

PCS INDEPENDENT Left

A New Voice For
The Members

Today at Conference

Today's key debates focus on changes in the workplace forced through by the employer to compel members to cover for cuts in staffing. Motions on Finance and Services section, many from Independent Left supporters, propose changes to the way that the union operates, moving resources from headquarters to better support members and reps.

The NEC's motion A74 will be agreed, but the real discussion will focus on the outcome of the first dispute on Lean in HMRC where widespread hostility to the HMRC GEC's handling of the dispute led to acceptance of a settlement on a very low turnout and a number of censure motions against the Group leadership. A74 is okay as far as it goes but, with Lean methods being introduced in other departments, it is far from unlikely that the failings of the LU leadership will not be repeated over again.

All Branches should support Composite A75, seconded by IL supporters, on the growing section of members working in Contact/Call Centres. Many Contact Centre members refer to having a "shelf-life" of just two years in the job. Many become ill and fall victim to ruthless attendance management rules. Others just leave due to bullying, intense monitoring and pressure to hit targets. While we support the Call Centre Workers Charter, it will only be of use if it is used as a platform for action. In DWP, 2500 formal warnings were issued to just 6000 staff in Contact Centres. The DWP has been unable to get to grips with the carnage. As bad, the NEC refused to take up the offer of joint work and job re-design of Contact Centre with the Institute of Work Psychology.

The leadership needs to improve support for reps and members. Pressure on reps, particularly through personal cases, has increased dramatically since Brown's 2004 announcement to cut jobs and sick absence. A135, moved by Independent left supporters, calls for a vital development of our education programme. We have to ensure that our reps can access training no matter how experienced they are.

Independent Left believes that the best way forward is to employ an in-house legal team and we support A136, A138 (Legal Helpline for Reps) and A139. Incredibly, the NEC opposes or seeks remission on all of these proposals. The opposition may be on financial grounds. However, that has not prevented the employment costs of the union rocketing by more than £800,000 in just a year, far exceeding the union's target percentage.

Independent left supporters will be moving A124 on Hardship Funds. The proposal asks for some help for branches to assist low paid members during industrial action campaigns. It is moved by a DWP branch where members have taken strike action of more than 20 days in the past few years. It is a practical means of demonstrating that our union belongs to and exists for the members. Also support A125 (Review on Strike Pay). A130 calls for more control of union salary costs. There can be no justification for senior officers earning as much as six times as our members. We also need to second activists rather than employ more organizing staff to help build the union when and where needed. Once again, A124, A125 and A130 are all opposed by the NEC, raising the question, in whose interests is the union being run?

Remember, this is a leadership that blew £100,000 on circulating a glossy leaflet on the job protocols and privatisation guidance in a pre-election stunt. They also proposed yesterday to ballot members on the deal. Total cost? Perhaps £250,000, that should have been used to defend members and fight the cuts.

In the first section of social and economic motions, our supporters have submitted important motions like A150 on the POA's right to strike attacked by New Labour and a key motion on fighting for a decent minimum wage, A151, as an attempt to move away from in-work poverty.

Thursday 22 May, Lunchtime The Belgrave Hotel

Sacked for being sick!

What should the union do about attendance management?

Speakers: Jackie Dutton (DWP London Regional Chair – personal cap)

John Moloney (Department for Transport GEC – personal cap)

The Belgrave Hotel can be found on the Corner West Street and Seafront – 100 metres Brighton Centre

The Independent Left has fought its second NEC election. This is why we stood and we hope you will join us.

In the NEC election our vote increased by more than 22% and a greater share of the total vote compared with last year. Given we have a fraction of the financial resources of Left Unity and 4TM, we are pleased with our progress. We have met many activists, recruited new supporters, and have begun to put our ideas across to the wider membership

Why we stood

We profoundly disagree with the Left Unity leadership's policies over key issues facing the membership. It is for that reason we have begun the process of putting our policies directly to the members.

Pay

It is good that the NEC says it will give greater campaigning emphasis to national pay. Activists are behind a national dispute and the need to win it. Nevertheless, loyalty to our members and the common fight of the union does not dictate that activists should leave everything in the hands of the "leadership" and abandon their critical faculties.

The leadership's year on year focus on negotiations for a "national pay framework" and then pay "coherence", without any sustained and meaningful national pay campaigning, did not bring us one jot closer to national pay, did not deliver one material gain for members, and did not lead to any demonstrable agreement on reductions in the pay inequalities between members in different bargaining units. Indeed national officials have recently suggested that such differences might be getting worst!

In the meantime performance related pay continues to discriminate against ethnic minority and disabled members - all this without any serious national political or legal challenge.

It is a good thing that the PCS leadership have recognised the impact of Gordon Brown's pay squeeze. Of course that squeeze was launched in 2006. We are now in 2008.

At the 2006 conference we put forward a motion that warned what would happen in that year's pay round and called upon the PCS to immediately prepare for a pay fight in early 2007 following months of preparation amongst the membership. That motion, and the proposed preparation, were rejected by the NEC with the explicit argument, "lets wait and see." Well, the NEC got to wait and the members got the pay cuts. We waited until the end of 2006 when, all of a sudden, we had a ballot and had a pay fight in early 2007. If our motion had been passed we would have spent months in the run up to the ballot campaigning; instead we had a campaigning time of a few weeks.

We believe national action is vital but as part of the campaign we also want selective action.

By selective action we mean taking out key offices/sections for short periods; long enough to hurt, short enough to prevent the employer from setting up a mechanism to work around the action. We do not advocate taking out one office out for months on end. That was tried by the leaders of the NEC in the past and failed.

Lets be clear. We are asking for national strike action *plus* selective action. It is not the case of having one or the other. Selective action helps the effectiveness of the national action and national action bolsters the impact of selective action. They are complimentary tactics.

Jobs

Whilst welcoming the improved jobs protocol we recognise its limitations. Remember our campaign was for a no compulsory redundancy guarantee and "**adequate resources and decent working conditions.**"

The protocols are a long way short of this. Of course having such a guarantee does not stop the job cuts; it just means that the cuts are handled with less pain. The Union has to start to properly campaign against the cuts themselves rather than in reality argue about how the cuts are managed.

Different view

Making these points (and we could make others) is not to concentrate on criticising the NEC as opposed to Ministers and Mandarins - it is to have a seriously different view as to how the critical issues facing members, the employer's attacks, should be tackled. For our part we are content that in bargaining units where we have real influence the terms and conditions are at least as good, if not better, than those where the Left Unity leadership prevail. Thus we feel no need to accept them as the gurus of the Union.

We wish to persuade others to work with us in developing and campaigning for the policies that will defend and advance members' interests. We do not ask, as a precondition, that individuals join. If you are interested in the Independent Left come to our meetings at this conference, talk to one of our supporters or e-mail pcsindependentleft@hotmail.co.uk

Visit our website at www.independentleft.org.uk