



workers' liberty

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Make Mayday the start of a fightback against Blair and Brown!

Every serious trade unionist should rally behind the national PCS civil service strike on 1 May and seek to build the fight-back against the Blair/Brown regime.

In his June 2006 Mansion House speech Gordon Brown promised his rich audience that he would peg increases in the public sector pay bill to 2% over the next two years. It was effectively a year on year promise to cut real pay for thousands of workers and to perpetuate the scandal of low pay in the public sector. With inflation currently running at nearly 5% Brown plans to hurt a lot of people and of course 2006 was a grim enough "pay year" for many public sector workers.

PCS's demand for a guarantee of at least inflation proof increases for all members runs directly counter to Brown's pay cutting policy and should be supported and built upon by other public sector unions. Public sector workers, especially the tens of thousands of low paid workers, want to share in the wealth of the country, to see their living standards improve, rather than see wages stand still in real terms as an alternative to having them cut.

All the signs are that public sector trade union unity in a common fight against Brown's wage slashing is a real possibility. It is up to us the members and activists of the different unions to fight for that unity and where necessary impose it on our respective union leaderships. On 17 April the conference of the traditionally conservative Royal College of Nursing

voted for the first time ever for nationwide industrial action. GMB Health workers have voted for industrial action over pay. Unison Health conference on 22-24 April voted to reject the 2.5% pay review board formula and for industrial action. Make May Day the start of a fightback against Blair and Brown!

Solidarity with the PCS strikers!

At the NUT conference at Easter the National Executive successfully moved a motion calling for preparations for a ballot on national industrial action and for a "joint campaign of opposition at national and local levels" - a clear mandate for action alongside other public sector unions. The NUT Executive motion was successfully and rightly amended, as a result of the actions of Workers' Liberty supporters, to remove the proposal that coordination should be exclusively through the TUC, a recipe for all talk and no action. The NUT leadership now has a mandate to coordinate directly with the PCS. The NUT has demanded that its 2006/08 settlement be reopened because it allowed for a review if inflation rose above 3.75% over a 12 month period (and inflation is a full 1% above that).

Brown combines his pay slashing policy with a continuing commitment to culling civil service jobs and privatising the public sector, handing it over to PFI "partners", "third way" charities (increasingly "charity businesses"), rich men contributing little but gaining control of our schools, and so

on and so forth. Whatever their precise form, the Blair/Brown public sector policies are an attack on all public sector workers and on all public services. PCS's demands for a no compulsory redundancy guarantee and for no further privatisation without agreements that protect the transferred are right - as far as they go but are limited. We need a halt to the job loss (in the civil service, the NHS, etc) and a halt to the transfer of services.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the PCS leadership's precise demands, a public sector wide campaign would inevitably generate a great deal more confidence in its ability to force real, material concessions from Brown. A lot more public sector workers would be confident about taking action if they knew that it would be alongside other public sector workers. Indeed we can safely predict that thousands of non-members would be recruited into the different unions. A united, confident, fight-back of the public sector unions, with a genuine strategy to win, could force Brown to retreat, especially if it were coupled with positive political campaigning against his public sector agenda and regressive taxation policy.

Of course whilst we live in eternal hope for the souls of the various public sector union leaders we cannot and should not rely on them to lead a serious united fight. The same people called off the joint pensions dispute, settling for a reserved rights deal and some loss of benefits in

some of the current schemes, without a single shot being fired. It is the job of serious activists to forge links across the unions, to formulate common demands, map out a line of march, fight for that within each union, and keep the union leaders under pressure.

In the meantime PCS has a dispute to win and it cannot afford to rely on the other unions entering the fray - although we must campaign for a united fight with all our strength. The PCS leadership launched the dispute and has the responsibility for winning it.

The PCS NEC has hitherto rejected the idea of a national levy and selective targeted action to go alongside national action. Yet they rightly do not believe that members are about to vote for all out action and they are unable to set out what happens next. But Brown will not concede a guaranteed rate of inflation increase for all, let alone a "fair pay system" that takes us some way to a restoration of national civil service pay rates and national pay bargaining, on the basis of a periodic one day national strike. The national days of action have to be supplemented by hitting him with highly effective, highly painful, selective action. It is a fact that the most successful pay dispute of recent years, in terms of pay outcomes and irrespective of criticisms that some activists had at the time, was in DEFRA, before the Left Unity NEC, and was won on the basis of selective action.