

23 May 2024

## **Chair of PCS parliamentary group addresses conference**

“Never give up fighting injustice,” was the message from Chris Stephens MP, chair of the PCS parliamentary group, guest speaker on the closing day of our national conference.

Chris opened his speech by talking about the infected blood scandal and how long the journey has taken for those affected. He said: “There’s a simple lesson there...never, ever give up fighting injustice.”

Talking about a constituent who had been threatened with deportation to Rwanda, despite being a victim of torture and despite having family in the UK, Chris thanked PCS for continuing to fight “this despicable, disgusting, Rwanda policy.”

Chris outlined the work of the parliamentary group in the last year. He mentioned the spring budget with “some pre-election giveaways” but real-terms cuts to public services and the threat to slash civil service jobs. He highlighted the UK’s response to events in Gaza “which continues to generate, quite rightly, widespread protests and opposition” and said that he stands “shoulder to shoulder” with HMRC staff in Leeds who have been banned from fund-raising for Medical Aid for Palestine.

Chris said: “It is time to end poverty pay in the civil service. We will support any group of workers who takes industrial action ... it’s the duty and responsibility of every member of parliament to attend picket lines to offer solidarity in support of those who take strike action. Weeks from now on 4 July you have the chance to remind people of that responsibility.”

On the voting turnout thresholds for strike action, Chris highlighted how MPs do not have to pass the same threshold to be elected.

Chris said: “The government is a national minimum wage employer. It is absolutely ludicrous that we have people employed by the state, looking after the social security systems or generating tax revenue, who are paid the national

minimum wage and in many cases having to use foodbanks in order to survive. We will take the opportunity to embarrass any government department or any government over this shameful position.”

He finished by saying: “Now we are in the heat of a general election campaign, there cannot be any rollback on the status of workers or workers’ rights.”

He advised members to “challenge every candidate” and reminded conference that the change we seek is “good terms and conditions, ending poverty pay, a better deal in the workplace, fairness and dignity.”