets, and the council in general.

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Nell: As a chronically ill and disabled person I am not only disgusted with the comments made by our current government, I am also incredibly saddened I live in a society that has allowed consecutive governments to slowly erode our once proud institutions such as the NHS [National Health Service] and social support and care. By taking from the poor instead of taxing the rich we have over time lost social housing, social care and

children's services once vital to our country. And sadly, this mentality has now led to a [parliamentary] green paper and potential spring statement being released by a Labour government that is quite literally coming for the disabled first... I feel like along with the lack of research, treatments and now financial support available to chronically ill and disabled people, I have clearly gone back in time to 1930s Europe.

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Janine: I work part-time due to COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], chronic migraine and anxiety. All affect me in the mornings due to vomiting, light headedness, being unable to breathe, physical exhaustion and needing to put ice on my head and lie in a dark room. I am unable to move until my medication starts to work and even then, I feel mentally and physically exhausted. As a consequence, I work afternoons only. Any reduction of PIP would mean that I could not afford to live on a part time wage. I have a cleaner, gardener and food delivery as I am generally too sick to complete these tasks. I am absolutely worried about how I will be able to live, especially given rising bills. These cuts are enough to drive people to suicide.

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Damien: Starmer and his government are red Tories. They haven't consulted disabled people and the so-called green paper consultation is biased, as it assumes that the proposed changes are a given. The wording of the 'consultation' is biased. It does not want to know how these proposed changes will impact disabled people and the chronically ill.

Starmer's moral crusade is a smokescreen to impose cuts designed to get up to 1 million disabled people off disability benefits and cause untold misery to hundreds of thousands of people. The DWP minister wants to increase dreaded face-to-face assessments which have led to suicides. The country has gone ultra right-wing and austerity will be imposed on the vulnerable, pushing them into poverty.

The welfare system is already punitive and Labour want to make it almost impossible to claim disabled benefits, pointing to the rise in mental health since COVID rather than looking at an NHS on its knees and overwhelmed. I haven't heard much from disability charities or MPs. The Lib Dem leader didn't even raise the issue at PMQs [Prime Minister's Questions] today.

The BBC is spinning the government's narrative. They aren't talking to disabled charities or those impacted by these cuts and changes. They just show graphs highlighting the rising cost of welfare and make it appear that the disabled and sick are to blame. It's sickening and the glee in Labour's front benchers at PMQs made me want to throw up. How and why is this happening?!

In 2019, we had a real socialist leader and we've gone from that to ultra-right and 'austerity on steroids'. Those impacted by these changes need to protest. Charities like Scope are advising to email your MP but I doubt that will achieve anything, Scope wrote an open letter to the chancellor but that will do absolutely nothing either. The government will pay more attention to disabled people taking their protest onto the street and social media to create more awareness. People don't care about disability or chronic illness until it impacts them personally. Disabled people are voiceless and disorganised, meaning we are an easy target. We need to fight back and avoid the pain, misery, poverty, and likely suicides that these draconian changes will have on vulnerable people.



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