

Press Release:

Campaigners join protests against Paralympic sponsor and disability benefit cuts

Members of Stroud Against the Cuts (1) will stage protests to coincide with the Paralympics in protest at the involvement of Atos as a sponsor (2). The protests will coincide with a nationwide week of protest organized by Disabled People Against Cuts and UKUncut (3), as French multinational Atos is targeted over criticisms of its treatment of people living with disabilities.

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When and Where: Wednesday 29th August, 12 noon – 2pm, Outside Stroud JobCentrePlus, Union St. Stroud and,

Saturday 1st September, meeting for leafleting on Stroud High Street, 11am.

For further information or to arrange photographs contact: Helen Prynne 07731 768077 or Gabriel Parlour 07800 867252.

Helen Prynne from Stroud Against the Cuts said:

“We strongly object to Atos’ sponsorship of the Paralympics. The Paralympics is an event at which people with disabilities show how well they can perform when they have the opportunity and support. At the same time as Atos Healthcare is sponsoring this event, it is taking benefits and support away from people with disabilities and making it harder for them to live to their full potential.” She added: “Atos’s Chief Executive, Thierry Breton, is reported as having been

awarded a £1 million bonus recently, bringing his personal income from the last year to about £1.95 million (4). We find it repellent for the company and its management to be making this amount of money by taking benefits from some of the poorest people in the country.”

Atos Healthcare have drawn criticism from campaigners nationally (5), who accuse the company of carrying out the government’s dirty work as it conducts Work Capability Assessments (WCA) for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Campaigners argue the company is arbitrarily cutting the number of people in receipt of disability benefits in order to achieve government targets in benefit cuts. Recently, the National Audit Office criticized the company and published data revealing that nearly four out of ten appeals against decisions to declare people ‘fit-for-work’ successful (6).

Gabriel Parlour from Stroud Against the Cuts said:

“Atos has wrongly removed benefits from people who have genuine disabilities and are in need of the money. How many others qualifying for the benefit have had it removed and not appealed? Is this what Atos Healthcare is banking on?” She added: “The methods of assessment employed by Atos Healthcare are unacceptable, humiliating and distressing. A computer program is not an adequate way to assess people’s health, only allowing yes or no answers, and leaving no space for people to qualify and explain how their health affects their day-to-day life. Atos appears to be uninterested in making sure that disabled people receive the benefits they need, and have a right to in law, but is only concerned with removing benefits from people” (7).

Notes for editors:

1. Stroud Against the Cuts is a community group formed in November 2010. For more information see: www.stroudagainstcuts.co.uk .

2. See: “Paralympic Games organisers defend Atos sponsorship deal: IPC head names as 'top sponsor' Atos Healthcare, responsible for controversial 'work capability' tests for disabled people”, guardian.co.uk, Monday 21 May 2012: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2012/may/21/paralympic-games-organisers-defend-atos-sponsorship>

3. As well as Stroud, protests are taking place in Cardiff, Plymouth, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Bournemouth, Northampton, Liverpool, Swansea, Lancaster, Southampton and London, as part of “five days of action against a company that’s sponsoring the Paralympics but but wrecking disabled people’s lives”. Campaigners are holding spoof Paralympic awards ceremonies, visiting their local Atos offices and plan to flood Atos with phone calls on Thursday 30th August. On Friday 31 August, UK Uncut and DPAC will be shutting down Atos’ London HQ for a “Closing ATOS Ceremony”. For full details see: <http://www.dpac.uk.net/2012/08/latest-information-on-atos-games-week/>

4. See: “Welfare cuts reward: Fatcat lands £1m bonus for helping to slash disability benefits bill”, Daily Mirror, 27th June 2012, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/atos-fatcat-lands-1m-bonus-941601>

5. A variety of groups have been campaigning against Atos, for instance: the ‘Atos Victims Group’ (<http://atosvictimgroup.co.uk>), the ‘Black Triangle Campaign’ (<http://blacktrianglecampaign.org/>) “established to galvanise opposition to the current vicious attack on the fundamental human rights of

disabled people by the Government of the United Kingdom”), ‘The Hardest Hit’ (thehardesthit.wordpress.com “fighting cuts to support for disabled people”) and ‘Disabled People Against Cuts’ (

www.dpac.uk.net/

“fighting for justice and human rights for all disabled people at a time of austerity and welfare cuts”).

6. See: “NAO criticises Atos benefits contract: Audit criticises Department for Work and Pensions over failure to achieve value for money in medically assessing benefits claims”, guardian.co.uk, Friday 17 August 2012: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/aug/17/nao-criticises-atos-benefits-contract>

7. A recent episode of Channel 4’s undercover program Dispatches found that, although the official line is that there are no targets, assessors are under pressure not to put more than 12 per cent of claimants into the ‘support’ group. See: “Atos assessors told to keep disability benefit approvals low, film suggests: GP applied for job with Atos assessing whether benefit applicants were fit for work, and secretly filmed his training”, The Guardian, Friday 27th July, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/jul/27/disability-benefit-assessors-film>

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