

10 September 2024

PCS fringe asks can Labour deliver a new age of workplace justice?

“It is our job as trade unionists to demand more from the Labour government and secure more for the working people we represent,” PCS General Secretary Fran Heathcote told delegates attending our fringe in Brighton today (10).

Our fringe asked if Labour can deliver a new age of workplace justice. Fran told the meeting that although we meet in a “very different political climate” following the election of a Labour government, the “legal situation is still built on the foundations laid by Thatcher.”

“This year marked 40 years since Margaret Thatcher banned workers from being trade union members at GCHQ. 1984 was also the year that the Miners’ Strike began and Thatcher was getting into her stride in attacking trade unions – or ‘the enemy within’ as she called us,” she said.

“Between 1980 and 1993, the Thatcher and Major governments introduced six acts of parliament to weaken trade unions and workers’ rights.”

Boost workers’ incomes

Fran said the Labour government could only achieve “its number one mission” of the highest sustained growth in the G7 unless it boosts the incomes of workers.

“A strong economy requires consumers with disposable income – not people whether in work or on benefits struggling to make ends meet,” she said.

“We should welcome the tearing up of the minimum service levels (legislation) that the last government brought in. We should welcome the move to end the ballot thresholds and other measures in the 2016 Trade Union Act. Because we know that stronger trade union rights mean workers can win a fairer share of the pie – and that’s good for them and good for the economy.”

She said that if Labour doesn’t deliver on key issues – like pay restoration, trade union rights and jobs, then there are warning signs for them.

She rounded off her speech by saying we need to organise to make sure the government is forced to deliver.

"It's our job to demand more and secure more for the working people we represent," she said.

Make sure Labour delivers

Former PCS deputy general secretary Hugh Lanning, who led the campaign to overturn the ban on unions at GCHQ, said that trade unions need to make sure "Labour delivers on its promises."

"I think it's a critical litmus test going forward of this government how many of the constraints on unions will be removed," he said.

"Workplace justice needs free trade unions and a partnership between the unions and Labour needs to be a partnership of equals," he said.

The meeting was shown [a short film about the 40th anniversary](#) of the ban on trade unions at GCHQ, filmed on the commemorative march and rally in the town in January,

Nicola Smith from the TUC said that we need to recognise the benefits of trade union organising and call out the very worst excesses of employment practices.

[Read the PCS pamphlet: a new era for trade union freedoms.](#)