**Probation under Threat**

Probation officers have a very important job which is often extremely challenging as they seek to rehabilitate people often lacking basic skills, perhaps damaged by drugs, alcohol or mental health problems; some with a history of violence. The national association of probation officers (NAPO) are a powerful, principled, progressive voice of workers within our justice system.

The Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) are dedicated family courts staff, who provide such an important service to some of our most vulnerable families and children.

Together what they do changes people’s lives, nurtures safe communities and makes our society more compassionate.

The Ministry of Justice, which both organisations are under the auspices of, is making £2 billion of cuts, with 10 per cent trimmed from the probation budget and up to 5,000 jobs at risk.

The TUC believes the effects will be disastrous. You can’t deliver a rehabilitation revolution on the cheap. Privatisation of services will mean the quality of supervision will be undermined, private firms will cherry pick the easiest, most lucrative work and local partnerships that have taken years to build will be lost.

Naturally, this is a hugely difficult time for Napo members. Cuts, reforms, and privatisation all threaten their jobs and the services they are so proud to provide.  On the 31st March and 1st April probation officers and solicitors showed real leadership and unity in making a stand by taking strike action – collectively saying ‘enough is enough’.

What grates most of all about these cuts is that there is absolutely no need to privatise probation.

The facts speak for themselves:

* the service successfully manages a huge caseload of 247,000 offenders.
* reoffending rates have been cut by nearly 6 per cent since 2005.
* last year, every Probation Trust in England and Wales met its target, with 31 rated as good and four rated as exceptional.

The Ministry of Justice is pushing through its Transforming Rehabilitation plans to outsource 70% of the Probation Service’s work by the end of 2014. Napo believes that the true motivation behind this is to drive down costs and to fulfil an ideological commitment on the part of the government to move to private sector bids as opposed to state run services. If these plans proceed it will lead to fragmentation of the services, staff cuts (the mechanism by which the government will make its savings and the companies their profit) and will severely compromise public protections, something which affects us all.

Your taxes should not be used to pay for private companies to make profits out of criminal justice. Remember what happened with previous contracts let by the Ministry of Justice – G4S and SERCO are still being investigated by the Serious Fraud Office for overcharging by tens of millions of pounds to electronically tag people who had gone to prison and even people who had died!

The probation service is not safe in their hands.

Beth Farhat

Northern TUC Regional Secretary