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‘We must fight the far-right,’ warns PCS leader at TUC meeting

PCS joined trade unionists from across the movement at an event to discuss the rise of the far-right and ways of fighting it.

The meeting on 20 February at the TUC headquarters in London heard how the last decade has witnessed a resurgence of the far-right across the globe.

PCS general secretary Fran Heathcote, the first speaker, said that the far-right in the UK has been “emboldened” by politicians like Rishi Sunak and Suella Braverman through their “hateful and incendiary language”.

She said that “conditions are ripe for the far right to continue growing and inevitably for asylum seekers and refugees to bear the brunt”.

“When refugees and asylum seekers are likened to a “swarm” and a “hurricane”, the inevitable consequence is the total dehumanisation of some of the most desperate people on the planet,” she said. “Throw in a catastrophic cost of living crisis, the effects of which have been felt by so many, then you have a deadly mix that means there is fertile ground for the far right to grow.”

As well as pointing out how integral the PCS anti-racism and anti-fascism strategy is to the work of rooting our racism in our workplaces and in wider society, Fran recalled how PCS has taken a stand against the government’s appalling treatment of asylum seekers.

But, she told the meeting, PCS could not rest on its laurels, so it set about to create an alternative vision by working closely with Care4Calis. What resulted was our Safe Passage policy proposal, “a humane alternative” that “would issue asylum seekers with a travel visa to enter the UK and they would then enter the asylum process as normal”.

Far-right on the rise everywhere

“Wherever you look, the far-right and authoritarianism are on the rise,” said Stevie Nolan from the political education organisation Belfast Trademark, pointing out that far-right parties are entering local government and regional and national parliaments across Europe in particular.

Noting the far-right menace in Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and Hungary, he added that the “far-right are the government in Italy”, Marine Le Pen’s far-right party “are destined for government in France over the next few years”, and that the German neo-Nazi party AfD are polling high for upcoming elections (the party was recently revealed to have held a conference with extremists to discuss the possibility of the mass expulsion of non-ethnic Germans from Germany).

“The question for us is to what extent the main establishment parties in Europe will ally themselves with far-right forces and fascist parties to maintain their power and their assault on workers,” he said. “What kind of populist appeals will they make like ‘Stop the Boats’ to recruit members of our class – the working-class – to their twisted vision of the world.”

The monster is back

TUC general secretary Paul Nowak said there is a need for trade unions to “put the fight against racism and fascism at the heart of our work” and to work together with a wider coalition of community organisations, faith-groups and anti-fascist groups to tackle the problem.

He explained that the resurgent far-right can be undermined if we tackle the root causes of their rise. “Falling living standards, stagnant wages, insecure jobs, and rising inequality have all feed the politics of hate,” he said. “And what’s before you think about the impact of cuts to our schools, our hospitals and other public services.”

Jose Antonio Moreno from the Comisiones Obreras, Spain’s largest trade union federation, said the “monster” of fascism has returned. To be anti-fascist, he reminded the audience, is to be a democrat.

Recounting Italian fascism and Spain’s own history of dictatorship under General Franco, he said that “trade unions have to be the first and traditional enemy of fascism”. That necessitates a coordinated responses between trade unions across the globe, he added.

Other speakers included the trade union activist Amardeep Singh and TUC Race Relations Committee member Gargi Bhattacharyya, both of whom discussed the links between the fight for Palestinian freedom and the struggle against fascism around the globe.

You can [read the PCS anti-racism anti-fascism strategy](#) and many more articles on combating racism in the workplace on PCS Knowledge.