

'Dodgy' legal advice to blame for fire and rehire strikes – British Gas CEO tells MPs

CEO tells MPs



Mr O'Shea told MPs he wants to rebuild trust and regretted fire and rehire – so why doesn't he take it off the table?

British Gas boss Chris O'Shea blamed 'dodgy' legal advice as he today told MPs he thought he had to issue fire and rehire notices to staff.



Giving evidence to the [BEIS Select Committee on February 2](#), Mr O'Shea told MP's he 'regretted' the company's interpretation of the law which led to him issue the notices, which GMB says is to blame for the ongoing strikes and breakdown in industrial relations and trust at British Gas under his leadership.

Mr O'Shea told the Committee 'trust is not where it should be' in what he said is a company 'with underlying profitability' and that he is committed to work with GMB to rebuild this trust.

Watch: BEIS Select Committee

Just three months after he arrived as CEO, industrial relations were thrown into turmoil and strikes.

Mr O'Shea added he could see how engineers would feel fire and rehire notices would 'contaminate negotiations' and 'I would feel similar to that'.

Committee chair Darren Jones MP replied he was 'not entirely convinced by the argument that you had to issue the fire and rehire so early because of the law...if that was the case every other business would be doing it.'

He added it was 'probably your decision Mr O'Shea and you might want to reflect on that'.



“ Chris O’Shea told the parliamentary committee that fire and rehire was his big regret and he wants to rebuild trust with GMB members – so why doesn’t he take it off the table so negotiations can resume?

Justin Bowden, GMB National Officer

GMB **has just announced** a further four days on February 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the ongoing dispute.

The union claims that after 12 days of strikes, more than 170,000 homes are in a backlog for repairs and 200,000 planned annual service visits have been axed.

A meeting of the GMB Central Executive Committee will decide the next steps in the dispute.

Justin Bowden, GMB National Officer, said:

“Mr O’Shea’s recognised dodgy legal advice he received is behind the total breakdown in industrial relations and trust between the engineers in what he confirmed is a profitable company. This should now signal a change of course.

“He told the parliamentary committee that fire and rehire was his big regret and he wants to rebuild trust with GMB members – so why doesn’t he take it off the table so negotiations can resume?

“Mr O’Shea should do this as further strikes will add to over 170,000 homes in repair backlog and 200,000 service visits axed. British Gas’s claim that it is catching up after 24 hours is bogus.

“ [View this post on Instagram](#)
A post shared by GMB Union (@gmbunion)

“Staff in the Field Engineers’ bargaining group will not accept the new contract. Twelve days of solid strike action shows this. British Gas is kidding itself using a misleading 83% figure that is mostly staff in other bargaining groups. The only votes that count are the Field staff, so the 83% figure is not relevant.

“Unless there is a recognition that the mistaken legal advice requires the company to get back round the table, GMB will have no alternative but to prepare for a protracted dispute.



"GMB in this industry started with town gas, moved onto natural gas and later again to digital technology. Change won't stop there. GMB members are not afraid to embrace a new future, with investment in the latest in diagnostic technologies, to pave the way for the 'engineers of the future' programme, but they will not be bullied into the new contract."

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