

Hardest Hit protesters gather in capital today

✘ Close to 1,000 people attended a protest against the UK government's proposed Welfare Reform Bill in Edinburgh today.

The rally in Princes Street Gardens was one of several organised throughout the country by the [Hardest Hit](#) group. The Edinburgh event was addressed by a number of speakers including the SNP's Margaret Burgess, Scottish Labour leader, Iain Gray, and Lord Colin Low.

Pam Duncan from [Inclusion Scotland](#) is among those who fear that the proposed cuts will hit people with disabilities hardest of all. Not only does she believe that it will hit people in their pockets, but it will also make them prisoners in their own home. Duncan said:- "Disabled people are facing a double whammy of cuts – we are facing it in our pockets and in our services. It is not fair and we are not going to take it."

Margaret Burgess MSP pledged her support to the campaign and read out a message from First Minister, Alex Salmond. In the message Mr Salmond said:- "I understand the real anxiety and uncertainty by the Westminster government's welfare reform proposals.


" The Scottish Government will do all it can to ensure the UK government listens to our concerns and takes proper account of Scotland's people. We believe that the benefits system should maximise the ability for all people to work and live free from poverty. However this must not be achieved through cuts to the support required by people living with ill health or disability."

✘ Scottish Labour leader Iain Gray encountered some hostility from the crowd with a few shouting comments such as:- "You started it!" in reference to reforms made by the last Labour

Westminster government. However Gray stressed his and his party's support of the campaign. Gray said:- "What is important is what is happening today and I am here standing shoulder to shoulder with you, fighting these changes that are being proposed now and that will undermine your standard of living."

One major area of concern among the campaigners is the way in which assessments for disability allowances will be carried out, and they say that those who suffer from disabilities with variable conditions are likely to suffer most from these new guidelines. Craig Wilkie from Multiple Sclerosis Scotland represents one such group. Wilkie said: – "One of the biggest concerns we have is the way in which assessments are conducted.

"MS is a fluctuating condition. People can be feeling fantastic one day, then be really poorly the next. Just depending on when you get your assessment can affect the level of support you will get. We have to make sure that these sorts of things are taken into account."

Similar events took place today in Birmingham, Brighton,  Bristol, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, Nottingham, Belfast and Cardiff.