



FOR A NATIONAL PCS EQUALITY CAMPAIGN

For Social Equality

Mrs Thatcher once said that equal opportunities mean nothing if they do not mean an opportunity to be unequal. The late left wing Labour MP Eric Heffer said that "...genuine equality of opportunity cannot be created while class divisions exist." The **Independent Left** agrees with Eric Heffer.

Within the civil service, "human resource" policies, such as performance related pay, impact differently on different groups of staff, depending on their grade and income and to the detriment of the more junior grades.

Champion Equal Opportunity And Diversity Policies

Despite the ways in which equal opportunity and diversity policies are undermined and distorted by the stratifications and realities of class society, the **Independent Left** champions them because we believe that formal legal equality and the right to equal treatment are vital advances. Trade unions should not be gravy trains for full time officials, a smart career move for people who would like to have a "nice conscience" but want to live a much better life style than the members they represent. Exceptionally well heeled officials are out of touch officials who are too prone to cosy relationships with the employer. Low paid and indeed not so low paid members do not pay their dues to finance exceptionally nice lives for senior officials.

Equality laws and equality of opportunity policies can and do improve people's lives, discourage discriminatory behaviour, and encourage practices which help educate people. They can make it that bit harder for bosses, bigots, racists and fascists to discriminate against and harass workers on grounds of their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability, and thereby make it that bit harder to pursue divide and rule policies.

The Inextricable Fight For Workplace Organisation And Equality

Of course the effectiveness of such laws and policies is dependent on the strength, mobilisation, and intelligence of the labour movement and their incorporation within a wider socialist and trade union programme. Work places without good trade union organisation are places where equality rules do not properly apply. But the fight for equality is also part of the fight to build good trade union workplace organisation. Equality should not be reduced to individual rights and individual personal cases: it is a collective need requiring a collective fight for a fair workplace and a just society.

Meeting Thursday 21 May, 5.45pm, Friends Meeting House, Ship St.

*The equality challenge: issues, strategy and tactics...
the fight for a national PCS equality campaign*

To find Ship Street: turn left out of the Conference Centre and continue along the sea front to the third street on your left.

The Impact Of Workplace Inequality

Yet, wherever members work in the civil service, even in the best organised of work places, inequality and unequal treatment has a profound affect upon their working lives, as shown, for example, by the:

- disproportionate representation of “junior” and ethnic minority staff in misconduct, poor performance, and poor attendance cases;
- the differential award by grade, ethnicity, and disability of performance box markings and therefore performance related pay;
- the differential award and value of special performance bonuses by grade;
- the gender pay gap; and
- differences in health.

Whitehall 1 & 2 Studies

The Whitehall Studies, a long term health study of civil servants, show that the lower the grade the higher the sick and death rate. Yet this core inequality in our very lives has had no impact on the way PCS nationally represents members on issues such as ill-health policies and sick leave trigger points. PCS lacks a national equality campaign that spreads best practice, ensures the equality checking of all personnel policies, and robustly and legally challenges management failings. It is time to put that right.

Support Motions A46 and A47 – Vote For A National Equality Campaign

In this context, Motions A46 and A47 are excellent motions which can help us deliver the national equality policy and campaigning we desperately need. However simply passing them will not be enough if we are to put real pressure on Ministers and Mandarins and make a difference to the lives of our members. They must be implemented with a national vigour and creativity that the NEC too rarely displays.

But we must also recognise that, in a society which is now more unequal than at any time since modern records began in the 1960s, PCS will not deliver a radically more equal civil service without far reaching changes in wider society. The inequalities in morbidity and mortality rates revealed by the Whitehall Studies, for instance, reflect similar inequalities in wider society.

Members struggling to find somewhere to live beyond the clutches of money grabbing private sector landlords, struggling to afford quality child care, suffering the myriad indignities of low pay in a society where the minimum wage is pitifully low, will not enjoy equality of opportunity in the workplace. Nor will their children enjoy equality of opportunity in their education and the other aspects of their lives. The civil service is not an island beyond the reach of wider society. The inequalities in our working and wider lives are inextricably linked.

Motion A47 is therefore right to emphasise the need for PCS to challenge social inequality as well as promoting “equality of opportunity.” It is right to insist on the need to keep members informed of the links between inequalities in and out of the workplace.

Workers Need A Political Voice

As Britain heads for major attacks on public services and the workers who deliver them, it is vital that public sector trade unionists link hands with private sector (including PCS members) and unemployed workers who face similar attacks and that together “social equality” becomes a rallying call.

But for this to be done properly PCS and other unions need to throw their weight onto the political scales and provide alternative answers to those being provided by the mainstream parties. That is not a task that can be undertaken within the confines of “Make Your Vote Count.” Workers need a political voice that speaks up for a fundamentally more equal Britain and PCS needs to play its role in developing such a voice.