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# **‘When we unite, there’s no stopping us’ - general secretary**

Fran Heathcote put unity and fraternity at the heart of her first speech to PCS national conference as our general secretary, as the delegate meeting opened in Brighton.

In presenting the union’s annual report she reflected on the victories of the past year – from national to local, and from public sector to outsourced areas – which have been achieved by members sticking together.

“What the past 12 months have shown more clearly than ever is that, when we unite, there’s no stopping us,” she said, echoing an earlier call for unity by newly-elected PCS President Martin Cavanagh.

Delegates were reminded that PCS’s national campaign forced the government to make historic concessions on pay and the civil service redundancy scheme last year.

On pensions Fran pledged “we will keep fighting to put an end to the great pensions robbery”.

And she added that PCS will resist the 70,000 job cuts reported to be coming to the civil service “with everything we’ve got”. The cuts plan shows a “desperate and decaying government that is using the livelihoods of our members in a pathetic pre-election gimmick”.

Fran ran through a list of localised disputes in which members had united to take action and won key improvements, including outsourced workers at ISS in BEIS, and OCS members in HMCTS and UK&I. She also mentioned members fighting back at The Pensions Regulator, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime, the National Museum of Wales Library, the CQC, Audit Wales, the DVLA, and MOJ Northern Ireland.

“That I’m able to present such a list is a testament to the effective action that we’ve taken,” said Fran.

The general secretary also addressed the latest national campaign ballot results for industrial action – action that has yet again been supported by members but in some areas will be blocked by this government’s anti-union laws. She said some employer area’s turnouts had nevertheless been disappointing, and said PCS needed to reflect – in a pragmatic, objective and comradely way – on where it can do things differently.

“Although the kettling of our movement poses a significant challenge, we can see it as an opportunity to improve how we organise,” she said.

This government is “terrified” by the gains unions have made in recent years and is now on the attack again with legislation to restrict the right to strike – one of the “gravest ever threats” to the movement. Fran said she was proud PCS was leading the fightback against the minimum service levels law. Referencing the struggle to reverse the sacking of 14 GCHQ union members in 1984, Fran said: “We won four decades ago, and we’ll resist and win again.”

Fran also reminded delegates of our union’s wider campaign work, including on refugees and asylum seekers, and the onslaught on Gaza.

And she said that under her leadership, PCS will also be the voice that “reminds the Labour Party of its purpose, and who they’re supposed to represent”.

She said it was a privilege to address delegates for the first time as the general secretary: “It’s an honour that members put their faith in me, and let me assure you, I won’t let you down. Building, growing and ultimately winning for members are the core principles that I believe in.

“Underpinning all of this is the need for unity.”