

With the challenges facing unions ahead of the next general election, never has solidarity among unions been so important

Mark Serwotka, PCS General Secretary

At a time of recession trade unions are needed more than ever, not only to protect their own members' jobs, pensions and conditions together with the services they provide, but also to campaign on issues of social justice.

In PCS our members are facing attacks on the civil service compensation scheme as well as their jobs and threats to terms and conditions.

All the main political parties are arguing over who will make the deepest cuts to the public sector following the next general election, and there is an onslaught of media attacks perpetuating myths that civil servants and other public sector workers have gold-plated pensions and well-paid secure jobs, when in fact many of our members are low paid and face pay freezes, pay cuts in real terms, job losses or insecurity, outsourcing and privatisation.

Against this back drop the anti trade union laws continue to shackle trade unions in their attempts to protect their members or support other trade unions and workers in their struggles.

They are aimed at keeping the unions weak by making industrial action difficult and less effective and solidarity action virtually impossible. They portray such action as illegitimate activity, rather than the

right of workers in a free society as enshrined in internationally agreed ILO Conventions which our government has signed up to.

In opposition Labour pledged to repeal these laws but in 1998 Tony Blair was happy to declare that even with the new rights under "fairness for all" that the UK would still have the most restrictive employment rights in the West.

The refusal to repeal the anti-trade union laws denies workers in the UK fundamental rights.

Thirty years on, it is time for change. Trade unions must work together to challenge these unfair and unjust laws and we can see many are. The Prison Officers Association, in the face of even more repressive regulation bravely stood up for their members' rights and in disputes such as Lindsey, Visteon, and Vesta, workers across the country have taken unofficial action to show the strength of feeling about the attacks on their jobs and trade unions have done their best to support them despite the anti trade union laws.

With the challenges that will face us following the next general election, never has it been more important to have solidarity and cooperation between trade unions.

September 2009

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