Consultation on General Election strategy
ADC 2018 agreed that the election of a UK Labour Government under the leadership and policies of John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn is in the interest of PCS members. Conference decided that we must develop an effective political strategy for the next general election that involves advancing our industrial agenda through national union support for a Jeremy Corbyn led Labour government.

Conference decided that a consultation should be held throughout the union “on the means by which we can increase our support for a campaign to get a Corbyn & McDonnell-led UK Labour government elected” (motion A41 attached).

Our approach to political campaigning is aimed at finding ways to win better pay, jobs, pensions and public services.

In the current situation, conference concluded that a Jeremy Corbyn-led UK government offers a genuine alternative to years of spending cuts and privatisation from Conservative and previous Labour governments and that must be in the interests of PCS members.

The purpose of this document is to set out background information and pose questions for the consultation. Branches, Groups, equality networks and other bodies of the union, as well as individual members, are strongly encouraged to respond.

The consultation will be launched at ADC 2019 and then discussions with branches, groups, regions, nation committees, sector associations and equalities committees will take place following ADC to run until November.

A report of the consultation will be produced for branch AGMs in 2020 so that decisions on national policy can be taken at ADC 2020.

You are strongly urged to respond to this consultation. Details of how to do so are at the end of the booklet.
British politics has changed beyond all recognition since 2015. Following the Conservative victory in the 2015 general election, Jeremy Corbyn was elected as Labour leader. The election of an anti-austerity leadership of the Labour Party committed to an alternative to the economic orthodoxy of cuts in public spending is an historic shift in British politics.

In the snap General Election of June 2017 the Tories unexpectedly lost their majority and Labour won over 12 million votes for the most radical manifesto for a generation.

Just as British politics has changed, PCS policy has changed with it. The view that a civil service union should not intervene in the political arena used to be widely accepted. But, as the civil service has been politicised by successive governments, and as cuts and privatisation programmes have fundamentally attacked PCS members’ terms and conditions, we have become more active in the political arena. Since 2010, Conservative austerity policies have brought such issues to centre stage.

We engage in political campaigning because politicians in Parliament and the devolved institutions take the decisions which determine members’ pay, jobs, pensions and working conditions, as well as the public services we both deliver and use. Political campaigning is a tool to advance our agenda in the workplace – to support our industrial strategy and to help us in bargaining situations. If we took the view that we shouldn’t get involved in such work it would be much harder to defend our basic interests.

Our Political Fund allows our political campaigning to take different forms, from local leafleting, using public petitions and using the national media, to lobbying MPs, engaging with political parties and other work in the political arena.

**TYPES OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING**

At its formation in 1998, PCS carried out very little political campaigning. Over the years since then, as our members suffered cuts and attacks on the services they delivered, we have developed a deserved reputation as a vibrant, independent and effective campaigning union with major influence as a critic of government policies, most recently the Tories’ austerity programme.

**Parliamentary groups**

In 2003 we set up our PCS parliamentary group in Westminster with Labour’s John McDonnell as chair (now honorary life chair). The parliamentary group has been working on members’ behalf to bring the concerns of the union to the attention of MPs on a consistent and coordinated basis very successfully ever since.

This approach, combined with members lobbying their own MPs, has enabled us to save workplaces from closure, stop privatisation, and to defend our members’ terms and conditions.

Reflecting the fact that PCS is not affiliated to any political party, we have members of most political parties in our group, currently chaired by the SNP’s Chris Stephens MP with officers from Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party.

**General election campaigns**

From 2010 onwards PCS carried out general election campaigning in the form of ‘Make your vote count’. MYVC centred on approaching all parties equally and asking candidates questions based on our interests with the responses publicised to members as information to help them decide who to vote for. MYVC treated all parties the same and was developed at a time when all major parties were...
running on very similar platforms, something that is no longer the case. When this strategy was first applied it generated a lot of interest but over time the parties became less responsive and some prepared general replies for all their candidates to use.

Over time, we moved to try to influence some key MPs in each region and nation by meeting them locally. These MPs tended to be in areas where there were significant numbers of PCS members in employment.

In 2012, after three years of debate at ADC and a full membership ballot, PCS adopted a policy of standing and supporting candidates in exceptional circumstances as a response to the consensus on cuts and privatisation that had grown up between the main parties.

The policy has always been that PCS would only consider standing and supporting candidates in constituencies where no candidate supported our aims. It is clear that this policy was developed in a very different political context to the one we are now in – one in which all the main parties supported cuts to our members’ jobs, pay and terms and conditions and supported austerity to some extent.

Since the election of a Tory government in 2015, the Labour leadership elections and the EU referendum vote, the political context has changed. Jeremy Corbyn’s election presented us with an opportunity to exert more influence on Labour’s policy development through our long-standing relationships with Jeremy and John McDonnell.

At our 2016 conference, Jeremy Corbyn promised to restore national bargaining in the civil service and pledged to oppose cuts and repeal the Tories’ Trade Union Act. In June 2016 the NEC issued a statement which declared that we opposed the attempts by some Labour MPs to unseat Jeremy Corbyn and, whilst remaining an independent, non-affiliated union, we believe that PCS members’ interests are best served by his continued leadership of the Labour party.

DEELOVED AREAS

No consultation on political strategy can ignore the impact of devolution on Wales and Northern Ireland, and the dramatic changes in Scotland over the last few years, and this consultation invites responses that reflect the breakup of the old political consensus, and the rise of the SNP in particular.

Scotland
With over 23,000 members, PCS is the largest civil service union in Scotland With a large cross-party parliamentary group in Holyrood, chaired by Labour’s Neil Findlay MSP.

While this consultation recognises the fundamental shift in the wider political context in the last three years, we also recognise that there has been a fundamental shift in Scottish politics, particularly following the independence referendum in 2014.

PCS took an active campaigning position in the 2014 independence referendum. However we did not take a yes or no position, and we have sought to maintain a successful relationship with the SNP in power, as the employer to the growing devolved sector members as well as the governing party over much social policy in Scotland since 2007.

Wales
PCS engages with the Welsh Assembly in a range of different ways as part of our devolved political campaigning. The PCS Assembly cross-party group was established in 2005 and is the only group dedicated to pursuing the interests and concerns of a particular union. The group is chaired by Plaid Cymru’s Bethan Sayed and the Vice-Chair is Labour’s Mike Hedges.

Northern Ireland
PCS members in NI work to the UK government in the Home Civil Service, non-departmental government bodies, and privatised areas. All NI devolved assembly work is the remit of the Northern Ireland Civil Service for which the recognised union is NIPSA. In addition, the political framework in NI is designed to ensure political balance in the Assembly. Therefore, how PCS engages in NI is different from Scotland and Wales.

RECENT CONFERENCE POLICY

In 2017, following the calling of the snap general election, ADC passed emergency motions which allowed the union to support Labour candidates. Despite the tight timescale between the conference and the election, PCS branches endorsed 91 local Labour candidates based on the party’s radical election manifesto which included proposed policies which we had long fought for. No financial support was provided and, due to the timescale, the
Our position is clear that we want a UK Labour Government led by Jeremy Corbyn. If an election occurs during the consultation period it would fall to the NEC to judge how to put that position in to practise.

**HOW IS OUR CURRENT POLITICAL STRATEGY WORKING?**

We have established a new HQ team that covers campaigns and political strategy, linking up the work in the UK Parliament with our national, group and branch campaigns. There is close working with our Scottish and Welsh offices to ensure a joined up approach.

We currently have 84 MP’s in the Westminster parliamentary group and three Lords. The MP breakdown is 69 Labour, 8 SNP, 3 PC, 3 Change UK/Independent, 1 Green.

This group meets around four times a year along with day to day contact with some key officers of the group. The meetings allow for a face to face briefing on the key issues of the day and a call for action on many issues raised with us by groups. This leads to Early Day Motions, adjournment debates, Westminster Hall debates, and Parliamentary Questions. In the past year the number of MP’s joining the group has risen sharply. Alongside this cross party approach we have – in line with conference policy – developed much stronger working relationships with the Labour front bench teams. This has been welcomed by PCS Groups as we brief shadow ministers directly on key issues such as office closures.

Links are particularly strong with the Treasury team (HMRC), the DWP, MOJ, Home Office, Transport and BEIS. Alongside this we have direct links with the Cabinet Office shadow team and to John McDonnell’s and Jeremy Corbyn’s offices.

Examples of this work include:

- A close working relationship with Jon Trickett’s team leading to regular discussions about civil service pay, pensions, redundancy scheme and how the civil service would change under a Jeremy Corbyn Government.
- Ongoing discussions with Treasury shadow minister Annalise Dodds around HMRC closures.
- Regular meetings with Margaret Greenwood’s shadow DWP team including direct input into the social security policy review, working together on Universal Credit.
- Discussions around the potential for a new Ministry of Labour with Laura Pidcock’s team.
- Joint work with Richard Burgon’s team to stand up for Justice workers.

**ENDORSEMENTS:**

Endorsements mainly took the form of branches communicating messages of endorsement to their members as they saw fit.

At ADC 2018 conference agreed that “the election of a UK Labour Government under the leadership and policies of McDonnell and Corbyn is in the interests of PCS members.”

The motion further instructed the NEC to “conduct a widespread consultation with branches, groups, regions, nation committees, sector associations and equalities committees on the means by which we can increase our support for a campaign to get a Corbyn & McDonnell-led UK Labour Government elected.”

Due to a combination of factors – the 2018 and 2019 pay ballots and the consultation on women’s representation on the NEC being the primary issues – the general election campaign consultation was not possible during the 2018/19 conference year.

**GENERAL ELECTION POLICY**

With the current situation over Brexit, PCS has been calling for a general election. It is entirely possible that one could take place before ADC 2020.

How can we increase our support for the election of a Jeremy Corbyn Government?

Unions all take a slightly different approach to political campaigning and lobbying. It is worth some comparison to see the range of possible strategies and activities we could adopt in order to increase our support for the election of a Jeremy Corbyn-LED government.

There are 12 unions affiliated to the Labour Party. They have representation on the party’s NEC, the right to vote in leadership elections and to elect delegates to attend conferences. They have a direct role in producing the Labour manifesto, which consequently reflects some of their key issues. At general elections they call for a vote for Labour and their representatives engage in canvassing and other election activities.
The activities of affiliated unions are not pertinent to PCS or this consultation. However, non-affiliated unions may offer us some possible courses of action. Non-affiliated unions adopt different campaigning strategies. Some simply attempt to draw attention to specific issues of concern to their members. At the other end of the scale, some non-affiliated unions work actively to support the election of a Labour government.

NEU, the new national teachers’ union, has built on the political strategy started by the previous NUT. They do not closely align with any political party but do run high profile campaigns especially around elections highlighting issues like school cuts.

This has moved from holding hustings type events to more online campaigns and photo opportunities around schools. They canvass national parties and local candidates for their views and publicise these responses. This is a strategy very close to the ‘Make Your Vote Count’ events and campaigns that PCS used to run.

The rail union RMT takes a different approach. Whilst it remains non-affiliated to the Labour party, in May 2018 it chose to closely align itself with Labour.

The union stated it wanted its members to be active within Labour and it provides training and publicity to enable members to do so. Branches and Regional Councils are encouraged to develop their links to local Labour parties, including supporting pro-RMT candidates in internal Labour selections with the prior approval of the RMT NEC.

Branches who wish to do so can support Labour candidates at elections. The RMT have taken part in Labour party campaign days, have produced their own election leaflets and have donated money to individual campaigns.

In 2017 the RMT called for “a maximum Labour vote at the 2017 General Election to defeat the Tories and for there to be a Labour Government led by Jeremy Corbyn”.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE CONSULTATION
How can we increase our support for the election of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government?

- Should PCS call for a Labour vote?
- Should a call for a Labour vote be for the whole of the UK or only in England and Wales?
- Should PCS declare it is in favour of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government but not advise members who to vote for in their constituencies?
- Should we encourage members to get involved in campaigning locally to support Labour candidates?
- Should we make donations from our political fund to support a Labour general election campaign?
- Should we encourage members to join their local Labour Party?
- Should we encourage branches to support local Labour Party campaigns?
- What different strategies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should we adopt to take account of the different political situations there?
- What other activities or strategies could PCS, as a non-affiliated union, adopt to assist in the election of a Corbyn-led Labour government?
Conclusion

This is an important debate for PCS members. The commitments made by John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn in the past three years around restoration of national pay bargaining, a new system for social security, a halt to the destructive office closure programme, a restoration of trade union rights and many other issues shows what is at stake.

We encourage all branches, Groups, other union bodies and members to take part in this discussion.

**TIMETABLE**

- Consultation between June and November 2019.
- Report to NEC in December 2019 on the outcomes of the consultation.
- New updated paper produced for discussion at AGMs in 2020.
- Motion for debate to ADC 2020.

**HOW TO RESPOND**

Please use the information and questions raised in the consultation document to respond:

- Online via the PCS website: [pcs.org.uk/politicalconsultation](http://pcs.org.uk/politicalconsultation)
- Email: mark@pcs.org.uk
- By post to: General Election strategy consultation, General Secretary’s Office, PCS, 160 Falcon Road London SW11 2LN.

The deadline for receipt of responses is 15 November 2019.

This booklet is available to download from the PCS website.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

The NEC will consider the results of the consultation and publish a report in early 2020, with a motion submitted to ADC 2020 that reflects any new proposals based on the responses.
Appendix

ADC 2018 motion A41

Conference notes the 2017 general election returned an unstable Tory minority government, propped up by the DUP, which has continued to attack public services, public sector workers, working class communities and the most vulnerable in our society.

Conference notes the higher-than-expected vote for Labour in the general election based on “For the Many Not the Few” manifesto, reflecting Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell’s advocacy of policies in line with longstanding PCS policies and industrial demands. Under that manifesto, the Labour leadership now support:

a) A return to national pay bargaining in the civil service and related bodies
b) A fair taxation system and investment in HMRC resources
c) Taking public utilities, private rail companies and the Royal Mail back into public ownership
d) Repealing anti-union legislation and increasing workers’ rights
e) Repealing benefits cuts and scrapping sanctions
f) Secure homes for all including building 100,000 new council/social housing
g) Keeping the Land Registry public

h) End the public sector pay cap and introduce £10 per hour living wage
i) Statutory rights for union equals reps
j) Sectoral collective bargaining with trade unions
k) Invest in public services and the public sector workforce including more civil service workers.

Conference further notes the widespread opposition to the Tories’ cuts and privatisation agenda by campaigning groups and trade unions through industrial and political action, and Corbyn and McDonnell’s support for such action including attending PCS protests.

Conference agrees that, notwithstanding the different political structures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the election of a UK Labour Government under the leadership and policies of McDonnell and Corbyn is in the interest of PCS members.

Conference notes last year our intervention at the general election was determined by Motions A304 and A305 carried at ADC 2017. The overall political strategy the NEC took in the short period running up to the general election included “allowing as much support to Labour Party candidates as is allowable under the current PCS policy”. Approval was given to branches to support 91 Labour candidates.

Conference recognises that the 2017 approach has its limitations and that it is now not enough to operate a national political strategy based on only local support for candidates. We must now develop an effective political strategy for the next general election that involves advancing our industrial agenda through national union support for a Corbyn led Labour government.

Our overall political strategy remains one of active engagement with government and opposition politicians of all parties in order to influence policies that promote the interests of our members.

Conference instructs the NEC to conduct a widespread consultation with branches, groups, regions, nation committees, sector associations and equalities committees on the means by which we can increase our support for a campaign to get a Corbyn & McDonnell-led UK Labour government elected.