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PCS responds to new IER report on pay review bodies

Responding to a report on pay review bodies, which says they've become a way for governments to undermine collective bargaining and degrade wages, PCS says stronger unions with collective bargaining rights are key to tackling low pay and inequality

[The Institute of Employment Rights](#) is launching its report, '[Pay review bodies: their past and their future](#)' in Westminster tonight, with a panel including PCS General Secretary Fran Heathcote. Ahead of the event, Fran said: "Stronger trade unions with collective bargaining rights are key to tackling problems of insecurity, inequality, discrimination, and low pay. As this report shows, too often pay review bodies are subject to government interference and far from independent.

"The real experts on pay are the ones receiving it: our members. We don't need an independent pay review body to tell us what fair pay is – our members know and we are their voice. We welcome the new government's commitment to sectoral collective bargaining and look forward to that being implemented in the civil service."

The report has been written by IER expert Dr Andrew Moretta, and says that against a backdrop of 44 years of political attacks on trade unions and collective bargaining, workers in some sectors were initially better off under Pay Review Body (PRB) structures. However, over time, successive governments have exerted undue influence over the independence of PRBs, until their recommendations became no more than options for the government to either accept or dispense with as they saw fit.

The report goes through the history of pay review bodies (PRBs); when they should be used under international law; when they shouldn't be implemented, and the evolving history of how they have inadvertently become a political Trojan horse for successive neo-liberal governments to degrade real-terms wages, and undermine collective bargaining in various sectors even further.

The report has a number of recommendations including helping restore independence and due process to existing PRBs where they are appropriate, and, in cases where the workers concerned are illegitimately denied the right to bargain collectively, allow the representative unions to be able to revert rapidly to collective bargaining.

IER director James Harrison said: “The operation of pay review bodies has been something that we, as the Institute of Employment Rights, have been tracking for some time, contrasting it to collective bargaining structures and analysing its independence. We are delighted to present this report, expertly compiled by Dr Andrew Moretta, which reflects the varied experiences of PRBs amongst trade unions, as well as taking a broader view of how these bodies developed historically and their likely future use.”

Holding down pay

Gawain Little, General Secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), said: “This important report comes at a crucial time. Pay review bodies have been used by successive governments to hold down workers' pay. Too often, they lack independence and are a poor substitute for real collective bargaining. The newly-elected Labour government has an opportunity to reset this pattern and to lead a massive expansion of collective bargaining across our economy, bringing us in line with international expectations and introducing a genuine new deal for workers.”

[Read the report online.](#)