

PUBLIC & COMMERCIAL SERVICES UNION

TO: NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

FROM: Fran Heathcote

DATE: 30 May 2024

SUBJECT: General Election Strategy

Issue

A proposed strategy for campaigning running up to the General Election including guidance for reps

Timing

For agreement at the Emergency NEC meeting on 4 June 2024

Recommendations

- **That the NEC:**
- **Promotes to all candidates and parties our key campaign objectives on pay, jobs, insourcing and hybrid working,**
- **Encourages members to register to vote, ensure they have voter ID and participate in democracy,**
- **Circulates FAQs and briefings to members relating to the campaigning objectives and broader policy areas including safe passage, tax justice, pensions, trade union rights and social security as well as promotion of commissioned research on civil service pay,**
- **Prepares a PCS charter containing our key demands,**
- **Produces a guide for lobbying candidates and ensure regional secretaries are on hand to assist with any union delegations to meet with candidates,**
- **Continues to engage with employer areas with live mandates and encourage them to submit leverage submissions to the NDC Secretary.**

COSTS

This is within an agreed budget

Background

Rishi Sunak, Prime Minister has called a General Election due to take place on 4 July 2024. This was short notice and unexpected, even by many in his own Party.

Current polls suggest that Starmer's Labour Party is at 44%, compared to the Tories 22% (YouGov, 23/24 May). However, recent local and Mayoral elections, do not indicate as significant a swing as has been previously predicted. What must be acknowledged is that the Labour Party of 2024 is a much-changed political party from the 2019 Corbyn era. Its reputation as a party of social justice, equality and fairness has been heavily tarnished in recent months with their recently published six election pledges falling short of workers expectations.

Political strategy position

At 2024 Annual Delegate Conference (ADC), the NEC's motion A13, 'General Election Strategy', was not taken due to the guillotine. The only motion debated and agreed in the Political Strategy section was A12, which is primarily focused on our industrial demands of a new government which might flow from Labour's commitments to date. The motion instructs the NEC to urgently seek the agreement of the Labour Party leadership around ten industrial demands. On taking up office as General Secretary, I wrote to Keir Starmer seeking a meeting to discuss such matters. I have yet to receive a reply. We will undoubtedly want to pursue these matters with the Labour front bench during and beyond the election campaign.

We are now tasked with developing a campaigning strategy in a short election period of six weeks. The expectation had been for an Autumn/Winter general election.

This paper therefore seeks to build on existing political strategy policy and develop new approaches appropriate to the 2024 political and industrial context. It is essential that PCS members have a voice in seeking to influence parties and candidates on our key demands. We need to maximise engagement of our members to leave politicians of all parties in no doubt of our industrial strength.

TUC position

The TUC General Council met on 29 May to discuss a coordinated strategy for highlighting workers' rights, which I can update the NEC on verbally at the meeting.

General Election 2019

In the last General Election, held in 2019, PCS advocated for a Labour vote. This broke from our long-standing stance not to support any Party, as the circumstances were exceptional. We had built a positive relationship with Party and the Corbyn leadership. Jeremy Corbyn, and his Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, incorporated PCS policy on social security, tax justice and pay into their manifesto. PCS encouraged members to participate, where possible, in regional leafletting and door knocking events, to support Labour candidates.

General Election 2024

While many of us deeply wish to kick the Tories out of office, PCS remains a non-party affiliated trade union. We represent a broad range of members who support many political parties and none. A significant portion of our membership are not politically engaged at all and therefore when developing our General Election input, we consider how our campaigning decisions impact on the entire membership.

Guidance for reps and members

Our National Political Officer, Lori Holmes met with the Electoral Commission on 29 May to establish the grounds on which we can campaign during the General Election period. PCS is not currently registered with the Electoral Commission and are considered to be a non-party campaigner – an organisation or individual that campaigns for or against a Party, or group of candidates, but is not seeking election themselves.

Non-party campaigners are a vital part of a healthy democracy and play a significant role in providing voters with information. They are only regulated when they campaign during a regulated period in the build-up to an election.

There are two types of campaigning defined by the Electoral Commission – local and general.

Local campaigns are those which advocate for or against one or more candidate in a particular constituency, ward, or other electoral area. They are subject to a spending limit, depending on the election. For example, the limit for campaigning for or against one or more candidates in a constituency in a UK Parliamentary general election is £700 and requires authorisation of the agent.

An example of local campaigning would be if a branch bought and paid for 500 leaflets promoting a local candidate and distributed them. If they cost more than £700 it would be an offence to do this without the authority of the agent. The limit only applies during the short campaign for candidates, this is the time between the date of dissolution of Parliament and polling day.

General campaigns are those which advocate for or against one or more political parties; or parties or candidates that support or do not support particular policies. The Electoral Commission regulates general non-party campaigns. Spending on the following activities is regulated in the following areas:

- election material
- canvassing and market research
- public rallies or public events
- press conferences or other media events
- transport in connection with publicising the campaign

Non-registration with the Electoral Commission restricts PCS to spend less than £10k on campaigning, and that campaigning is controlled tightly on policy issues and is party-neutral.

Communications and materials

The proposals in the strategy plan below allow PCS to embark a significant General Election campaign focused on member engagement, promoting our policy objectives whilst remaining party neutral and enables us to work out with additional scrutiny and administrative burden of the Electoral Commission. Costs would also fall within existing budgets.

Communicating with our members internally is not regulated and it is here we have the biggest impact as recent open rates and survey participation shows.

PCS may also embark on joint working with other unions and organisations, such as the TUC, or bodies to which we affiliate, signing statements, and adding our logo to shared materials.

Media coverage is not regulated therefore we can continue to use broadcast and print media to promote our policy positions. Costs must be considered, however in relation to our official social media posts and press releases, but these will be minimal over a short election period.

Lobbying candidates on our issues is not targeted at the public therefore it is not regulated, so we may target future decision makers without requiring registration with the Commission.

PCS political policy and campaigning objectives have been long established since our 2005 Make Your Vote Count initiative, our interventions in the Scottish Independence Referendum "PCS informs – you decide", and our ongoing e-actions and lobbying of politicians on a wide range of matters. None of these activities are regulated, even though the employer in most instances is the Government.

With a short election period it is therefore vital that we use this period to prioritise elements which are well established policy and practice within the union and as part of our campaigning objectives, focussing on what is achievable within the coming 6 weeks.

Our national campaign must feature in the General Election strategy. We currently have live mandates in 62 employer areas for strike action, for which we are awaiting leverage reports in relation to targeted action.

The July NEC will be considering all ADC mandates, including the national dispute, which will be held post-election and will help us shape next steps in the national campaign.

In the General Election, we must engage with the membership in relation to our national campaigning objectives – pay, pensions and job security, and encourage members themselves along with the national union to highlight these messages locally to candidates whilst the national union raises these matters nationally with Parties and Leaders.

6-week campaign plan

The table below outlines a realistic and achievable set of actions that can form our General Election strategy.

General Election campaign – 6-week	Status
Political Schools	<p>Within existing policy.</p> <p>Ready to launch with groups, national branches, equality networks. Trials went very well at group conferences.</p> <p>Will give members insight in our political campaigning, how we utilise parliamentary mechanisms and why it is important to take part in union led lobbying i.e. e-actions for national, group campaigns.</p>
FAQs	<p>FAQs to be drafted in liaison with policy officer, Head of Bargaining, group execs i.e. DWP social security. These can be turned around within 2 weeks.</p> <p>These will be generalised so that they can be used post-election in our continued campaigning.</p>
Guidance on how to 'lobby' your local MP/candidate	<p>This will be available via regional secretaries who can assist in arranging local delegations to meet with parliamentary candidates.</p>

Social media and comms work	Collaboration with campaigns and comms to formulate comms plan with agreed messaging regarding democratic participation i.e. voter ID, deadline for postal vote, videos from young members, chair of networks, NEC members
PCS Charter – ‘vote for <i>your</i> civil service’	To be drafted post NEC, following discussion and agreement, PCS ‘charter’ for future MPs/Govt. Sets out our key asks for the civil service, a document which can be the basis of campaigning during and after a General Election.

PCS Parliamentary Group

With parliament dissolved, we can no longer utilise our parliamentary group of MPs, its activists, or Parliamentary mechanisms to boost our national and group campaigns. We will seek to rebuild the Parliamentary Group post-election with the support of those MPs returned and an assessment and invitation to the new intake of MPs we find to support our cause.

PCS Charter

A document collating our key demands for a future Government should be central to our General Election strategy. This will help activists to shape our messaging with members and provide a basis for campaigning in the new parliament.

Over the past two years our key campaigning objectives have included pay, pensions, jobs as well as significant campaigns on return to office, facilities managements insourcing, social security, and safe passage. These remain central demands that we should take into the General Election and forward with the new government.

The Charter will cover:

1. Pay – return to national collective bargaining for civil service, pay restoration and inflation proofed pay rise,
2. Jobs – investment in the civil service including a properly staffed civil service helps every community in the country and ensure successful day to day functionality of government,
3. Pensions - commitment that civil servants will secure pensions justice and an immediate review of state pension age,

4. Hybrid working – civil servants have continued to fulfil their roles to an incredibly high standard, with increased productivity, when given access to hybrid working. Future Government must acknowledge the changing world of work and the need for flexibility,
5. Insourcing – PCS has led campaigning efforts to bring workers back into the public sector, supporting members employed in facilities management across government departments to challenge poor private employers. Insourcing should be a key commitment of any future government, giving these valued workers the same rights and opportunities as their civil service colleagues,
6. Social Security – a system with support at its heart. Universal Credit is a dangerously flawed system, the most vulnerable continue to slip through its cracks and our members are the scapegoats for over a decade of social security failures. We need a system which supports the individual and does not demonise those who cannot work,
7. Tax Justice – With the current tax gap estimated to be over £40bn it is time for a future Government to invest in HMRC and ensure those who can pay more, do. Big business and the top 1% must pay their fair share and HMRC must be adequately resourced to ensure that the gap is reduced, and the public finances are restored off the backs of those who can and should pay more,
8. Safe Passage – a policy which has broad support and will help to stop the boats in a humane and safe manner. Investment in the Home Office to ensure adequate support is given to those who are entering the UK, allowing them to contribute to society quickly. Working with our European partners to establish the policy and protect the most vulnerable. A future Government must build on this policy, work with PCS, Care 4 Calais, and others to ensure the asylum system is reformed,
9. Trade Union Rights – repeal all anti trade union laws in the UK. Work with trade unions to ensure democracy, fairness and access to a union is paramount in the world of work. Implement electronic balloting for trade unions and a return to adequate facility time for trade union activists.

Implementation

The above plan will allow us to use the next 6 weeks to build our campaigning objectives which will not be limited to the election but will establish our asks for a future Government. The key focus will be membership engagement, political education and building the unions profile with a future Government.

The roles of region and nations in taking this forward will be crucial.

We are proud to be a democratic trade union and we believe that participation in democracy is a fundamental right, we will encourage members to register to vote, to sign up to our learning courses on political campaigning and to take their concerns

and our campaigning priorities to their local candidates and, in 6 weeks times, to a potentially new Government.

National Campaign

The calling of the general election, and its outcome, will obviously have a significant bearing on our approach to our national campaign.

As part of our ballot ready work, we made a call for groups and national branches to submit leverage proposals. In the 62 areas where we had secured a statutory mandate, and we asked for responses by 6 June 2024, following which consideration can be given by the National Disputes Committee on any submissions for targeted action from those areas covered by the live mandate. To date no submissions have been received.

In addition, the NEC will now clearly need to take stock of new conference policy, our potential leverage, and the outcome of the general election before determining the way forward in our national campaign. We will therefore need to turn to this in earnest at our meeting in July.

I recommend:

That the NEC:

- **Promotes to all candidates and parties our key campaign objectives on pay, jobs, insourcing and hybrid working,**
- **Encourages members to register to vote, ensure they have voter ID and participate in democracy,**
- **Circulates FAQs and briefings to members relating to the campaigning objectives and broader policy areas including safe passage, tax justice, pensions, trade union rights and social security as well as promotion of commissioned research on civil service pay,**
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