The WoW petition achieves success

The petition first appeared almost a year ago on the Government website calling for a new deal for Britain’s sick and disabled people and speaking out against the Government’s ‘War on Welfare’. Last Saturday, just 12 days before the petition which became known as WoW was due to close, it achieved a stunning 100,000 signatures, which means under the Government’s own rules, its demands must now be considered for MPs to debate in the House of Commons.

“We are delighted, overjoyed and very tearful,” a spokesperson at the campaign said at the weekend. “We will continue to fight in the hope that we can protect those in need from despair, poverty and death.”

Francesca said: “Disabled people have never been under such attack. The welfare cuts are hitting people everywhere they turn. We are being demonised, even though we didn't cause the financial crisis.”

What WoW has done is to challenge the cuts agenda day in, day out. It was a revolution carried out from wheelchairs and disabled people’s bedsides, from hospitals and job centre queues, by people who sometimes can literally only lift a finger or who rely on voice activated software to tweet. The same people who are sometimes are overwhelmed by health problems and have to retire for weeks from the fray. Between them, WoW founders Rick Burgess, Ian Jones, Jane Bence, Wayne Blackburn, Laura Stringhetti and Michelle Maher live with brain injury, severe depression, epilepsy, neurological problems, disc injury and chronic fatigue syndrome, but have still had the courage to take on the Government.

The campaign started from conversations on social media as the Coalition Government began to enact the biggest shake-up of the welfare state in a generation. As cut followed cut to support and benefits, disabled people began to realise this wasn’t reform, but attack and maybe even more worrying, the wider public had no idea what was happening.

Francesca was horrified to discover the Government intended to reassess her for benefit entitlement. “I’ve got cerebral palsy,” she said. “So, I’m not going to wake up tomorrow and go ‘oh I’m not wobbly any more!’ I’ve no plans to go to Lourdes, but like thousands of other people like me, I'm now going to have to be reassessed every few years. That’s millions of pounds from the taxpayer for a private company to come and see me. Basically, we're going to waste shed-loads of money.”

More than a petition, WoW is really a manifesto that covers the length and breadth of Iain Duncan Smith’s ambitions for the welfare system. It calls for an end to the Work Capability Assessment, an inquiry into ATOS, and demands a ‘Cumulative Impact Assessment’ that will look at the overall effect of cuts to sick and disabled people’s lives.
What makes WoW’s achievement so heartening is that it goes against the grain of British politics as for the past three years, the Government has been decisively winning the welfare narrative. Never mind that less than 1% of the welfare budget is spent on active ‘fraud’ – its attacks on ‘scroungers’ work extremely well in justifying cuts to the poorest. Ultimately, this kind of ‘austerity’ enables a society where the most vulnerable pay for the banking crisis, instead of the Government’s banker friends and tax-evading cronies.

Now, because WoW has achieved 100,000 signatures on the e-petition site, a backbencher can come forward to ask the Backbench Business Committee to table a debate. Yesterday Labour MPs John McDonnell and Ian Mearns went to the Committee and were asked to get cross-party support. Disability Cornwall now calls on all its members & followers to contact their MP to ask them to support the two MPs’ call and to make sure this long overdue debate is heard in the main chamber.

You can click on a template letter here to help you.

You can still sign the WoW Petition for a few more days at wowpetition.com. Also please consider supporting Jack Monroe’s online petition calling on David Cameron to hold a debate on UK hunger, so families don’t have to decide between heating and eating. Join them in signing the petition here: change.org/foodbanks

Let us all show that we are not ‘all in this together’ and to start re-building our society so it truly is for ‘one & all.’

With thanks to the Daily Mirror