

17 July 2024

What the King's Speech could mean for PCS members

The UK Labour government has set out its first legislative programme in 15 years in a King's Speech that included plans to strengthen workers' rights, create a new Border Security Command, and to extend the right to equal pay.

PCS has welcomed the plans under the Employments Rights Bill to strengthen rights for working people and ban exploitative practices. PCS general secretary, Fran Heathcote said: "After 14 years of anti-union rhetoric and attacks on workers across sectors, it is refreshing today to see a new government committed to implementing rights from day one.

"We would urge Labour to liaise with unions urgently to ensure that workers across sectors are protected. Our union stands ready to work with Labour in government to ensure civil servants, outsourced workers and related bodies are protected, empowered and respected."

The union welcomes moves to update trade union legislation which would remove restrictions on trade union activity, including removing the previous government's minimum service levels which threatened the right to strike. We would also like to see the government go further in improving democracy for workers with the introduction of electronic balloting for statutory trade union ballots.

There will also be consultation on a draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill will enshrine in law equal pay rights for Black, Asian and ethnic minority people and disabled.

Making work pay

PCS notes that the UK government is committed to "making work pay" and acknowledges that real wage growth has been flat. PCS believes that the Labour government should lead by example by giving its own workforce inflation-proofed pay and pay restoration for the years of real-terms pay cuts our members have faced.

PCS is concerned there was no mention in legislative programme of reforming Universal Credit. Our members want to see a social security system with support at its heart. Universal Credit is a dangerously flawed system, and it is important that the government creates a system which supports the individual and does not demonise those who cannot work.

PCS wants to work with the UK government to ensure that its approach to getting people back in work is supportive rather than the kind of punitive, sanctions led regime that we saw under their predecessors.

We are disappointed that Labour hasn't committed to ending the two-child benefit cap, which would lift 250,000 children out of poverty. PCS supports Labour MP Kim Johnson's amendment to the King's Speech calling for the cap to be scrapped.

Much of the legislative programme covered plans for economic stability and growth. This includes a Budget Responsibility Bill that will legislate to ensure that all significant tax and spending changes are subject to an independent assessment by the Office for Budget Responsibility. The government cites the disastrous Liz Truss mini-budget as a need for introducing this fiscal lock. However, PCS is concerned that such caution should not come at the expense of the investment that our public services so desperately need.

Safe passage

PCS has welcomed the new UK government's scrapping of the previous government's wasteful and inhumane plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. As expected, a new Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill was announced that includes plans to establish a new Border Security Command and enhance counter terror powers to tackle people smugglers.

PCS has put forward a Safe Passage policy which has received broad support and would see boat crossings stopped in a humane and safe manner. We believe that this policy, along with the necessary investment the Home Office needs, will ensure that adequate support is given to those who are entering the UK and that asylum backlogs can be cleared.

There are a host of other plans which PCS will be looking at to determine the impact on government workers. These include the English Devolution Bill which will give local leaders new powers and duties to produce Local Growth Plans, and the setting up of Skills England which will take on several of the functions carried

out by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.