

5 April 2024

# Defending our rights - past, present, and future

PCS was at the forefront of a huge gathering of trade unionists who marched through Cheltenham to mark the 40th anniversary of the infamous GCHQ trade union ban and to show opposition to yet more anti-trade union legislation.

Our joint PCS/TUC march and rally, which took place near the home of GCHQ on 27 January, marked the 40th anniversary of the trade union ban there that sparked 13 years of campaigning before it was lifted by Labour in 1997. The event also showed our movement's vehement opposition to new restrictions imposed by the government to limit workers' ability to strike.

The march - led by PCS, the sacked GCHQ workers and their families, the TUC and union leaders - followed a similar route to that taken by the workers on their annual marches in Cheltenham, a key part of their inspirational campaign to overturn the ban. PCS vice president and South West TUC chair Hannah David welcomed protestors and introduced speakers from the top of an FBU fire engine.

Numerous high-profile trade unionists spoke at the post-march rally, hosted by then PCS General Secretary-elect Fran Heathcote. Outgoing general secretary Mark Serwotka praised the sacked workers' bravery and used his final speech to declare that PCS is launching a judicial review against the anti-strike MSLs law.

"GCHQ workers said no and won back their right to union membership," he said. "We all, as a movement, say no to banning the right to strike and we will prevail."

## **Movement 'revived'**

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak thanked Mark for his contribution as PCS leader. To the government, he said: "The trade union movement has beaten you once, and we'll beat you again... repeal the anti-strike legislation."

One of the sacked GCHQ workers, Gareth Morris, told the packed rally that while their story had ended in victory, thanks to the support of so many, workers in many sectors now face attacks from this government and the MSLs law "must be

resisted". He said: "We stood up for our rights as a matter of principle 40 years ago, and you are doing the same now."

Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham said the GCHQ workers were told the lie that their union membership undermined national security. "I say to the government... you are the real threat to national security," she said. She called on the Labour party to repeal the law on day one in government, if elected.

RMT leader Mick Lynch thanked activists for "reviving the trade union moment". He said we need to proactively "use the right to strike" and not just protect that right.

### **Border Force members**

A number of speakers represented sectors impacted by the new law, which includes thousands of our members in the Home Office.

PCS border security rep Trevor Harris said the regulations affecting Border Force members are not about ensuring 'minimum service levels', because they have decreed those levels must remain the same on a strike day as a non-strike day: "In other words, the government has removed the right to strike from our members in Border Force," he said.

"Just like the abhorrent small boats pushback scheme, the appalling Rwanda plan, the attacks on pensions and threats of job cuts, PCS is not going to sit back and let this new attack on our members' human rights go without a fight," he said. He added that their members have shown how effective unions can be by taking strategic action that led directly to members winning concessions last year.