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Achieving positive change

How union activists can achieve positive change in society was discussed at a TUC fringe meeting.

A range of speakers in Brighton last night (10) discussed how union activists can unite to achieve positive change to end austerity, racism and war.

PCS President Martin Cavanagh told the meeting that we should be in no doubt about the challenges we are facing with the new UK Government. He said Labour needs to take bold decisions when in power but that was lacking in prime minister Keir Starmer's speech to TUC Congress yesterday.

He criticised the government's decision to cut the winter fuel allowance and said it would endanger pensioners' lives. He said there appeared to be no drive from Labour to tackle pensioner poverty.

"If you don't give people hope, if you continue to suppress wages, if you don't build the good social housing, if you don't improve the education system, if you don't create good, long-term quality jobs for people that can embolden the far-right," he said.

Martin said he was very proud that PCS has never been inward looking: "We absolute know that the bread and butter issues for our members are pay, pensions, job security, terms and conditions and working environment. But we've also always had a social conscience and that international issues are also critical and that's why we've been proud to address the Palestine demonstrations over the past 9 months. And the reason we did that was because we had a government that was threatening our representatives with disciplinary action and dismissal if they spoke on pro-Palestinian platforms."

Struggle led by unions

Labour MP Richard Burgeon told the meeting that: "All of the advances we've got have been as result of the struggle led by the trade union movement.

“We can’t have workers pitted against pensioners or immigrants against people who were born here.”

He called on unions to come together to demand that in the budget next month “the government moves the right way on winter fuel allowance.”

Sabby Dhalu co-convenor of Stand Up To Racism, said there had been a reticence from the government to call out racism as a central organising factor of the recent riots across the UK.

“Racism and Islamophobia should be seen in the context of 14 years of austerity and scapegoating of migrants as a weapon of mass distraction,” she said.

“I think Labour would electorally benefit if they tackled racism head-on and mobilised anti-racist people.”

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