

10 September 2023

# **TUC Congress: PCS stresses the need for collective bargaining on pay**

PCS called for free collective bargaining to allow our union to pursue our members' aspirations on pay, rather than for it to be determined by pay review bodies.

Speaking to [composite motion 15](#), PCS deputy president Martin Cavanagh told Congress in Liverpool today (10) that pay review bodies (PRBs) are "no substitute for free collective bargaining."

He PCS is determined to "pursue our members' aspirations through collective bargaining, unfettered by recommendations that set false strictures on our members' aspirations."

We are campaigning for national collective bargaining on civil service pay, where currently pay is a delegated issue for PCS members. The senior civil service has a pay review body that normally determines its pay increases.

Dave Penman of the FDA, which represents senior civil servants, moved the motion, which recognised that the last year has seen committed public servants left with no option but to strike in pursuit of higher pay rises in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis following over a decade of pay restraint.

He said that whatever individual unions' views on PRBs, "they are a fact of life".

"We need to ensure that where our members are impacted by decisions made by pay review bodies, we get the best outcomes we can," he said.

Martin Furlong of the Royal College of Podiatrists seconded the motion, which recommended that the TUC works with unions in different sectors to produce a model template for PRBs and work with affiliates in either making sure that PRBs are fit for purpose or other methods of settling pay, such as direct negotiations, are promoted if more appropriate.

The motion said that review bodies can only function effectively if they are independent of interference and direction by government and the evidence of all parties carries equal weight. But said that, unfortunately, in recent years that has not been the case.

Martin Cavanagh explained that our amendment to the motion made it clear that after decades of wage restraint imposed by governments and employers pursuing neoliberal economics, pay review bodies are no panacea.

“Their existence within the public sector has done little or nothing to prevent the huge drop in living standards suffered by workers covered by their remit,” he said.

“While the recommendations of pay review bodies are allegedly independent, they have displayed a clear tendency to take their steer from government economic policy.”

Martin explained that during the now decade and a half of pay restraint we have witnessed since the financial crash in 2008, review bodies have tended to broadly set their recommendation around the government imposed pay restraint figure for the public sector. Civil service pay has gone down in real term by 26% since 2010.

## **Not delivering**

Steve Wright of the FBU spoke to oppose the motion and said PRBs did not deliver for his members. He said the bodies had been used to downgrade or scrap collective bargaining and remove the opportunity for face-to-face talks.

“PRBs are not the right forum for trade unions to bargain over terms and conditions,” he said.

While calling for “a new compact between government and public servants” the motion agreed that collective bargaining is an appropriate vehicle for pay determination for many unions facing hostile employers, and that it can facilitate member engagement in pay campaigns and their outcomes.

The motion was carried.

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We will also provide regular updates in [the news section](#) of our website.

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