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PCS Independent Left



PCS INDEPENDENT LEFT

MANIFESTO

FOR A FIGHTING, RANK & FILE CONTROLLED UNION

FOREWORD

We are the PCS Independent Left (IL), a democratic organisation of socialists within the PCS union. This booklet outlines our policies.

PCS Independent Left candidates stand for election within PCS to put forward a vision for transforming our union. This manifesto was first agreed and promoted during the 2019 General Secretary election, when our candidate Bev Laidlaw stood for the position.

We stand for rank and file democracy, creative industrial strategies and a leadership that empowers members to take action rather than holding them back.

From leading strikes to building union membership and density, our candidates have years of experience as rank-and-file, workplace reps.

Thank you for taking the time to read this manifesto.

1 INDUSTRIAL DEMANDS

Civil service pay has stagnated over the last decade and there is chronic low pay in the administrative grades, yet PCS has failed in two successive ballots to deliver a 50%+ turnout and thus a legal mandate for industrial action. This is fundamentally an organising issue, but we also need to be clear what we want in relation to pay and other industrial demands. We stand for:

1.1 NATIONAL EQUAL PAY

Differences in pay for civil servants of the same grade in the same location can vary by thousands of pounds – a lifetime inequality reflected in pension, pension lump sum, and severance entitlements. Those on the same grade should be on the same pay, regardless of department. This should mean an uplift to the best wage going as the rate for the job, not a race to the bottom.

1.2 PAY CLAIMS WITH THE LIVING WAGE AS THE STARTING POINT

The 2019 pay claim of 10% underpinned by £10 per hour or £2,500 (whichever is greater) would have put AAs and AOs on the minimum within HMRC at the same salary. Whilst an improvement in both cases on existing pay rates, this is still not ideal. The union's pay claims should start from a minimum of our living wage rate (currently £10/hr nationally or £11.55 in London) as the pay rate for the AA grade and work upwards from there.

1.3 A SHORTER WORKING WEEK

PCS Conference passed a policy to campaign for a 28-

hour working week. This is not only achievable but necessary – to tackle the burgeoning mental health crisis in the civil service, to increase work life balance, to offset the threat to jobs from digitalisation, and for the environment. The union has to take this policy seriously, organising around the issue and agitating amongst the membership to win the argument as a first step towards winning the fight.

1.4 FAIR PENSIONS FOR ALL

The union's campaign over pensions was all but abandoned back in 2012 after the coordinated public sector one day strikes failed to yield results. Now that we know our pensions have been devalued and the government is refusing to correct that, the time is right to relaunch a pension campaign. This must focus not just on correcting the current valuation issue but putting forward the case for comprehensive pension reform which restores retirement security for members and brings about a pension equality not predicated on a race to the bottom.

1.5 NO CUTS TO THE CSCS

The government is once more on the verge of pushing through swingeing cuts to the CSCS, after its defeat in the courts over the 2016 changes to the scheme. This time, it was forced to engage in consultation but refused to seriously address PCS's alternative proposals which would have made savings whilst moving redundancy money towards the low paid members who would most need it and addressing age discrimination in the present system. The union should publish these proposals to

challenge Tory propaganda about the changes as the opening salvo of a renewed campaign.

1.6 BEST PRACTICE TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Across the civil service there a wide array of variations in terms and conditions, creating a multi-tier workforce whereby some members are treated better than others simply by virtue of where and when they joined. The employer uses this to try and divide workers and will utilise resentment towards those with better conditions to drive a wedge between us as it pursues a race to the bottom.

Countering that shouldn't simply mean resisting detrimental changes, though this is vital. The union must also establish a comprehensive list of "best practice" in terms and conditions across the civil service and use this as the basis of our bargaining agenda when we talk to the employer.

1.7 TAKING ON OUTSOURCING ACROSS THE CIVIL SERVICE

Outsourcing is chronic across the government estate. Most often, this serves as a convenient way for the employer to avoid the questions of union recognition, decent pay and decent conditions with whole groups of workers, whilst also funnelling public money into private sector profits.

PCS must now commit to developing a strategy on organising outsourced workers across the piece. We need to ensure that there is a coordinated effort throughout the union to recruit and organise these workers, and to agitate for and link up disputes on pay, conditions and bringing the work back in house. This

should be done in a systematic way, with the resource made available to support branches and proactive coordination from the centre.

1.8 A NATIONAL FIGHT AGAINST OFFICE CLOSURES AND COMPULSORY REDUNDANCIES

HMRC and the DWP are currently engaged in the largest and most ambitious office closures in the history of the civil service. This fits into the wider Government "hub" strategy, which is estimated to effect 200,000 civil servants. Compulsory redundancies are now a continuing, looming threat. The union needs to tackle office closures and compulsory redundancies head on, by building for a serious, coordinated and sustained industrial response.

2 EQUALITY

“Equality at the heart of everything we do” needs to be more than a slogan. PCS has strong equality structures at all levels of the union, but there is often a disconnect between these structures and the broader work of the union. This needs to be addressed so that the slogan becomes a reality.

2.1 NATIONALLY COORDINATED EQUALITY ORGANISING

The union should be a tool for black, women, LGBT+, disabled and neurodivergent workers to organise against inequality and discrimination, at work and in society.

This means undertaking the fundamental work to properly map out these constituencies and where they intersect in order to identify new workplace leaders and collective issues that we can tackle through members standing together on the shop floor. We can do this by building upon existing equality networks and the excellent activists in those networks but bringing those networks and activists to the members in the workplace as a starting point for equality organising rooted in the jobs that our members do.

2.2 NATIONAL EQUALITY BARGAINING

Many civil service policies, such as sickness trigger points, are inherently discriminatory. We can tackle these department by department, but we also need to be demanding that the CSEP policies which dictate departmental procedures are equality proofed and using campaigning plus possible legal test cases to challenge

where this isn't happening.

As with bargaining more broadly, we need to do this in a transparent and accountable way that links our activity at the bargaining table to that on the shop floor. We must campaign on the issues as we negotiate around them, shaping the direction of those talks through our collective power.

2.3 CHALLENGING MEDIA NARRATIVES ON “COMPETING RIGHTS”

The most common line of attack against equality is the false notion of competing rights. This includes the decades-old propaganda that recruiting BAME and migrant workers is “positive discrimination” against white people, and more recently the notion that the rights of women and those of trans and non-binary people are at odds. The latter is particularly insidious in that whilst it is being driven and funded by the right-wing media, the American religious right and far-right groups as an anti-LGBT+ wedge issue, some on the left are repeating the same divisive rhetoric.

As trade unionists and socialists, we believe that an injury to one is an injury to all. An attack on one equality area is an attack on equality itself and will harm our members inside and out of the workplace. We must be proactive and unapologetic in speaking up against them in all circumstances.

2.4 ANTI-FASCISM AND ANTI-RACISM AT THE CENTRE

The union needs to take a proactive stance against fascism, working with anti-fascist organising groups but also directly mobilising members. We ought to directly block and challenge fascist mobilisations, provide

stewarding which puts the safety of attendees first, and provide political education to expose the bankruptcy of fascist ideas. Beyond the far-right we must also proactively take a stand against racist ideas that pervade society and institutional racism in government.

3 BUILDING THE UNION

PCS's membership is in crisis. The union has a target of achieving 200,000 members by 2020 yet has fewer members now than when it set that target. Cuts to the civil services, currently spear-headed by the aggressive office closure programme, are a key part of this reduction. However, PCS faces the same challenges as other unions in a changing workplace environment, with the age demographic of the membership not necessarily reflecting that of the workforce. Meeting this challenge head on will require several measures:

3.1 COMPREHENSIVE SUBSCRIPTION REFORM

PCS has the lowest subscription rates of any union in the TUC, with a progressive system of rates based on salary. However, the cap is set too low and means that members at higher grades are paying a lower proportion of their wages than those at the lower grades.

We need a comprehensive review of subscription rates to ensure that they are set at an appropriate level to ensure that we can attract the greatest number of members at the lowest salary levels in the civil and public sector and working for on-site contractors, ensure the financial security of the union, and are fair to members across the pay ranges, so that some members do not pay a significantly greater proportion of their salary than other members.

This will also give more flexibility to ring fence more income for the Fighting Fund and to not have to raise subs above pay increases.

3.2 ACTIVIST WORKING GROUPS

PCS has a huge pool of activists across branches, with a wide variety of skills that the union doesn't fully utilise. This includes social media "super users," experienced organisers, and more, who can contribute to the efforts of the national union without necessarily being on the NEC or a GEC. These informal activist working groups would complement the work of executive committees and paid staff, helping to direct resources where they are needed and share best practice.

3.3 DEEP, SYSTEMATIC ORGANISING

We need to rebuild the union workplace by workplace, branch by branch, in a systematic way. Full time officers involved in these efforts should not seek to substitute themselves for the workforce, as in the previous pay ballots where their primary focus was getting out the vote. Instead, they should have a clear, long term task of identifying and building up workplace leaders who will then take on the tasks like getting the vote out.

PCS needs to develop realistic metrics of how well organised or not a workplace is and provide support accordingly, rather than deploying staff reactively based on arbitrary targets.

3.4 NEW APPROACHES TO NEGOTIATING

There is currently a void between the union's organising work and its bargaining work. We can strengthen both by bridging that gap and recognising that our ability to make gains at the negotiating table is fundamentally predicated on the leverage we hold as a result of being well organised.

We need to end the practice of negotiations in confidence and move towards open negotiations which hold both the negotiators and the employer accountable. We also need to look at how we can use more open negotiations to improve our campaigning, with agitation and campaigning on the shop floor throughout the process. In this way, the members can proactively shape the product of talks rather than waiting to be mobilised in response to the final product that is offered.

3.5 EDUCATION AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

A whole generation of experienced union activists are approaching retirement, whilst redundancies from office closures are removing many more. This is stripping many branches of valuable experiences and leaving newer reps in a sink or swim situation.

The main task for any good organiser is to continually replace themselves, by building up new workplace leaders. PCS needs to do this systematically, demystifying its structures and sweeping aside barriers in order to ensure that all our activists receive the education they need to take up the mantle as their predecessors leave the union.

4 FOR AN ACCOUNTABLE, TRANSPARENT, DEMOCRATIC UNION STRUCTURE

PCS's full-time apparatus is far removed from its lay membership. This is not a fault of individuals amongst the union staff but a structural issue due to the way that the union is set up. As an organisation which believes that ours should be a lay-led union, with members firmly in the driving seat, we propose to address this as follows:

4.1 WORKERS' REPRESENTATIVES ON A WORKER'S WAGE

The material interests of workers and the employer are different, and fundamentally opposed. Whilst all who work for the union should earn a wage they can live on, they should not be on amounts which put them closer to the bosses they negotiate with than to the workers they represent.

Any IL candidates elected to full time positions will take a wage tied to the average wage of PCS members, and will return the rest of their salary to the union's Fighting Fund.

4.2 FOSTERING ACCOUNTABILITY

Union members should be able to elect all of those who negotiate on their behalf, including full time as well as lay officials. Where those officials are deemed to not be carrying out the mandate they were given, members should have the right to recall them.

We argue for rule changes that will extend the election of full time officials beyond the General Secretary and

Assistant General Secretary, introduce a mechanism to recall any elected full time officers, and to create a safeguard so that representational powers and duties of the General Secretary, if delegated, can only be handed down to elected officers.

4.3 PUTTING LAY REPS IN CHARGE OF STAFF DEPLOYMENT

Currently, the General Secretary has control over the deployment of PCS staff, which in turn is delegated within the management hierarchy. We must remove this control and puts it in the hands of the National Executive Committee. This will allow lay reps elected by members to steer how the union's resources are used.

4.4 MAKING PCS STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES ACCESSIBLE AND TRANSPARENT

Many of the union's internal processes are shrouded in unnecessary secrecy and/or complicated by excessive bureaucracy. We need a reform of processes so that they are transparent, so that any PCS member can easily find the process and appropriate forms on the union's website, and so that whilst full time officials support the process they cannot act as a barrier or a hindrance to them proceeding in a timely fashion, in accordance with the will of members.

4.5 RANK AND FILE CONTROL OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION

In order to undertake a ballot for industrial action, branches have to seek permission from the union's National Disputes Committee (NDC). The process also

requires sign off by an unelected National Officer before being considered by the NDC.

We argue for reforms whereby industrial action ballots can be agreed and authorised by lay members at the appropriate level (e.g. the local branch) so that members wanting to take action over an issue they care about cannot be blocked by the bureaucracy of the union.

4.6 DEVOLVED DELEGATE CONFERENCES

Conference is the centrepiece of the union's democracy, where all branches can send delegates to debate and vote on policy. However, where many of the political decisions that affect our members in the different nations of the UK are devolved, there is no such devolution in PCS policy making. The union must establish devolved conferences that can properly consider and set policy on such matters.

5 POLITICS

Our union cannot remain neutral on political questions. Not only does politics have a direct impact on the job we do, on whether our jobs are secure, on the pay rise we are offered, and so on, it also shapes our lives as working class people and the communities that we live in. Racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and ableism are rooted in the dominant politics of our society, and as a class we need to have an answer to that.

5.1 PUTTING POLITICS IN MEMBERS' HANDS

The PCS Parliamentary Group does great work lobbying on members' behalf, and we should see this continue. However, this is often far removed from members and not as well publicised as it could be. We need to ensure members hear of this activity and see what we are pushing for through this work. But we should also put politics directly into the hands of branches and look seriously at how we can use protest and direct action to put pressure on MPs who are acting against PCS members' interests.

5.2 FOR AGREEMENTS, NOT UNDERSTANDINGS

A Labour government with the policy platform it established under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership is in the interests of PCS members, particularly in comparison to successive previous governments. The party has made a number of statements about what they would do when in power that benefits us, but of course if they were to get elected on such a platform there would be immense

pressure on them to act in favour of different interests. The union should seek to secure concrete agreements on policy positions the party will announce when they take power.

5.3 No SHORTCUTS: BEYOND PARTY POLITICS

Regardless of which government is in power, or how friendly to our interests they may be, PCS needs to have a strategy to build our own independent power and to be able to press our interests where they are in opposition to those of any government. Our political, organising and bargaining strategies must be linked and geared towards building this power base.