

3 July 2024

Celebrating historic campaigns at Tolpuddle

Come and join PCS for a family-friendly weekend of solidarity and celebration at the annual Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival (19-21 July) that includes a wide variety of debates, live music and entertainment.

PCS is marking the 40th anniversary of the GCHQ trade union ban at the festival with a screening of a new film. The screening of 'I Won't Sign' - a film commissioned by PCS to commemorate the ban, will take place at the Tolpuddle Village Hall on Friday, 19 July from 6pm - 7.30pm. This will include a Q&A session with PCS General Secretary, Fran Heathcote, senior national officer, Paul O'Connor and former deputy general secretary, Hugh Lanning, who was involved in the historic campaign to overturn the ban.

In 1984, the Thatcher government ordered all GCHQ workers to leave their trade unions or face dismissal. This marked the start of a 13-year campaign where a small group of brave staff and their unions commanded huge support throughout the movement. It saw 14 workers sacked and it eventually ended in 1997, when the new Labour government overturned the ban. Staff at GCHQ are now members of PCS.

Emergence of a movement

The Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival is an annual event held to celebrate the legacy of six farm labourers who in 1838 were arrested and sentenced to deportation after they dared to organise a union to fight for better wages. The outrage this caused in the UK once news of their punishment was publicised led to the emergence of a fully-fledged trade union movement in the UK. After two years the six martyrs were pardoned by the government and returned.

The festival is the perfect opportunity to bring these historic struggles, that both originated in the south west of England, together. As well as the screening, PCS will be involved in a host of activities over the festival weekend. Our stall will feature some special commemorative GCHQ badges and bags, which will be sold

to raise money for [the PCS fighting fund](#).

We will also be speaking to festival goers about our current campaigns and PCS General Secretary, Fran Heathcote is due to speak on the following panels:

Saturday 20 July

10.30am Palestine Solidarity Campaign - Tolpuddle Fringe Tent

11.30am Organising outsourced and migrant workers - Tolpuddle Fringe Tent

1pm Next steps for a new deal for working people - Martyrs' Marquee

2:45pm Supporting refugees (with Stand Up to Racism Dorset) - Organise Tent

Sunday 21 July

9.45am Social security is a trade union issue - Unite Tent

The festival culminates at 2pm on Sunday with the traditional big procession through the village, where PCS will join unions from across the movement to celebrate the Tolpuddle Martyrs' legacy.

[Book your Tolpuddle tickets.](#)

Read more about the [GCHQ campaign](#) and look at our [timeline of how it started](#) and what happened when.