

✉ by email ✉

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Mark Serwotka
General Secretary

12 July 2018

Dear Richard and Saorsa

Thank you for your letter of 9 July about the letter published in the Morning Star newspaper on the debate surrounding the GRA.

You raise a number of issues and concerns and I am happy to clarify the union's position. The PCS position is clear and a matter of public record. We condemn all discrimination against trans people and fully support the fight for trans rights.

Much of the response to the Morning Star letter has misunderstood its content and purpose. Indeed, you say in your letter that my signature "has led to many making an assumption about our union's policies on transgender, and wider equality, issues". That is regrettable since the letter should be read on its own merits. The letter is specifically, and only, about issues concerning the way in which debate should be conducted within the labour movement. In fact, the letter starts by stating that the signatories have a variety of positions about proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act and some have not yet fully formed opinions. The signatories did not address the issues arising from the GRA consultation, but only the importance of free discussion within our movement. This is not to diminish the importance of the proposed reform of the GRA but to state that many people have misunderstood the purpose and content of the letter.

In your letter you raise an objection to the use of the phrase "ordinary women" in the Morning Star letter. You say that it "implies those opposed to the position expressed in the letter are not ordinary". Again, that is an unwarranted assumption. The letter actually refers to "ordinary women concerned for their rights, as well as those active within the trade union movement and other political campaigns". In context, the meaning of the phrase is clear.

You raise the issue of inappropriate behaviours towards transgender individuals and ask whether I would call for an immediate end to such behaviours. I have no hesitation in unequivocally condemning discriminatory behaviour against trans people, the belittlement of their everyday suffering from hate crimes, and the denial of the authenticity of their personal experience. These are all totally unacceptable. It is clearly our union's policy to oppose and campaign against such discrimination.

You say that the letter "provides a limited sample of alleged incidents" concerning debate on the GRA, and that "examples listed are specifically of alleged aggression from one side of the "debate" towards the other. We are concerned that this is an attempt to create a one-sided narrative". I must point out, firstly, that the incidents and acts of aggression you refer to are not mere allegations, but are documented facts, including an assault on a woman in Hyde Park, an attack on a woman on a BECTU picket line, and the attempted blocking of a

women's meeting by masked activists. The letter was signed by leading figures with the movement because of the great concern that exists over these violent incidents and would not have been published if it were only a matter of allegations. I hope you would agree that such actions should be openly and unequivocally condemned by all trade unionists.

The Morning Star letter did not intend to create a "one sided" narrative. As I have said, the letter specifically concerned the way in which debate has been approached, and in some cases undermined, by intolerant actions within the labour movement. It did not address the wider issue of trans people's rights within society but focused on the manner of debate, and question of division within the movement. This is of vital importance. PCS's aim is to create a united campaign for trans rights which everyone within the trade unions can support. That unity requires the free exchange of views. Unity is necessary, I would argue, for a successful campaign that ends the oppression and discrimination faced by trans people.

You suggest in your letter that calling for free debate in the labour movement over the proposed reform of the GRA implies we are ignoring the debates and policy decisions of the PCS annual delegate conference. However, the reference in the letter to free debate means the wider debate across the whole movement, not the debate within PCS, which has agreed policy.

That policy was set out in motions to the 2017 and 2018 conferences. As the motion to ADC 2018 stated, reform of the GRA is essential to remove barriers to our trans and non-binary comrades, and we will work "to see that the review and the proposed reforms to the GRA are adopted without further delay, to lobby parliament to this end, and to use our voice in support of our trans and non-binary comrades in the press and media in the hopes of breaking down some of the stigma and lies that are circulated there." The NEC supported the motion with a statement. The NEC's position is to work with PCS Proud, trans groups, other allies and the PCS National Women's Forum to implement the policy and, as we work to ensure that reform of the GRA comes about, to be aware of the need to leave intact the protections and exemptions currently provided by the Equality Act. The NEC will discuss the implementation of the ADC motion when it next meets.

As the NEC speaker said in the ADC debate, we must stand in absolute support of trans people fighting for their rights and we must unite to support each other in the fight against discrimination and for freedom. We must calmly allow safe discussion to articulate and understand each other's concerns and perspectives. It is the perpetrators of discrimination, violence, abuse and hatred we must unite against.

I hope that I have clarified the PCS position which I fully support. I am happy to meet you to discuss the issues and the implementation of motion A18.

I note that your letter was an open letter so I am happy for this letter to be shared on social media.

Yours in solidarity

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Serwotka', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Serwotka
General Secretary