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# Unions announce national rally to commemorate 40th anniversary of GCHQ ban

PCS and TUC to hold event in Cheltenham on January 27

Trade unions are next month holding a rally to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GCHQ trade union ban.

The joint Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union and Trade Union Congress (TUC) event in [Cheltenham on January 27](#) will see hundreds of people gathering to mark one of the movement's most important victories.

In 1984 Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government banned trade unions at the Government Communications Headquarters citing security concerns.

Most workers quit their unions, but fourteen refused as a matter of principle and were sacked.

The campaign to reinstate them was led by PCS's forebear, the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA), and saw speakers travel more than 150,000 miles and attend more than 350 events, including annual marches through the town centre, to keep the issue in the public eye.

Their persistence paid off when, in 1997, the newly-elected Labour government lifted the ban and they were able to return to work.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "Margaret Thatcher's decision to ban trade unions at GCHQ was part of her attack on unions in general but these workers weren't prepared to accept it.

"Their principled decision not to give up their trade union membership saw them pay a massive price.

"Now, forty years on, as we celebrate their courage and determination, a different Conservative government is attacking trade union rights - this time they're

introducing Minimum Service Levels in a naked attack on our right to strike.

“Our message today is the same as it was in 1984 – we shall fight this injustice for however long it takes.”

TUC general secretary Paul Nowak said: “Forty years ago, at GCHQ workers were banned from belonging to a union. After a long campaign by the workers and their unions, they won and were reinstated – but attacks on unions continue.

“The new Strikes Act restricts the fundamental right of any worker to take industrial action to defend their pay and conditions. This is an unprecedented attack on the right to strike – it’s unworkable, undemocratic and likely illegal.

“On Saturday 27 January, 40 years on, unions will march through Cheltenham to commemorate the GCHQ victory and to demonstrate continued defiance against minimum service level regulations and attacks on the right to strike.

“We will once again show a Conservative government that the full force of the union movement stands behind any worker sacked for trade union activity.”

Mark Serwotka, Paul Nowak and UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea have already been confirmed as speakers on the day, with others expected to be added soon.

The surviving members of the original campaign – Alan Rowland, Robin Smith, Brian Johnson and Gareth Morris – and their families will be attending as guests of honour. A pamphlet and commemorative film is also being produced.

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