

SOCIALIST APPEAL



PCS BULLETIN

ISSUE 6

PCS NATIONAL STRIKE COORDINATION IS KEY!

PCS Socialist Appeal supporters

Over the past few months, our union – PCS – has moved into action against the cost-of-living crisis plaguing our members, and against the Tories' ruinous austerity agenda.

PCS members have responded en masse to the call to strike, with over 130,000 civil servants and public sector workers taking part in the union's walk-outs. Even the government's scabbing efforts have failed to dampen the impact of this action.

Significantly, in both the initial ballots and subsequent reballots, the union's average national turnout beat the 50% threshold imposed by Tory anti-union laws not just once but twice, something it had never done previous to that.

This shows the depth of feeling amongst civil service workers, who have been hammered for many years by degraded pay and conditions, as well as being made the target of scurrilous political attacks by Tory ministers looking to score cheap points with the gutter press.

Now, with new layers of workers – such as local government unions – joining Britain's strike wave, we must prepare for even fiercer battles.

Strengths

So far, our campaign over pay, jobs, and conditions has been centred around targeted action. Strikes have been solid in most departments, with well-attended pickets in most cases.

Even where departments were hit by the Tories' scabbing attempts, such as with the Border Force, the government's intervention has been so chaotic as to be laughable. It's hard to imagine them feeling happy about army personnel allegedly turning up drunk during this scabbing operation, after all!

The strength of our struggle is reflected in the recent national reballot



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result. Although a few employer areas failed to meet the turnout threshold, the overall picture nationally is one of an increased 'Yes' vote for strike action.

88% of members backed walkouts this time, compared to 86% before, with a similar national turnout of 52%.

The results reveal a slightly uneven picture when it comes to turnout. In particular, the DWP - which just got over the threshold in the initial ballot - unfortunately dipped below it this time around. Members are clearly frustrated by this, but the mood is still there for a fight; a focused reballot therefore has every chance of succeeding.

As to why there was unevenness, this picture is somewhat complex. Some departments are historically less organised than others, and therefore

more work has to be put in to get the vote out. In others, reports of absence may explain lower turnout.

Generally, however, we have every reason to be positive despite the small setbacks. If the Tories thought our mood to fight would have fizzled away, these results show just how wrong they are.

Indeed, reports indicate that many workers in departments where little organisation existed before, such as the Passport Office, have taken the chance to join the union with enthusiasm. These new layers will help by swelling our ranks and bolstering our forces.

Sectarianism

Unfortunately, alongside these developments, pernicious sectarianism has

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been rearing its head inside the union again recently.

There are certainly elements of the strike that could be strengthened, and no doubt this will be the focus of debate at Conference and more broadly. This is both right and proper.

But some groups – such as the Socialist Party – have seized upon these potential criticisms as a pretext for making unprincipled attacks on the Left Unity leadership during the recent NEC elections.

Despite the vitriol, this alliance failed to capitalise in any significant way. Nevertheless, rule-or-ruin approaches to intra-union debates can do much harm even when they fail to produce significant electoral results.

An open and comradely discussion about strategy and policy is always desirable. But it is impossible to have a genuine debate when one side insists on exaggerating and distorting its opponents words, in pursuit of its own narrow, short-term interests.

Simply put, such divisive behaviour is no way to win a strike. In fact, it plays right into the hands of the employers. For workers to win, such sectarian antics must be brought to an end immediately.

Unity

Overall, it is clear that PCS members are prepared to continue the fight. What is needed now is to mobilise for an escalation of the struggle, making use of the clear determination that remains for this fight.

This can start by strengthening our strike activity itself, by calling longer and sharper strikes in multiple departments at a time. The key departments identified by the union in its last round of strikes remain, as before, high priority for this strategy.

Similarly, PCS' current policy of unified strike action shows the way forward. Existing efforts to coordinate action with other unions should be stepped up in this



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next period – particularly in the rest of the public sector, with local government, teaching, and health unions all looking to strike.

In particular, it is notable that the local government unions are all preparing to ballot their members at present, with a view to striking against their own risible pay offer. These workers are natural allies - their fight is our fight!

Linking our struggles is the best way to strengthen them, and the only way to prevent the Tories from picking off unions one by one, as has happened in the battle over NHS pay.

Furthermore, on the basis of a mass campaign of coordinated action across the trade union movement, we could go beyond just winning concessions

here and there. This government, far from being as strong as it would like to pretend, is in fact almost comically weak.

Organised around a bold socialist programme, a tsunami of strikes could topple the crisis-ridden Tories, reverse the attacks on pay and conditions, and even overturn the bankrupt capitalist system that lies behind the employers' offensive.

As each day passes, more and more members of our class are preparing to fight against the constant stealing-away of their livelihoods and futures. They are looking to the current struggles for inspiration.

As it has been in the past, PCS is in a prime position to lead the charge and give the whole labour movement an example to follow. ■

**ARE YOU A
COMMUNIST?
THEN GET ORGANISED.**



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A... CIVIL SERVANT

Working in the department I'm based in, the pressure on the head of every worker is immense. This starts with the fact that there aren't enough workers for the job, so a lot of work falls onto the shoulders of the people who are there.

Many of my co-workers are stressed, working late into the night in order to keep up with the amount of work given to them. I've even received emails sent on Sundays, indicating that staff on a 9-to-5 Monday-to-Friday job are being forced to work for part of their weekend in order to keep up.

Many projects with completion targets of a few weeks have instead taken several months to finish.

When I fell badly behind with work several years ago, I raised issues about the level of work I was receiving. I was bluntly told by management that the amount of work and pace at which it needed to be completed were never going to slow down.

In theory, the flexi-time system we use means that working over hours one day could result in a shorter day the next. In practice, many workers I know have rarely claimed this time, as the amount of work they receive means they are rarely able to.

Although my contract is permanent, many of the staff I work with are agency workers – this lets the state save costs. It also serves the purpose of dividing the

workers into a two-tier system. Agency workers tend not to join a union, and stand in a precarious position in relation to their job.

Due to the short-term nature of their contracts, agency workers are often ignored by permanent staff. While on probation, I was subject to much of the same treatment.

Once colleagues found out I had been made permanent, I noticed that they were far more willing to hold conversations with me. I don't blame my co-workers for this – there's not much of a point in trying to establish a friendly relationship with people who could leave at very short notice.

Our reward for overworking ourselves increasingly looks like being made to go hungry. The real wages of civil servants have fallen for over a decade. Tens of thousands no longer earn enough to meet their needs.

In the last few months, a close colleague of mine has been forced to skip meals in order to make ends meet. They have therefore often been tired, hungry, and sluggish at work.

Although the Tories' planned cull of 91,000 civil servants has been abandoned, the threat of future job losses remains.

We're not taking it lying down, however. In response to the government's attacks on our jobs, pay and pensions, my union, PCS, has moved into action.

This has involved 130,000 workers across 130 departments taking strike action. The government, in order to weaken the strike, has resorted to all kinds of dirty tactics, including attempting to intimidate and mislead workers.

For example, under existing law, we are not obliged to tell our employer that we are planning to strike, and can keep that to ourselves until we actually walk out to form pickets.

Yet some departments have put tremendous pressure on their workforces despite this, instead stating that they should tell their employer early on the strike day or beforehand. This allows them to plan around absences and minimise disruption.

Despite these attempts to undermine us, however, tens of thousands have joined PCS since the national strikes began. A new layer of young militant workers has emerged, many of whom are becoming advocates and reps. My union branch's recent AGM saw its attendance increase tenfold compared with last year!

Civil servants were once one of the most privileged layers of the working class, serving as the administrators of the capitalist state. Any such privileges have long since gone, ground away by years of attacks.

Now there is nothing short of a bold, angry and militant spirit amongst wide layers of civil servants. I think we'll rise to the challenge, and make the government regret picking a fight with us! ■

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Tories are the political representatives of big business. As defenders of capitalism, they are the sworn enemies of the working class.

Neither do we have trust in Keir Starmer and the right-wing Labour leadership, who are taking the party back to Blairism.

The capitalist system is in a complete impasse. It cannot be reformed. It must be overthrown.

We are fighting for bold socialist policies to defend workers and challenge the capitalist system.

- Answer the cost-of-living crisis with a £15 per hour minimum wage. For a sliding (rising) scale of wages, with increases in pay, pensions, and benefits automatically linked to prices.
- If the bosses say they can't afford this, we say: Open up the books! Let the working class and the labour movement see the accounts! If firms plead bankruptcy, they should not be bailed out, but nationalised under workers' control.
- For a fully publicly-owned and free health service, under workers' control and management. Reverse all privatisation and outsourcing. All private health and care services must be nationalised without compensation, and integrated into the NHS.
- Fight the climate catastrophe and inflation with expropriation and socialist planning. Nationalise the energy monopolies, big supermarket chains, and distributors, without compensation.

■ Ban evictions and cancel housing debts. Give local authorities the power to cap rents at affordable levels. And bring empty properties and the assets of the big landlords and management companies under public control.

■ For a mass programme to build a million council houses a year. Nationalise the land, construction companies, and banks to provide the resources to accomplish this.

■ To fight job cuts and unemployment, work should be shared out without any loss of pay, in order to lower the hours of the working week.

■ Repeal the anti-trade union laws. No to class compromise. All union officials to be regularly elected, with the right of immediate recall by the membership. Officials to receive no more than the average wage of a skilled worker.

■ Fight for the real emancipation of women. Remove all barriers to women working: provide free nurseries, after-school childcare, and care for the elderly. End all forms of discrimination. Equal pay for work of equal value.

■ Abolish the relics of privilege and feudalism: the monarchy and the House of Lords. The assets of the parasitic landlord class and aristocracy should be expropriated for the public good.

■ Scrap tuition fees and student rents. Free education and full maintenance grants for all. End marketisation – kick the profiteers out of education. Put staff in control in schools and universities.

■ Many small businesses are faced with bankruptcy – squeezed not only by the banks, but by the big monopolies. By nationalising the banks we can supply these small businesses with the lifeline of guaranteed low-interest credit.

■ The financial resources required to fight the crisis must not come from increased taxes or more austerity, but through the nationalisation of the banks and finance houses. Rather than a 'wealth tax', we call for the expropriation of the monopolies.

■ Instead of building up the national debt through government borrowing, the money needed should be obtained entirely from expropriating the accumulated profits of big business and the billionaires.

■ No to austerity! Reverse the cuts! The working class must not pay for this crisis!

■ For a mass campaign to bring down this criminal Tory government and do away with this rotten system!

This crisis does not just exist in Britain alone, but is felt internationally. A Socialist Federation of Britain should be linked to a World Socialist Federation, in order to plan resources internationally for the benefit of all. This would put an end to the brutality of capitalism and allow humanity to begin solving the urgent issues of climate change, disease, and poverty that face our planet.

If you agree with our programme here, get involved with Socialist Appeal in PCS and help us fight for a better, socialist world! ■

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN US

Marxists are class conscious fighters for socialism. As Marx explained, we should be regarded as the most resolute section of the working class.

Marxism arms us with a conscious understanding of society and the class struggle. Only by absorbing this outlook can we lay the foundation for the overthrow of capitalism.

For us, Marxism is the science of social revolution and therefore needs to be studied.

Our tendency therefore stresses the need to educate and train our members in Marxist theory and the struggles of the working class. This gives us considerable advantages. First and foremost, Marxist theory is a guide to action, a guide to the class struggle.

As isolated individuals we can do very little. However, organised together

we can achieve a considerable amount. Organisation allows us to concentrate our forces to much greater effect. Based on correct policies and perspectives, we can intervene effectively in the class struggle.

The present reformist leadership of the labour movement has led to one retreat after another. In practice they accept capitalism and its limits.

The leadership of the Labour Party is now in the grip of the right wing, who serve the interests of capitalism. This revival is due to the weakness of the left to act decisively, which in turn is a reflection of the weakness of reformism.

Likewise, the reformist trade union leadership has failed to meet the challenges we face. They are lagging completely behind the objective situation. For them, it is simply 'business as usual'.

But the crisis of capitalism is posing massive challenges in front of the working

class. We will fight shoulder to shoulder with those prepared to fight. In doing so, we will point to the future needs of the movement.

Our task is to provide the necessary clarity for the struggle. Capitalism cannot be reformed; it needs to be consciously overthrown by the working class in Britain and internationally. That is why we are internationalists and proud to be part of the International Marxist Tendency ■

