

News Story

Disabled workers hit unfairly by recession

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By Sam Collins

The recession could be having a disproportionately large impact on disabled workers, unions fear.

Previous recessions have shown that disabled workers can face discrimination and unfair selection for redundancy, the Trades Union Congress said.

With fewer chances of securing alternative work, the TUC believes it is vital to keep disabled workers in employment during the economic downturn.

Unemployment is predicted to increase to almost three million by 2010 and disabled workers are particularly at risk when unemployment rises.

Increased unemployment for disabled workers can lead to social divide, increase the prospect of discrimination and lead to real long-term hardship for disabled people.

Speaking at the TUC's annual disability conference in London, Deputy General Secretary Frances O'Grady said: "By this time next year, it is likely that unemployment will have surged past the three million mark.

"As in previous recessions it will be disabled workers who will be disproportionately affected: by funding pressures on key services, with the public finances now deep in the red; by discrimination during redundancy selection, based perhaps on absence records; and by an even greater reluctance on the part of employers to meet their obligations towards disabled staff.

"It's our job as unionists to be alert to these dangers; to hold employers and indeed ministers to account for the actions they take. Otherwise we face a reversal of the slow, painful progress we have made over the past decade in increasing the employment rate among disabled people.

"Places like South Wales and the North East of England are still picking up the pieces of the Thatcher recessions of the early 80s and 90s - with a higher number of incapacity benefit claimants than anywhere else - and we simply cannot afford a repeat performance this time."

O'Grady added: "We will continue to support unions to support their disabled members. We will continue to help unions build a new, nationwide network of equality reps. And we will continue to work with unions in the battle to secure justice for Remploy workers."

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Posted By Nicholas Lakeland on Friday 22nd May 2009 01:42:37

As someone who spends his life pursuing and defending Disability Discrimination Claims I find it difficult to fathom why companies would want to risk litigation by not giving people with disabilities and equal chance at being interviewed for a job...what's the worst that could happen ...an employer might get a good employee !

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