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UK: PCS conference rejects “Stop the War” argument, votes for strong Ukraine solidarity

Friday 3 June 2022, by [PCS activist](#) (Date first published: 1 June 2022).

The national conference of civil service trade union PCS (24-26 May, Brighton) voted overwhelmingly for a strong stand in solidarity with Ukraine and its labour movement, and to affiliate to the [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#) (USC).

It rejected a Stop the War Coalition-supporting motion attempting to present the war as a “proxy conflict between Nato and Russia”.

Workers’ Liberty supporters in PCS, organising alongside others in PCS Independent Left and the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, were central to organising around the issue and prominent in the motions debate.

On Tuesday 24 May the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) held a lunchtime fringe meeting addressed by STWC convenor Lindsey German, former STWC chair Andrew Murray and PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka (and chaired by PCS President Fran Heathcote).

German and Murray went out of their way to minimise disagreements, even saying that “Ukraine has a right to resist” – incoherently in the case of German, who also called to cut off military aid to Ukraine, and dishonestly in the case of the Stalinist Murray.

After some diplomatic comments about the past importance of Stop the War and his respect for German and Murray, Serwotka was clear and sharp in his disagreements with the STW position. He emphasised that he was speaking officially on behalf of the union’s national executive. For some of what he said, see [here](#). He also took *Socialist Worker* to task, twice, for [calling](#) the 9 April trade union demo in solidarity with Ukraine pro-NATO and a distraction from the cost-of-living crisis.

The first speaker from the floor was London Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) activist Tom Harris, who took part in the recent [European labour movement solidarity delegation](#) to Ukraine. Tom told the meeting about the struggles of Ukraine’s labour movement, and pointed out that it also supports Ukraine’s defensive struggle and calls for military aid to Ukraine.

That afternoon the conference debated three motions: an emergency motion from the union’s NEC supporting Ukraine, a stronger one from PCS’s Scottish government branch and the STW-type motion from DWP Birmingham South. By very large margins it passed the first two and rejected the third.

Socialist Worker has [sought](#) to present the outcome as a middle-position between an imaginary pro-NATO camp in the union and its anti-imperialist stance. This is fantasy. The Stop the War position was comprehensively defeated in favour of strong internationalist solidarity with Ukraine.

Opposing the STW motion, Chris Marks, a delegate from DWP London HQ Branch, said: “We cannot

respond to Ukrainian comrades by saying that while we support you, we oppose you getting the means you need to win because they may have come from NATO. Or that while Russia is bad, we believe NATO is worse.

"This motion is in direct opposition to the calls being made by our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and it would be a dereliction of our duty as internationalists and anti-imperialists to pass it."

That motion was rejected overwhelmingly.

The next day, Wednesday 25th, a fringe meeting co-sponsored by PCS and Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (also chaired by President Fran Heathcote) heard from Serwotka, John McDonnell MP, Ukrainian socialist Yuliya Yurchenko and USC's Chris Ford - on the issues in the conflict, workers' struggles in Ukraine and the fight to reconstruct the country on a new basis after the war. Immediately afterwards the conference voted, with only one delegate voting against, to affiliate to USC.

Stop the War, SWP etc clearly decided to cut their losses and not oppose affiliation. However, in preparation for opposition, Chris Hickey, a delegate from DLUHC National Branch stated in the debate: "The USC is absolutely clear, as conference was yesterday, that Russia's war mission is the denial of self-determination to the people of Ukraine. USC is equally clear that the labour movement's duty is ensure a distinct solidarity. We must make links with trade unions, demand abolition of Ukrainian debt for assistance with reconstruction, demand opening of our borders for refugees and advocate the right of Ukraine to receive weapons if it needs them - and it does - to resist the Russian invasion."

PCS activist

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P.S.

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<https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2022-06-01/pcs-conference-rejects-stop-war-argument-votes-strong-ukraine-solidarity>