

PCS prepares for cuts battle Fighting leadership re-elected

John McNally
PCS vice president,
personal capacity

In the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), the left-led Democracy Alliance national executive committee has been re-elected with an increased majority. This demonstrates, for those willing to take notice, that when workers are offered a campaigning alternative to the attacks of pro-big business Labour and coalition governments they will be prepared to fight to defend their jobs, services and conditions.

This is a solid endorsement of a campaigning, left leadership that over the past decade has transformed PCS into a union that has become a beacon for workers des-

perate to challenge the calculated destruction of the public sector and the race to the bottom.

Members have again rejected the do-nothing collaborationist "4themembers" group, a cynical re-branding of the despised "Moderates", who failed in an attempted coup to remove Mark Serwotka as general secretary ten years ago.

Members and activists have been fully involved in the development of the union's campaign strategies. While PCS members face unprecedented challenges, they can have confidence in a leadership that always starts from a simple principle - the union must defend jobs, conditions and services using all campaign methods and never being afraid to use industrial action.



Striking to defend jobs and fighting for decent pay photo Paul Mattsson

Defending trade unionism on London Underground

An RMT member

In a ballot for strike action to defend two transport union RMT reps, the result was overwhelmingly in support. A turnout of 46% (higher than the mayoral election turnout of 44% Boris!) voted 66% in favour to defend Arwyn Thomas and Eamon Lynch, sacked by London Underground (LUL) for being effective trade unionists.

Our train members have already taken four days of strike action (seven on the Northern and Bakerloo lines). They are not irresponsible militants as portrayed in the press, they are good trade unionists who are prepared to take whatever action is necessary to get their two brothers back at work.

We call on our brothers and sisters in Aslef, to respect our picket lines, if

they pick off our reps they will come for your reps next.

A recent article in the Evening Standard shows the splits in the Con-Dem government. There is pressure on London Mayor Boris Johnson to meet with RMT and settle the dispute. Are LUL willing to flout the Employment Tribunals which found in Eamon and Arwyn's favour? We demand their reinstatement.

Six days of strike action are planned, starting on 16 May. We will encourage large pickets at every depot and we call on every member to rally to defend our members and our unions.

• As we go to press the RMT have suspended the strike action after LUL agreed to reemploy Eamon Lynch. There will be further discussions aimed at resolving the unfair dismissal, in advance of his full employment tribunal.

Crucial time for Saltend dispute

Alistair Tice

On 6 May, a mass meeting of the Redhall engineering construction workers, 400 of whom have been locked out for eight weeks from working on the bio-ethanol plant at BP Saltend near Hull, voted again to reject an increased financial settlement in order to continue the fight for their jobs.

At the meeting, Socialist Party member Keith Gibson, on behalf of the lockout committee, described the COT3 collective bargaining agreement as an "employers' charter" which if signed up to by the trade unions would have prevented any worker from taking any legal action, employment tribunal or further protest against BP/Viverno.

The meeting also agreed to call on the industry national shop stewards' forum to support a rolling programme of weekly national strikes in support of the locked-out workers.

Redhall workers lobbied the national stewards' meeting in Leeds on 9 May. The previous emergency meeting held two weeks earlier had

unanimously agreed to call a national day of action if the dispute had not been settled by this scheduled next meeting.

Unfortunately, the stewards voted 27 to 10 against taking any industrial action in support of the locked-out workers. This was due to the pressure of the trade union bureaucracy who don't support unofficial and illegal strike action.

There is also a fear of job losses, and a refusal to acknowledge the industry-wide implications of this employers' attack on the trade unions, the TUPE transfer agreement and the NAECI national agreement. Whilst the stewards did pledge financial support, this will not win the dispute.

The Redhall workers have struggled heroically for over two months against financial hardship, company lies and a media black-out, heavy-handed policing and use of Section 14 of the Public Order Act. The workers will be discussing how to proceed with this dispute at report back meetings this week, in the light of the national stewards' refusal to give meaningful support.

Poverty minimum wage

A Labour Research Department publication has stated that the TUC welcomed the government's confirmation that the National Minimum Wage (NMW) for workers aged 21 and over will go up by 2.5%. This really is the TUC clutching at straws because this percentage increase amounts to a 15p increase in the hourly rate from October taking the NMW to £6.08.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said that the increases showed that the government "understands the NMW must remain an important part of working life". He apparently went on to point out that there was evidence that workers on the NMW spent all their pay rises where they work and live.

Someone should point out to Brendan Barber that on the current level of the NMW and the pay rise workers could not afford to travel far to spend it. The closest Brendan Barber comes to criticising what amounts to a drop in the living standards for those on the NMW,

given price rises, is when he called the proposed rises "modest".

Barber of course does not criticise the current level of the NMW because it was his New Labour friends in government that maintained it at a poverty level. I don't recall generous increases when they were in power during a so-called boom.

If this so-called increase for 21 year-olds and over is not a disgrace enough, the rate for young workers, - 18 to 20 year olds and 16 to 17 year olds will only rise by 1.2% and 1.1% respectively. For many all capitalism can offer is legalised poverty, where young workers are valued less and exploited more than older workers.

If Barber and most of the other trade union leaders won't lead the fightback against the Con-Dems or any other government that seeks to place the burden of the crisis of capitalism on our shoulders, then they should stand aside for those who will.

Mark Evans

In brief

Connexions

Connexions staff, members of Union employed by Birmingham city council, staged a half day strike on 4 May. This was in protest at the cuts proposed by the council's ruling Con-Dem coalition which place a question mark over the future viability of the service.

A lively protest was staged outside the city centre office at lunchtime attended by about 100 workers whose spirits were kept up by socialist musicians singing on the picket line. The protest was followed by a short march and rally. I spoke to Simone, one of the workers who agreed that there was no party worth voting for in the elections because all the major parties supported swingeing cuts to public services and that working people needed a political party of their own. She also agreed that the TUC should have used the 26 March demonstration as a springboard for a more concerted campaign and that a one-day public sector strike was needed.

Clive Walder,
Birmingham Socialist Party

Anti-strike laws

Britain already has draconian regulations to prevent workers from striking. Tory backbencher Dominic Raab, however, sponsored a private members' bill making it harder still - strike ballots would need to have at least 50% participation of a union's membership before being legally accepted. The move was defeated. However, a noisy group of Tories (including London mayor Boris Johnson and the Daily Telegraph) want prime minister Cameron to adopt the orphaned bill and push it through with government support. Of course, Cameron asking for a 50% turnout is ironic. During the AV debate, he was adamant in supporting a voting system that regularly elects governments, councils and MPs on far lower participation. The trade unions should fight for their members' democratic rights by campaigning to scrap the anti-union laws.

Sexist sacking

On Saturday 14 May at 10am transport union RMT members and supporters will be leafleting the Original Tour bus company at Piccadilly circus station. This is over the sacking of RMT member Zara Senkan. Zara has suffered from sexist discrimination for years. She got practically no overtime and terrible shifts whilst her male colleagues got regular overtime and decent shifts over a period of two years. When she finally complained and entered a grievance she was swiftly dismissed on the pretence that she was disrespectful to managers. The RMT are taking her case to tribunal for sex discrimination and unfair dismissal. We will be organising more leafleting soon.

Steve Hedley,
RMT regional organiser
London Transport Region

nationalshopstewardsnetwork
conference 2011
strike together
to defend jobs and pensions
save our NHS
stop cuts and privatisation
fight for the right to strike
fight the anti-union laws, stop blacklisting & victimisation

Speakers include: Alex Gordon RMT President Janice Godrich PCS President Keith Gibson Saltend Lock-Out Committee Frank Morris Blacklisted Olympics Worker

Saturday June 11th
11:30am - 4:00pm
South Camden Community School,
London NW1 1RG
Registration: will open at 10:30am
Email: info@shopstewards.net

For bulk supplies of this leaflet, contact info@shopstewards.net

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