



the next step

Newsletter of PCSU Socialist Caucus

Defending jobs, preventing adverse pension changes and restoring National Pay (with all civil servants moved to the highest existing wage) are the three key objectives that the Union has to achieve.

Unfortunately, in our opinion, the present strategic direction of the union means that we will not realise those goals.

Currently the union is fighting separate campaigns over pensions, jobs and pay.

We believe that instead of three campaigns there has to be one national campaign.

A Different Way Is Needed

To that end we have put forward an emergency motion to National Conference. We do not know whether it will be heard, or if heard, won.

Regardless of that we think it is vitally important that the arguments in that motion be publicised and that members are made aware of them.

At the beginning of the motion we note the stark facts:

"This conference notes that New Labour has been re-elected. During the election campaign they gave no indication that they would lessen the number of job cuts they want in the Civil Service; or that they would have national pay in the Civil Service or that they would make concessions on Civil Service pensions.

This conference notes that the voting mandate won for taking strike action on the 23rd March lapsed in early April and that the national Union now has no legal mandate to take national industrial action over job losses, pension changes or national pay".

It then states what we think it is a vital point:

"This conference believes that we must have a national industrial action mandate if we are to make the necessary progress on pay, pensions and jobs".

Mandate Needed

Without strike action on the 5th November 2004 and the threat of action on the 23rd March we would be in a worse position than we are. Without a mandate; without power to back up our demands any talks with senior managers and Ministers over pensions will be ineffective.



Of course my good fellows we can talk

We then go to a the key difference between us and the current union position:

"Conference further believes that the basis on which future PCS strike action should be campaigned for and delivered must be on the basis of emphasising the equal importance of the scale of civil service job losses, pay and pensions".

Step Up The Material To Members

We are clear that we have to increase dramatically the amount and range of material to the members. In particular the Union must hammer home the message concerning:

"the pay differentials between bargaining units; how low pay and unequal pay translate into inequalities in pensions, pension lump sum and

severance entitlements;



We have to systematically tell members of the differences in pay between bargaining units

the threat to the final salary pension scheme and how other schemes such as a career average scheme will reduce the pensions of many existing members;

the ways in which the job cuts and relocation drive is affecting members and service and where compulsory redundancy notices have been issued;

PCS negotiating objectives and the progress (or lack of it) made in achieving these goals through central talks;

the need for industrial action if our reasonable demands are not met".

Preparation

If you are heading for a fight then it is best be prepared for it. So the motion instructs:

"the General Secretary to prepare detailed



If a fight is necessary plan for it!!

plans for discontinuous national strike action, selective strike action, overtime ban, and a work to rule. These to be presented to the NEC for their consideration. The NEC then to decide what the industrial action plans should be".;

We should be using selective action (but always in conjunction with national action) to hit key spots. The best example of this in the recent past was the DEFRA pay dispute. Through intelligent use of selective action, along with general action, members won three pay increases in 12 months!

By selective action we do not mean the action taken during the screens dispute in BA and the ES.

Deadlines

Probably most controversially we go on to say:

"ballot all civil service and other affected members on the industrial action plans agreed by the NEC if PCS does not make sufficient early progress in negotiations and in any case begin balloting members no later than 31st October 2005 if, by the beginning of October 2005, agreement has not been minimally reached on: then we list a series of objectives.



Ah - Gershon is working!

Many may think that having a deadline is tactically wrong. If we do not have a date then the real danger is that the Government will drag out the pensions talks; if we have no deadline then there is no pressure to have real talks over pay (we have been in pay coherence talks for nearly 12 months with no concrete results) or over job losses (there is no national agreement concerning jobs between the Civil Service and

the Union; the Protocol is an internal Civil Service arrangement between departments that happens to mention Unions).

Unity - Yes - But Not At Any Price

Lastly we ask for public sector solidarity but not as an alternative to what we have to do:

"continue to press for co-ordinated industrial action amongst the wider civil service and public sector trade unions on key common issues such as pensions but not as an alternative to PCS taking the necessary and timely action it needs to take in order to defend its members interests".

To leave effective control of our pension fight riding on the will and determination of the likes of Dave Prentis, the General Secretary of UNISON, is a big mistake.

The Socialist Party (a significant component of the Left Unity leadership) is clear of what they think of the current UNISON leadership. On their website they say of their comrade Roger Bannister's recent attempt to become UNISON General Secretary

"Roger contrasted the present Left leadership of the PCS - of which the Socialist Party is a significant component - with the passive, bureaucratic UNISON executive. UNISON needs a real rank-and-file organisation to help defend workers, pressurise the leadership and the union officials, and win a Left-led national executive. UNISON's current leadership is too close to New Labour - for public-sector workers that means too close to the bosses".

Why trust people who are too close to New Labour to determine our pension campaign? Also what about the pay and job loss angle. Whilst it would be good to have public sector unity over jobs and pay unfortunately that is not on the table at the present time.

Without a job having a good or bad pension does not matter; having low wages means a small pension. Many members will have to work beyond 60 (regardless of the official pension age) just to boost their pension pay out. Having higher wages means members can retire earlier.



Dave's my boy

All these things are inter connected - therefore so should our campaign be. That is what the motion is about.

If it is heard we hope on the basis of what is said above that you will support it. If it is not (or it is lost) then we hope you will agree that the current direction of the Union, with its insistence on having three different and separate campaigns, cannot win us what we have to get. It is time for a change of direction.

Break Out Of Divide And Rule Trap

Socialist Caucus has consistently argued that PCS needs to break out of the divide and rule trap of delegated bargaining by punching its full national weight in a unified pay campaign. To ask each bargaining unit to somehow force their management to get the Treasury to concede sufficient extra money to deal with progression, low pay and so on, is frankly not going to get us to national pay.

Socialist Caucus, Mark Serwotka And National Action - 1993

In 1993 Socialist Caucus stood Mark Serwotka for CPSA President. He stood in opposition to CPSA Broad Left's backed Albert Astbury (who was non-Broad Left member and Grade 7) and the right winger, Marion Chambers.

Socialist Caucus and Mark said, **"Only national action can save national bargaining."**

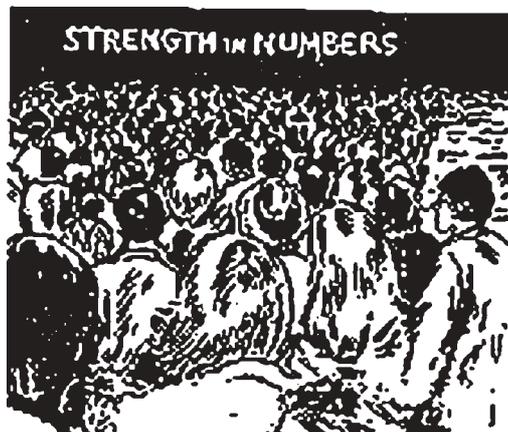
There was no national action and over the next three years national bargaining, then synonymous with national pay rates, was lost in the civil service. Socialist Caucus believes that essentially the same argument applies today: only national action can return us national bargaining and national pay rates.

Socialist Caucus, Mark Serwotka And National Action - 2000

Mark stood for the General Secretary election in 2000 as the candidate of "PCS Must Fightback" (of which Socialist Caucus was a critical component - without us Mark would not have obtained enough branch nominations to have got on the ballot paper).

The campaign literature stated, "pay is the key issue...If elected, Mark will coordinate a **national pay campaign, linking all the sections of the union for an end to low pay, an end to performance related pay and a minimum wage of the European Decency Threshold (currently £14,182).**"

Fightback and Mark argued for "**a return to national pay bargaining – unity is strength. End the wild variation in pay between civil service departments and agencies...**"



When the Left Unity leadership at the very last knockings switched from supporting Hugh Lanning to Mark Serwotka they stated that Mark would "...coordinate a massive national pay campaign..." for, amongst other things, "**a minimum wage of more than £14,000.**" If that massive campaign was needed in 2000 then it sure is needed now.

Continuing Low Pay & Wild Variations In Pay

According to the PCS Pay and Conditions 2004 database, as reported in the 2005 "PCS National Pay Claim", the lowest payband minima for AA in the civil service and linked bodies was **£8,834** and the highest **£13,715**. 2004 figures from the Reward Group show that the median salary of a civil service admin assistant was **£11,781**.

PCS' 2005 national pay claim seeks a minimum rate for AA members **of £14,000** (the same demand as made by Left Unity in 2000!).

In fact the May 2005 PCS View reports "**...low pay in the sector is continuing to worsen thanks to Treasury pay caps...**"

Again according to the "PCS Pay and Conditions database 2004", the % difference between the highest and lowest maxima obtaining in the civil service and related bodies for an EO was 64.1%. The May PCS View tells us that the civil service gender pay gap increased from 22% to 25% last year.

We are talking about lifetime inequalities here: low and unequal pay = low and unequal pensions and severance terms (pretty important when we are due to shed jobs by the wagonload).

No Sign Of A National Pay Campaign Let Alone A Massive One

Despite this dreadful situation there is no sign of a serious national pay campaign let alone a "massive one". Yet motion A155, overwhelmingly adopted at last year's ADC but not acted upon by the NEC, gave the NEC the basis for a civil service wide dispute if the Treasury remit for 2005 turned out once again to be too low – and it has.

Pay Coherence

Instead we have national "coherence talks" divorced from any real national campaign.

The PCS 2004 Annual Report says that the "...the Cabinet Office and Treasury in the Spring of 2004 showed a clear willingness to tackle the problems of huge pay gaps between different Civil Service organisations. Understandings were reached on a way



Treasury's idea of pay progression

forward, which involved producing a "Vision for 2008" setting down the basis for achieving significant changes towards more coherent pay bargaining **outcomes** across the civil service." (The reference to "**bargaining outcomes across the civil service**" indicates that there will still be substantial delegated bargaining in 2008).

Caucus supporters obviously hope that the coherence talks go well – they have been going on long enough (for a year). However the February 2005 Treasury Pay Guidance for 2005/2006 certainly does not inspire hope – it's frankly awful.

Treasury Guidance And Fairness And Equality

The Treasury's reference to "fairness" comes in a document replete with other references to local markets, affordability, etc.

Somewhat worse, there is not the slightest suggestion that equal pay considerations should be separately funded from the general settlement. Indeed the equality advice is non-existent apart from saying "**reforms to address [possible pay inequalities] must be affordable and consistent with other pay and workforce objectives.**" These are of course criteria, which simply do not exist, in the Equal Pay Act.

And Progression

Neither is there any suggestion that PCS' argument that progression should be dealt with separately from the general increase has been heard by Treasury. Indeed the Treasury Guidance doesn't even mention progression.

And Coherence

So it is unsurprising that Treasury's references

to pay coherence do not describe what it is aiming at and offer no commitments on minimum standards in 2005 and beyond.

Instead the Treasury says: "...departments may wish to submit pay remits which include arguments in favour of reducing pay dispersion as part of progress towards greater coherence of pay across departments. **Supporting business cases would need to explain how the proposal helps to achieve efficiency plans; promotes the delivery of public services; and is justified in terms of the recruitment, retention and motivation of staff.** Any case for reducing differentials between departments **would be expected to consider carefully whether closing the gap was warranted in each location.** Cases should not simply propose changes throughout a department without attention to the variation in local labour market conditions. **Any pay remit cases submitted on the need for more coherence should rigorously address the issue of affordability both in the current and future years.**"

Unless negotiations have gone miraculously well of late it would seem that for 2005 at least the coherence talks have delivered us into yet another miserable pay round.

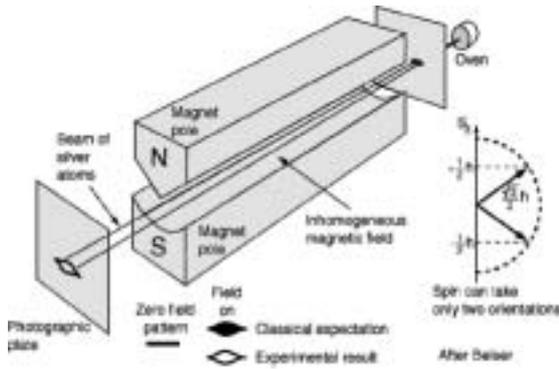
We believe that only the campaign outlined at the beginning of this bulletin can deliver the real increases in pay that members need and to move us to national pay bargaining and national pay rates.

And Pay Remit For 2005/2006

The earnings growth (total paybill increase) set by the treasury for 2005/06 is 3.5%. This will make it impossible to balance the need to address low pay, progression pay, equal pay, maintain the value of minima and maxima, and deliver everybody an inflation+ increase. One hesitates to mention other pay-bill related ambitions. For many negotiators, especially those trapped in small and not very strong bargaining units, it will be another tough year in which they struggle to find a way of squeezing a bit more money out of management.

It kind of makes you yearn for a massive national pay campaign. As PCS Fightback and Mark said back in 2000, "**Its time our union punched its weight.**"

PCS Spin City



1. THE CLAIM: Referring to the Cabinet Office/Sir Andrew Turnbull “peace” letter, a PCS Newsbrief, dated 21 March claimed, “the Government has agreed to implement national level measures **to avoid** compulsory redundancies in the civil service.”

IN FACT: Turnbull said the Government is “...**seeking** to avoid compulsory redundancies...”, a weaker formulation previously granted to the union, and one that civil service departments always say.

2. THE CLAIM: With reference to the same Turnbull letter, the Newsbrief said, “We have persuaded the Government to introduce a fairer, more coherent pay system...”

IN FACT: Whilst Turnbull talked of “a more coherent pay system” he made no mention of a fairer one.

3. THE CLAIM: Janice Goodrich says, “we have stopped the Government compulsory increasing the pension age to 65” (“A personal message to PCS members”).

4. IN FACT: The Government has not yet withdrawn its pension age proposal and so it has not yet been stopped. Instead it has agreed to negotiations - a good thing but something different to Janice’s claim.

5. THE CLAIM: In a press statement Mark Serwotka said, “It is on the basis of meaningful negotiation, **in giving people real choices and a real flexibility about their pensions**, that the decision to postpone Wednesday’s strike has been taken.”

IN FACT: The Government had not conceded one iota to the idea of giving people “real

choices and a real flexibility about their pensions.”

6. THE CLAIM: “After a long campaign by PCS, the Prime Minister has announced measures to end the two tier workforce in central government. A new code of Practice, called “Workforce matters”, will give staff protection from less favourable terms and conditions when working in services contracted out to private providers” (March 2005 issue of “Informed”).

IN FACT: “Workforce Matters” is a welcome gain but it:

- explicitly excludes from its provisions trading funds (such as the Driving Standards Agency in Department for Transport) and therefore a two tier workforce can continue to exist in such bodies;
- “...does not envisage **existing staff** working on the contract should have terms and conditions adjusted... The Code is concerned with ‘new joiners’ to the outsourced workforce...” (so two tier workforces could exist for a long time).
- “...only applies to a retender situation where at least some of the original public authority transferees remain employed.” We might therefore see the emergence of a two-tier workforce where the difference is between those who joined before and after the last ex public sector worker leaves.

7. THE CLAIM: In its editorial of 19th March, “The Socialist”, journal of the Socialist Party to which a number of NEC and full time officers belong, stated, “**Correctly, the PCS civil service union is keeping its ballot for action in place**, and only suspending the strike scheduled for 23 March, to wait and see if the government delivers on its promises before the likely general election on 5 May. Other unions that were balloting for action...should have continued with their ballots to ensure they have a mandate for action...call[ing] off their ballots...we think is a mistake. The threat of action before a general election is still needed to ensure the government departments start genuine negotiations immediately.” Echoing this line the NEC, in reports to members, has also claimed that it “suspended” the action.

IN FACT: PCS did not keep its ballot mandate open – it allowed it to lapse. The action is not

suspended – members will have to be re-balloted again vote for action. The Union did not take any other action to keep the legal mandate alive.

8. THE CLAIM: Mark has argued that the NEC “decided to ballot members on strike action” because “the government had intended to impose a compulsory increase in the pension age” and that “the action was planned...to get [ministers] around the negotiating table” (May PCS View).

IN FACT: PCS had previously argued that the strike was also needed “to press...[for] further progress **on the key guarantees** the union has requested on jobs, pay, pensions, conditions and services, including no compulsory redundancies and relocations” (membership leaflet) and was part of the “...ongoing dispute over...cuts that includes 104,000 job losses” (briefing to reps and see also “Say Yes Vote Yes”). No guarantees have been forthcoming, the job losses roll on (it seems London Region DWP might be striking alone on this issue), and members in DEFRA have been walking around with compulsory notices in their pockets.

Why You Should Join Socialist Caucus

Socialist Caucus only exists for one thing and that is promoting the interests of the members. We believe that this can only be achieved by having an effective and fighting Union. Accordingly we want a union that will stand up to the employer.

We are not a political party that requires you to believe in a party line. We are a group of independent activists who work in left unity to change it fundamentally but we are much more than that.

If you agree with any of the following then you should join us.

That: National Pay must be a central plank of our campaign, alongside pensions and defence of jobs. The Treasury must set its “remit” at a level high enough to allow pay and conditions to be leveled up across the civil service, eliminating poverty rates now current in some of the 192 bargaining areas;

There should be the most vigorous struggle against poverty and low pay;

We should campaign for concerted action across the public sector, especially on pensions. Teachers, NHS and local government workers will all face the same threat. Branch to branch contacts need to be made at local level to press the leadership into organising united action;

The defeatist line that PCS cannot win on jobs and other matters unless there is a general strike across the whole public sector must be rejected. We fight for public sector unity but PCS can deal a blow against this government alone if necessary.

The union must organise a national levy of all members to fund selective action and hardship funds;

Further national action to supplement the selective strikes over jobs, pay and pensions must be coordinated;

That full time officer pay should be brought more in line with that of the members. That all costs relating only to running the structure of the Union should be kept as low as possible;

The Union should vigorously use equal pay and other laws to help break down delegated pay and ensure uniformity of conditions across the entire civil service;

Local activists must get proper backup including legal advice and representation if necessary. No longer should you be made to feel that the regional office or HQ view you as a nuisance that should go away. The Union has to be built around the needs of the activists not the other way around.

Read More About Us At Our Website:

www.pcsocialistcaucus.org.uk

Read Our Publications

See What We Argue For

See How We Want To Make a Difference

If You Like What You See Join Us

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FOR ADMIN GRADES, THE NORMAL SUBSCRIPTION IS £3 PER MONTH. FOR EXECUTIVE GRADES, THE NORMAL SUBSCRIPTION IS £5 PER MONTH.

PLEASE RETURN TO: SOCIALIST CAUCUS, 112 FINDON STREET, SHEFFIELD S6 4QP

NAME..... DEPARTMENT

HOME ADDRESS

.....

.....

WORK ADDRESS

.....

.....

EMAIL

BANKERS STANDING ORDER

TO: (NAME OF BANK)

FULL ADDRESS OF BANK

SORT CODE

TITLE OF ACCOUNT

ACCOUNT NUMBER

PLEASE MAKE PAYMENTS DETAILED BELOW AND DEBIT MY ACCOUNT

SIGNED DATE

BANK: CO-OPERATIVE BANK PLC
BRANCH: 78-80 CORNHILL, LONDON EC3V 3NJ
SORT CODE: 08-02-28T
ACCOUNT NUMBER: 50383311
ACCOUNT TO BE CREDITED: SOCIALIST CAUCUS

PLEASE DEBIT THE AMOUNT OF £ ON THE DAY OF EACH MONTH

DATE OF FIRST PAYMENT:

PAYMENTS TO CONTINUE UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE