

# Whitehall Worker

**R**ight now we are in the latest battle in the war, waged by successive governments, on the public sector. Whether it is called austerity, balancing the books, departmental efficiencies, or ‘managing public money’, the effect is the same. Jobs are cut, those left behind on ever-eroding pay are asked to deliver more with less, and public services decline.

In our sector, politicians then get to blame an amorphous Civil Service - ‘the blob’ - which is holding them back from delivering the necessary change the country needs. If only they could get rid of the blockers, the regulators, the red tape. If they could recruit more disrupters, rewire the state, and replace parts of the workforce with AI agents, then things would only get better.

This narrative, caught up in the frenetic pace of the news cycle, is a distraction used by governments who do not act in our interest, only serving big business... But us workers on the ground can see it for what it is.

We see it in the government’s actions on Palestine where the needs of arms

companies and Anglo-American imperialism are prioritised over funding essential services while thousands of state employees are put at legal risk in the process. We see it in the immigration rules that tear apart the lives of our neighbours and colleagues in failed attempts to placate the racist demands of an insurgent far right. We see it in the gung-ho adoption of AI where environmental commitments and privacy concerns are disregarded at the behest of snake oil salesmen from Silicon Valley. We see it in the state-backed demonisation of trans and non-binary people and enforcement of measures designed to make their lives harder.

If, while you read this bulletin, you feel despair creeping in, do not think that there is nothing you can do. The Civil Service Code does not mean that we have to stand by and do nothing while politicians facilitate genocide, deport colleagues and risk our collective future at the whim of billionaires. To challenge this, we need to work together.

The Whitehall Worker is a new, rank-and-file bulletin. It is produced

and written by a group of PCS representatives and activists who work at different departments based around Whitehall. We are in the state and against the state.

In each publication we will shine a light on the workplace struggles in which we are involved. We are not aligned to any of our union’s factions. We will publish different views on the actions and direction of the national union, as well as on wider political events and issues.

Our aim is for more workers based in central London to get involved in the work that we do. It is a cliché that a union is only as strong as its members - but it is a cliché for a reason. We want to show you what we are fighting, and show you what we can win, and we want you to join us so we can win even more.

If you are a member or rep and want to get involved, get in touch - our contact details are below. If you aren’t a member yet, now is the time to join - find your local rep or go onto the PCS website.

Solidarity,

*The Whitehall Worker Editors*  
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## We need YOU to write in

Are you involved in a dispute we haven’t covered? Know of an issue we haven’t raised? Do you have a piece of writing you believe your comrades simply must read?

Write a letter in to the Whitehall Worker at [PCSWitehallWorker@protonmail.com](mailto:PCSWitehallWorker@protonmail.com)

Or find us on Substack at [whitehallworker.substack.com](http://whitehallworker.substack.com)

# Thousands of civil servants deported under new Visa rules

New immigration rules introduced last summer affect the status of over 2,000 civil servants in the DWP alone, many of whom have already been deported. In many cases migrant workers recruited during the Pandemic to support vital public services have been told they will have to uproot their lives.

As of 22 July, the minimum salary threshold for skilled worker visa applicants is £41,700 a year or £17.13 an hour, based on a 37.5-hour work week. Roles must now meet RQF Level 6 (equivalent to a bachelor's degree), excluding over 100 previously eligible medium-skilled occupations such as care workers, logistics staff, and technicians. These changes have led to the deportation of workers – many of whom are Black and from marginalised communities – simply because their earnings fall below arbitrary thresholds. This includes thousands of civil servants employed by the government itself, highlighting the contradiction of a state that underpays its workforce while penalising them for it.

The changes demonstrate the State's role in establishing policy frameworks and differentiated labour regimes that racialise communities. The rhetoric used to justify the reforms fuels racist narratives that are dividing our society.

## Union response

Trade unions have flagged that the increased costs of visas mean talented people have had to leave the UK or face removal/deportation.

Last year, delegates from PCS' National Black Members Committee submitted a motion to the TUC Black Workers Conference calling on unions and trade unionists to oppose the assault on workers that the raised visa threshold represents. The motion recognised that these changes affect the most precarious racialised members of the workforce.

## View from the Home Office

For many of us who work for the Home Office, the rising tide of racism in our country is deeply concerning and it can be unclear how we can voice our objections when our own department dances to the merry tune of nationalism.

The PCS Home Office Group is proactive in challenging harmful rhetoric and policy and has strong presence at protests and demonstrations, particularly when policies or issues raised affect our members and wider communities directly.

On 13 September 2025, I attended the counter demonstration against Tommy Robinson and Nigel Farage in opposition to their divisive anti-humanist and ultra-capitalist rhetoric. I have since attended Stand up to Racism counter demonstrations against the far right in Wallington & Carshalton, Dartford, and outside the Home Office building in Croydon, in my trade union capacity. Just because we work for the Home Office doesn't mean that we should remain silent when departmental policy risks breaking the 1951 Refugee Convention, to which the UK has been wedded for almost three quarters of a century. It's a national heritage worth defending. Please speak with your local branch if you would like to get more involved.



# AI Alarm Bells - PCS DESNZ calls on members to suspend Co-Pilot

PCS DESNZ have instructed members to request that Microsoft Co-Pilot licences are removed from their devices as the Department refuses to negotiate an agreement about AI safeguards.

Union reps stressed that they are not rejecting AI outright but want a negotiated agreement that provides guardrails to protect jobs and assurances about privacy and considered use of the technology. The action comes following a sustained period of membership

engagement including listening sessions, outreach and surveys in which 100s of members contributed. The feedback demonstrated widespread concerns about the impacts of AI and reflected recent research from the FDA, the senior civil servant's union, that found that over two thirds of civil servants want more involvement in how AI is being rolled out.

DESNZ has been particularly gung-ho in its adoption of AI with licences provided for all staff at the start of the

year and a mandatory AI objective integrated into end of year reviews. The Department, who have not disclosed the cost of licences, maintains that Co-Pilot is just a tool like Outlook and so doesn't require union consultation. However, it's clear that AI is seen as a route to efficiency savings and is being pursued without proper assessment of its potential impacts on jobs, work quality, environmental commitments or security risks.

AI is yet to support the claims of its founders but we should take their statements of intent seriously. Microsoft's own CEO of AI has declared that all white collar workers could be replaced in 12-18 months. The Tony- ...

...Blair Institute has excitedly claimed that billions could be saved through AI, largely via the eradication of over a million public sector jobs.

### **It is evident that our own government believes the hype.**

Last year's Spending Review demanded efficiency savings from across the public sector. DESNZ itself is being asked to find nearly 20%, which is driving a significant head count

reduction. Colleagues in some teams have been asked to provide use cases for how AI can be used to do elements of their jobs. Analytical teams have been tasked with creating AI apps that draft correspondence, potentially replacing whole divisions. This is despite evidence that AI outputs are of questionable quality and plummeting work satisfaction.

All of this is to say nothing of the gargantuan energy and water demands that AI technology requires during an ecological crisis which is destroying

the physical conditions on which our civilization depends.

As workers and citizens we must organise together to protect our livelihoods and future. We cannot trust our Silicon Valley overlords or captured politicians to make decisions for us when they have publicly stated that their intention is to replace us. We call on all branches to push back against the top-down implementation of this technology and to work together in our collective interests.

## **Over 500 FCDO staff write to Minister about risks of complicity in Israeli war crimes**

**B**efore Christmas over 500 FCDO staff wrote to Ministers and the Perm Secretary over fears about the potential for their roles to be tied to Israeli war crimes. This was the fifth letter sent to leaders since the beginning of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza in October 2023.

A previous letter in July expressed concern about Israel's violations of international humanitarian law and potential UK government complicity. The letter called for a suspension of the free trade deal, a complete suspension of arms sales, the publication of legal advice to ministers, an evidence-based review of the UK government's response to the conflict, and encouragement of a Foreign Office speak-up culture by establishing an internal challenge mechanism.

In the Department's response to the letter in July staff were advised that, "if your disagreement with any aspect of government policy or action is profound, your ultimate recourse is to resign from the civil service."

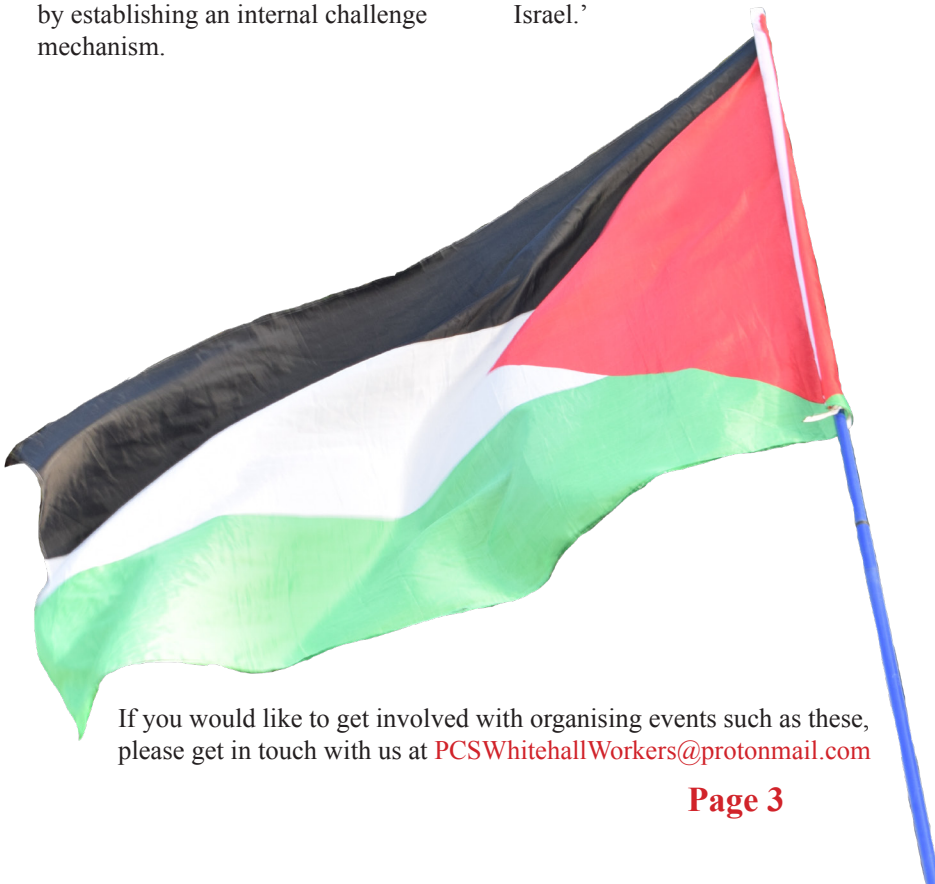
However, colleagues should not be expected to put themselves at legal risk in the course of carrying out their duties. PCS wrote to the Cabinet Secretary last summer calling on the government to do more to protect civil servants from legal liability. PCS general secretary Fran Heathcote said: "PCS is extremely concerned that the government continues to ignore our members' concerns that they may be held liable under international law for the war crimes being committed daily by the state of Israel."

### **Rank and file action**

As far as we understand there has been no response to the latest letter sent by FCDO staff. We commend colleagues in the Department acting on their conscience and against a culture of fear.

We encourage those involved and others concerned by our government's role in the escalating attacks on the Palestinian people to join a group of trade unionists across Whitehall who have gathered together to organise solidarity work. The rank and file group, bringing together PCS reps across Whitehall, was formed last summer. It has since hosted an educational series specifically focused on Palestine, bake sales raising money for Medical Aid for Palestinians and coordinated attendance at demonstrations. More sessions, including practical workshops, are being planned.

As part of the Rank and File activity in solidarity with Palestine, we organised a film screening at PCS HQ, inviting PCS members and specifically culture workers. We watched the critically acclaimed *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, a harrowing and detailed recounting of the events that surrounded the brutal murder of 5-year-old Palestinian Hind by the IDF, who fired over 300 bullets from point-blank range to the car in which she and members of her family were desperately trying to flee from Gaza City. After the screening, we sat through our deep discomfort, aware that the known perpetrators haven't yet been brought to justice, and we talked about ways forward in our solidarity work. We talked about common challenges as well as workplace-specific ones, and ways to share our knowledge and resources.



If you would like to get involved with organising events such as these, please get in touch with us at [PCSWhitehallWorkers@protonmail.com](mailto:PCSWhitehallWorkers@protonmail.com)

# 100 years since Britain's last general strike

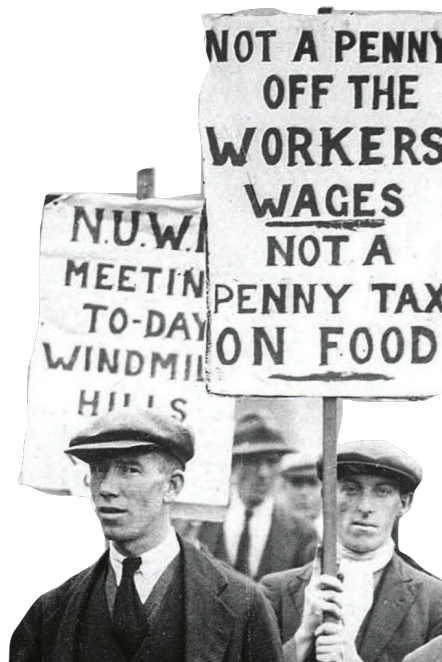
May 4 marks one hundred years since the start of the 1926 General Strike, which marks the highest point of working-class struggle in British history. Over the course of nine days, three and a half million workers across Britain took strike action. Trains, buses and trams remained in their depots. Factories were closed, and streets were emptied. Construction work ground to a halt. In many towns and cities, nothing moved without the permission of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), who called and officially led the strike. Unionised workers were joined by non-union labour on pickets, and mass demonstrations were held across the country. Local trades councils formed cross-union Councils of Action, which coordinated pickets across localities. They organised information bulletins, pickets, transport, food distribution, entertainment, and workers defence corps.

These measures were necessary, for the working class faced a formidable opponent. The Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin, backed by the employers, had a clear aim: to cripple the trade union movement so that workers would be forced to pay for the decline of British capitalism. Employers were seeing their profits fall as America and Germany increasingly outcompeted the British Empire. The government's main target was the Miner's Federation of Great Britain – the most powerful union in the country. If it was able to isolate and defeat the miners, it would embolden employers to drive down working conditions and wages across the board. The government spent months preparing for a confrontation. It set up the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, which served to recruit scab labour to cross picket lines, and the Civil Constabulary Reserve, a semi-fascist organisation designed to break picket lines.

Had the strike been won, it would have likely brought about a revolutionary situation in Britain. The Councils of Action had shown that workers were perfectly capable of organising society for themselves. Yet, after only nine days, and with the strike only getting stronger, the TUC's General Council ended the strike and capitulated to Baldwin. The miners were left to fight on their own

and were eventually defeated. What followed was an employer's offensive which we still feel the impact of today. The government quickly moved to ban general strikes and secondary strike action, gave legal protection to scabs, severely restricted the right to picket, and barred civil service unions from TUC or Labour Party membership. Tens of thousands of union activists were victimised, and union membership rapidly fell as workers felt abandoned and demoralised.

Responsibility for the defeat lay largely with the TUC General Council, who, much like today's union leaders, sought to avoid a general strike at all costs, and, once it had started, fought to contain it and prevent a victory.



The Labour Party leadership had the same attitude. Desperate to find an "honourable settlement" with a government determined to destroy union power, the General Council refused to call out shipbuilding workers and engineers for almost a week, and never mobilised workers responsible for operating the newly-created National Grid. The Civil Service Clerical Association, a predecessor union to PCS, was also ordered to stay in work, despite having over 16,000 members. The TUC even rejected a £100,000 strike donation from Soviet workers.

In 1924, the Communist Party established a cross-union rank-and-file organisation, the National Minority Movement, which eventually won over

activists and organisations representing almost a million workers. The Movement's initial aim was to transform and strengthen the labour movement and build a new leadership to oppose the existing union bureaucracy. It played a central role in the strike, particularly in organising the Councils of Action. Had the Party and Movement stayed true to the latter's original aims, they may have had the strength and influence to ensure the strike continued and was won after the TUC capitulated. However, under the direction of the ruling bureaucracy in the USSR, both organisations abandoned these goals in the period before the strike and deferred entirely to the leadership of the treacherous General Council. This only worsened the post-strike demoralisation in the labour movement.

Today, the need for a general strike is greater than ever. Workers across the public and private sectors are under attack. Our ability to resist these attacks within the confines of the law is becoming increasingly restricted as laws are passed curtailing the right to protest. Our employer has unconditionally supported Israel's genocide of the Palestinians and plays a supporting role in the US's destruction of Iran. We continue to hear from some union leaders that a general strike is not possible, while our own union's leaders offer militant rhetoric which evaporates once practical action needs to be taken.

Last year, we witnessed general strikes in Italy and Portugal. That we have not had our own is not a result of working-class conservatism or unwillingness to fight – for we have shown our determination to fight and win again and again – it's a question of organisation and leadership. Those general strikes were able to take place, because the union rank-and-file was strong enough to pressure their leaderships to organise them. A general strike in Britain may not be on the cards today or tomorrow, but the potential for it exists, and it is only a matter of time until it happens. We must be ready to build for it, by transforming our union into a fighting organisation that can hold its leadership to account, and begin to train, organise, and develop a new leadership to replace it.