

20 May 2024

# PCS is a beacon of hope, Fran Heathcote tells PCS group conferences

PCS will never stop being a “beacon of hope for our members and people around the world,” our general secretary Fran Heathcote has told delegates to our group conferences which are taking place in Brighton.

## 5-minute read

Ahead of [our annual delegate conference](#) which starts tomorrow afternoon, Fran has been sharing a powerful message at multiple group conferences. She looked back on 12 months in which our members and reps have been “fighting the government on every front in their relentless assault on your living standards. And it’s a fight we’ve been winning,” she said.

She praised and thanked members’ action as part of our national campaign, which “drew historic concessions from the government.”

“The pay remit was more than doubled and plans to cut your redundancy by a third were scrapped.”

Fran also lambasted the UK Government for trying to remove the right to strike itself, rather than addressing the material needs of workers on strike.

“It’s an astonishingly brazen attack on a fundamental human right,” she said.

“I can’t think of a more appropriate manifestation of the Tory’s ideological revulsion at the notion of organised labour than this.”

She highlighted how it’s our members in the Border Force who face the most severe restrictions of the lot, with strikes now required to have no impact on strike days, to “all intents and purposes is an outright ban on strike action.”

“Let’s not forget that these are the same workers lauded as heroes during the pandemic and were clapped by the prime minister on the doorstep of number

10," she said.

"The sacrifice of these members in the Border Force was rewarded with an insulting pay rise equivalent to just £4 per week."

She explained that is why we began legal proceedings and we were recently granted permission by the High Court to [pursue a judicial review of the government's decision to impose minimum service levels](#).

### **Brave GCHQ workers remembered**

Fran described how our members have faced similar threats before.

"40 years ago, Thatcher wanted to prevent workers at GCHQ from even being a member of a trade union. 14 brave workers stood firm and refused to relinquish this fundamental human right. After more than 10 years of campaigning across the trade union movement, led by the late Mike Grindley, the ban was finally lifted in 1997."

She said she was immensely proud that the GCHQ branch remains an important part of PCS.

### **Contempt for the most desperate**

Fran described her pride at our union's response to the government's plans to send refugees and asylum seekers to Rwanda and their "despicable plans to turn back boats in the Channel."

She said the Tories were "treating the most desperate people on the planet with some of the most callous and cruel policies I've ever seen."

She said "this decaying government" is using refugees as "political pawns in a game of chess that they're destined to lose."

"Rather than opening our arms to the desperate and the vulnerable, this rotten government wants to kick them onto a one-way flight to a country 4,000 miles away," she said.

"I couldn't be prouder to say that thanks to PCS, not a single flight containing a single asylum seeker has left for Rwanda."

She called for a "cast iron commitment from Labour that such cruelty will have no part of their government and policy programme."

## **Bold radical change**

Fran called on Labour to deliver bold and radical change after 14 years of Tory had “left this country in ruin, with people poorer, more hopeless and more miserable than ever.”

She said a Labour government should start by repealing every single piece of anti-union legislation. And “while they’re at it, they can fix the completely broken delegated pay system in the civil service which entrenches low pay and the inequalities within it.”

She said that while PCS is not affiliated to Labour, we won’t stop making these calls and others. And said that our members also deserve an inflation-proof pay rise because civil service wages are lower now than they were in 1975.

“The system isn’t just broken, it needs taking apart and rebuilding. And this should be a priority for an incoming Labour government.”

She also had a warning for Labour that: “Our class needs drastic change, with economic and industrial power put back in the hands of ordinary people.”

## **Importance of solidarity with Palestine**

Fran finished her speech by stressing the importance of Palestinian solidarity to PCS.

“I’m immensely proud that PCS has for many years led the calls demanding justice for the people of Palestine in Gaza and the West Bank,” she said.

“The resistance shown by our members working in departments that license the sale of weapons to Israel is inspirational.”

She said our demands are clear:

- stop the sale of arms
- enact an immediate and lasting ceasefire,
- and stop the killing.

She said that PCS would “never shy away from being the voice for Palestinian liberation and we will do so for as long as it takes.”

She concluded by saying that what our union has shown over the past 12 months is that for every issue, large and small, we are there fighting by our members’

side and fighting for what's right.

"As we look to the future, in what will be a new political era, we will never stop being that beacon of hope for our members and people around the world," she added.

Find out more about PCS conference on [our dedicated web page](#) and follow the latest on social media with the hashtag #PCSADC