

16 July 2024

King's Speech 2024 - what we can expect

PCS expects to hear Labour commitments to end the two-child benefit cap and strengthen workers' rights in the state opening of parliament on Wednesday.

King Charles will deliver a speech tomorrow (17) to mark the state opening of parliament. His speech will set out the legislative plans of the next Labour government.

During the general election campaign PCS published our key demands for a future government in the PCS Charter.

Among other demands, PCS is calling on Labour to return to national collective bargaining for the civil service and bring about pay restoration and an inflation-proofed pay rise. In addition, the new government must ensure there is a properly staffed civil service, that outsourced jobs are brought back in-house into the public sector, and that civil servants have pensions justice.

The new government must also overhaul Universal Credit to create a social security system which supports the individual and does not demonise those who cannot work - and take steps to make sure big business and the top 1% pay their fair share of tax.

PCS general secretary Fran Heathcote has called on prime minister Keir Starmer to "get around the table and work with us to put an end to endemic low pay, job insecurity, privatisation and Tory attacks on civil service pensions" and said that we "demand a government that values its own workforce after years of Tory neglect and destruction".

"PCS members, as the government's own workforce, will be watching the King's Speech very closely. The Labour Party, which was established by and for workers, must create real and positive change for workers, their families and communities through improved public services, not austerity or austerity-lite.

As a union that is not affiliated to the party, we will hold Keir Starmer's feet to the fire."

Watered down

Although the monarch delivers the King's speech, the government writes it, with Labour expected to reveal more than 35 new laws. Key proposals include new rules on smoking, planning law reforms, nationalisation of the railways, House of Lords reforms, and the creation of Great British Energy.

Many expect Labour to pass the new Employment Rights Bill within 100 days of Keir Starmer taking power. It's expected to include a ban on zero hour contracts and greater protections against unfair dismissal.

However, there are fears in the trade union movement that Keir Starmer, who has previously praised Margaret Thatcher and has reprimanded MPs for attending picket lines, may dilute or even discard his pledges on workers' rights over the course of this parliament.

Last year, Labour's 'A New Deal for Working People' – a policy paper agreed in 2021 which set out in detail how the party would strengthen workers' rights – was watered down significantly.

Recent reports have suggested that the deputy prime minister Angela Rayner, who has been leading on employment rights for Labour while in opposition, is already being sidelined in the new government. Just last week, Starmer himself told journalists in Washington that he will not accept pay demands from public sector unions for their members.

During last year's King's Speech, the Conservative government promised to rush through laws which would effectively criminalise strike action for thousands of our Home Office members, including border security staff in Border Force and workers in the Passport Office.

This time around PCS will be paying special attention to the workers' rights dimensions of the King's Speech as well as any announcements on social security reforms.

Labour are under pressure to end two-child benefit cap, a punitive Tory policy which restricts child tax credit and universal credit to the first two children in most households.

Liverpool Riverside Labour MP Kim Johnson tweeted this week that she would be “laying an amendment to the King’s Speech calling for the cap to scrapped - immediately lifting 250,000 children out of poverty”.