



The Professional Trades Union for Prison,
Correctional & Secure Psychiatric Workers

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TO: ALL POLITICAL EDITORS, HOME AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENTS AND
INDUSTRIAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENTS

PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

**PRISON OFFICERS RALLY AGAINST VIOLENCE, PRIVATISATION AND
'CRUEL' RETIREMENT AGE**

Hundreds of Prison Officers will march through Westminster tomorrow (WEDS) demanding action against soaring levels of violence, an end to private prisons, and a fair retirement age of 60.

Marching down Whitehall past Downing Street, POA union members and supporters will then rally at Methodist Central Hall off Parliament Square, where they will hear from fellow trade unionists and MPs from across the political parties, introduced by POA National Chair Mark Fairhurst.

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and Shadow Justice Secretary headline this special event, joined by party colleagues Ian Lavery, Jo Stevens, Laura Pidcock, Imran Hussain, Mary Glendon and more, alongside the SNP's Chris Stephens and Plaid Cymru Westminster leader Liz Saville Roberts.

Union members were planning to lobby their MPs in the Palace of Westminster after the rally, though with Parliamentary security staff set to strike in an increasingly bitter dispute over pay parity and the sacking of a colleague, lobbying might have to happen outside the Parliamentary estate.

Speaking ahead of the march and rally, POA General Secretary Steve Gillan said;

"We may be banned by law from taking any kind of industrial action, but they can't take away our right to protest.

We are here in Westminster to hold the Government to account for causing this prisons crisis. My members face record levels of violence – day in, day out – simply for doing their job. This is a health and safety emergency, and the Government must immediately return the money it stole from the Prison Service in the discredited name of austerity.

New private prisons are not the answer – with their record of overcrowding, understaffing, more violence and worse terms and conditions than at public prisons. The Government must end its ideological obsession with running prisons for profit.

And we demand our cruelly high retirement age is brought back down to 60. Across Parliament, Politicians agree that 68 is too late! We ask all MPs, how



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many people do you know who could perform the physically demanding and extreme role of a front-line Prison Officer until the age of 68?”.

POA National Chair Mark Fairhurst added;

“I am proud to represent POA members who serve the public in all secure environments and wish to express my sincere thanks to them for the dedicated, professional and dangerous work they perform in the most hostile and violent workplace in Western Europe.

“Expecting Prison Officers to work at the front line until they are 68 is cruel. We are a front-line uniformed service, essential to the public, and we deserve to be treated in the same category as Firefighters and the Police.

“We deal with violence and emergencies daily. We cannot be expected, either physically or mentally, to continue working in this environment in our sixties.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- POA is the professional trades union for prison, correctional & secure psychiatric workers. See www.poauk.org.uk for more information.
- The march will assemble from 10.30am in Whitehall Place, SW1A 2BD, before setting off at 11am.
- The rally at Methodist Central Hall, SW1H 9NH, will run from 12.30pm to 3pm, with MPs expected to arrive after PMQs from 1pm.
- POA members plan to lobby their MPs from 3pm. Depending on whether the Parliamentary security staff strike goes ahead, the lobbying may happen in Parliament Square (or the Red Lion if it's raining).
- A short film from the POA highlighting violence against officers and their unfair retirement age will be playing at the rally, and can be viewed here: http://www.poauk.org.uk/index.php?videos&newsdetail=20190319-71_poa-68-is-too-late
- For more information or interviews with POA leaders, call 07963 446 664 or the press office on 020 8803 0255 option 7.