

British Gas called before select committee as workers strike over fire and rehire



MP's set to ask why the law allows a profitable British Gas to invent a crisis and provoke a strike to try to impose cuts on field engineers through the fire and rehire

GMB has accepted an invitation to appear at the BEIS Select Committee as MP's call British Gas boss Chris O'Shea to give evidence over their fire and rehire plan.



Strikes provoked by the company have now led to a repair backlog of more than 150,000 homes, with 200,000 routine annual boiler service visits cancelled so far this month, GMB will tell MP's.

The hearing will take place on Tuesday February 2 at 10.30am.

In a written submission to the committee, GMB tells MP's:

- CEO Chris O'Shea spuriously projected a crisis scenario in a company with in a company with £27 billion turnover and £901m profits, after exceptional deductions to justify changes to contracts for all 20,000 staff via the fire and rehire mechanism.
- For thousands of field staff, the changes mean an additional five-and-a-half to eight extra hours per week for no pay – leading to hourly rates 15% below agreed rates – as well as several other adverse changes to terms and conditions.
- It was wishful thinking to expect engineers to accept these cuts from a profitable company – strikes in response were inevitable

The vast majority of the field staff, overwhelmingly GMB members, have consistently rejected the proposals.

They have overwhelmingly voted for strike action and have staged eight days of determined and solid strike action – with further strikes set to take place on January 29, 30, 31 and February 1.

Mr O'Shea has provoked a total breakdown in industrial relations with his own field staff. The only way that this dispute can be ended is for British Gas to take fire and rehire off the table.

Justin Bowden, GMB National Secretary, said:

"British Gas' 'fire and rehire' cuts have provoked strikes leading to a backlog of more than 150,000 homes waiting for service and 200,000 boiler service visits axed so far.

"There are serious questions as to why a profitable British Gas is treating customers and staff so badly.

"Questions must be asked as to why the law allows British Gas to invent a crisis to try to impose an hourly rate 15% lower than agreed rates and other adverse changes in conditions on its field engineers through the 'fire and rehire' mechanism.

"There are serious questions as to why the British Gas board went along with this wishful thinking that union members would acquiesce to this treatment and loss.



“Mr O’Shea provoked an inevitable strike and the disruption has led to appalling service for customers.

“The numbers awaiting service are growing as more strikes are planned and the only the only way to end the dispute is to take fire and rehire off the table.

“British Gas mixes apples and oranges in figures they quote for field staff for acceptance of the contract and support for the strikes by including the votes of other bargaining groups with different proposals.

“The way that British Gas has treated loyal employees should not be tolerated in any company, let alone one of the size and profitability of Centrica.

“We look forward to the select committee seeing what fire and rehire means in practice – in our view it has no place in a modern industrial framework and should be outlawed.

“Long after the current CEO has gone, it will be our members keeping the business going and delivering for customers.”

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