

WEST COUNTRY WORKERS

NEWS FROM THE
SOUTH WEST TUC
ISSUE 2 2016



TUC 

♥ UNIONS



Striking is a last resort

Workers from across South West explain why they take industrial action



West Country leaders reject Bill

Bristol and Plymouth write to government to oppose legislation



Peer pressure

Members of the House of Lords prepare to fight the Bill



INTRODUCTION

The success of the South West economy depends upon good employment relations. We all need to be motivated and supported at work to do the best we can. But sometimes management get things wrong and unfairness destroys morale and performance. We don't leave justice at the factory gate or the office door when we go to work. We need ways to resolve disputes and when things get so bad we have the right to refuse to work.

Strikes are down with latest figures from the Office of National Statistics showing industrial action in the UK is at an all-time low. In the 1980s, a total of 7,213,000 days per year were lost to strike action. Since 2010 that number is 647,000 – a fall of 91%.

The number of days lost through strike action fell by 74% between October 2014 and October 2015 accounting for 0.0035% of all working days. With the level of UK disputes at around half the EU average, strikes cannot be considered a significant problem.

So will the Trade Union Bill make things better or worse for employment relations? The organisation of HR professionals, the CIPD, thinks it will make matters worse. The British problem is no longer about strikes but about poor management; weakening the rights of workers will simply encourage more bad bosses.

Strike action is always a last resort for workers. Withdrawing labour may be rare but it is sometimes the only way workers have to make obstinate employers listen to their concerns. Remove that threat and workers will have no bargaining power in their workplace.

This publication looks at employment relations in the South West and why the Trade Union Bill is unnecessary. It showcases the positive work carried out by unions. It charts the strength – and breadth – of opposition to the Bill and reveals it for what it is: an outrageous attack on unions and our ability to raise funds and organise in workplaces.

It is unfair, unnecessary, unwanted and we call on people to join our campaign against it.

Nigel Costley

Regional Secretary, South West TUC



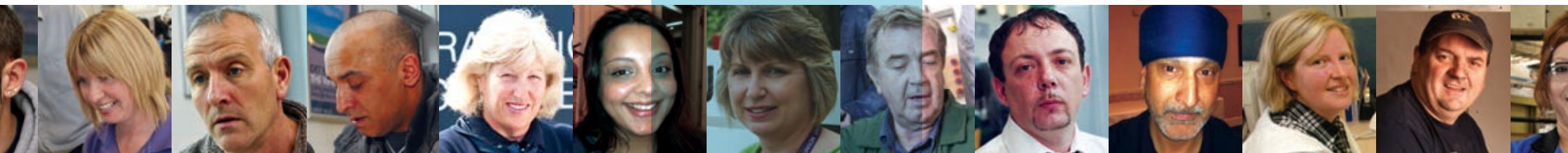
UNIONS ARE GOOD FOR EVERYONE

**When you join a union,
you join the UK's largest
social movement. There
are more than 6.4 million union
members in the country, some
500,000 members in the South West.**

For the fourth year in a row, the level of union members in the private sector has increased, which is no surprise when you realise union members in the private sector earn, on average, 8% more than non-union members.

This union premium is magnified in the public sector, where union members earn 21% more than non-union members with women union members earning, on average, a staggering 30% more than non-unionised women.

But pay is just one benefit of joining a union. Others include safer workplaces because of trained health and safety representatives, longer holidays, better sickness and pensions benefits because of collective bargaining and better



learning opportunities because of the training courses arranged by union learning reps.

These courses change people's lives. Last year more than 220,000 people were given training and learning opportunities at work through their union, allowing them to acquire new skills, and more than 50,000 trade union reps were trained on TUC courses.

Despite all these benefits – or perhaps because of them – the government is attacking unions. The Trade Union Bill will restrict our ability to operate and threaten our right to strike.

The TUC has several concerns.

Time to represent

Public sector employers give paid time off to reps to carry out their union duties. A study by the University of Hertford in 2012 showed that for every £1 spent on facility time, between £2 and £5 is returned in accrued benefits on the costs of dismissal and exit rates; in other words trade union reps save

the taxpayer money by resolving workplace disputes.

The government wants all public sector employers to publish the cost of time off for reps, plus a breakdown of what their time is used for. It also wants to cap the time reps spend representing members, reducing unions' ability to represent their members and resolve disputes before they escalate.

Collecting subs

Union members have their subs automatically deducted from their salary at source. Despite many employers supporting check-off, the government wants to stop it, threatening the finances of unions. The government claims it is unfair for the taxpayer to pay to collect union subs, but has turned down offers from unions to cover the costs themselves.

Voting thresholds

In "important public services" (fire, health, education, transport, border security and nuclear decommissioning), 50% of

“THE UNIONS ARE IMPORTANT ORGANISATIONS THAT STILL DELIVER SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS FOR THEIR MEMBERS AND, I'D SAY, THE WIDER SOCIETY.”

Peter Hoskin, Associate Editor
conservativehome.com

members must turn out to vote and 40% of the entire membership must vote in favour of strike action (that amounts to 80% of those voting on a 50% turnout).

The government claims these thresholds are aimed at boosting democracy in the workplace but will not allow online voting. And why is the threshold higher for trade union members than it is for MPs? The Conservatives formed a government after the last election despite winning fewer than 40% of the votes. And half of the Cabinet did not pass the threshold of being elected by 40% of the electorate.

Strike breakers

The government plans to allow agency workers to replace striking workers, fundamentally undermining the power balance between workers and employers. There are also concerns about inexperienced replacement workers taking on the roles of striking employers, leading to poorer quality services and, potentially, health and safety issues.

Regulating unions

The government wants to give the Certification Officer the power to investigate unions in the absence of a complaint ... and then send unions the bill! The Officer will also be allowed to confiscate copies of membership details.



VOICES FROM THE WORKPLACE

TAKING INDUSTRIAL ACTION IS THE LAST RESORT FOR ALL WORKERS. WITHDRAWING OUR LABOUR, INCONVENIENCING CUSTOMERS/COMMUTERS/ PARENTS/PATIENTS IS NOT WHY WE GO TO WORK. WE ALSO LOSE A DAY'S PAY FOR EACH STRIKE DAY WE TAKE, SO WHY DO WE DO IT? INTERVIEWS BY **TIM LEZARD**.



Tracy Millard, Usdaw, Tesco, Gloucester said: "I've been a member of Usdaw for 15 years and before

that the Banking and Insurance Finance Union for ten years, and never once have I been on strike.

"I've obviously had to deal in disputes in workplaces but I've always done it by having a chat with the boss and resolving the problem that way. For me, a strike's a last resort. It's only when people are getting ignored by their boss, when there's no movement, that they go on strike."

Gary Splindler, FBU, firefighter, Bristol said:

"I joined the Fire Service to help people' is a cliché when it comes to firefighters, but also fundamentally true, otherwise the balance of risking our lives for random members of the public against an average wage with unsocial shifts simply wouldn't add up!

"Deciding to strike as a firefighter was a massive decision, it not only affects me as an individual, but also family, friends and, of course,

public. To potentially be in any way responsible for the loss of life due to withdrawing my labour goes against everything I have worked for over the last 24 years, but because I care so much about my job, sitting back and letting politicians decimate the fire service, and with that, my ability to help others, or should I say you, in that absolute hour of need would have simply been inexcusable.

"I make no apology for striking...it's the politicians who place more value on votes and money than your life or mine who should be apologising!"



Kris Ross-Osborne, UNISON, senior admin assistant, Somerset County Council, said:

"Striking wasn't my first choice because I lost a day's pay, but sitting round the table, negotiating, wasn't getting us anywhere. Taking strike action is a difficult choice for a lot of people because they're worried

about job security. We're told we're lucky to have a job, but if that job doesn't pay the bills, there's something wrong."



Pam Ward, RCM, midwife, Bristol, said: "I went on strike for the first time last year. It was a big step, something I had

to think long and hard about. I was worried the patients might feel at

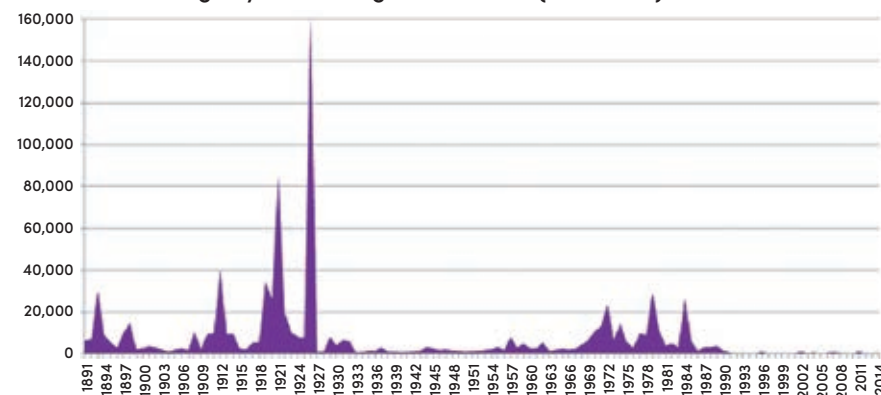
risk, but we made sure all the emergency and urgent care was covered. I was also worried people might think I was greedy but, in the end, I decided I'd sat back for too long, watching as our terms and conditions changed for the worse, and it was time to take action."

Mandy Robinson, UNISON, mental health nurse, Bristol said: "It was a difficult decision to strike because I was thinking about the impact on the service. I'm working



Mandy Robinson

Working days lost through strike action (thousands). 1891 to 2014





Bridgwater protest – the sort of ‘picket line’ the government wants to ban

SITTING BACK AND LETTING POLITICIANS DECIMATE THE FIRE SERVICE, AND WITH THAT, MY ABILITY TO HELP OTHERS, OR SHOULD I SAY YOU, IN THAT ABSOLUTE HOUR OF NEED WOULD HAVE SIMPLY BEEN INEXCUSABLE.

with adolescents with the most severe and complex mental health problems so the idea of walking out and not being available for them is an incredibly difficult ethical dilemma.

“However, myself and my colleagues reconciled that in that if we didn’t go on strike those young people would suffer because our morale would suffer and people wouldn’t be able to stay in nursing if they’re not paid enough to do their

jobs. On top of that, we lost a day’s pay. No-one wants that, do they?



Lee Everson, NUT, teacher, South Gloucestershire, said: “The decision for us to strike was a last resort. We

took action because we were as concerned about our pupils’ learning conditions as we were about our own working conditions.”



Stuart Roden worked for UNISON in Cornwall for 30 years. Here’s an excerpt of the letter he wrote to colleagues after retiring in November:

The motto of the union when I joined was “campaigning and caring”. I first became involved when it was proposed to close the hospital where I worked. We organised a campaign, which we eventually won, and the hospital remains open to this day.

The first evening I started work in Cornwall we held a meeting to campaign against proposed residential home closures. At the end of the meeting a steward said to me “there is no point in the union campaigning, they will do what they want, whatever we say”. We won the campaign and got the closure plan thrown out. Those residential homes still remain open because of our campaign; they now also provide nursing and domiciliary care and employ over 1500 staff. Without our campaigning the homes would have shut and none of that care and employment would have been possible.

We now face a Tory government who are hell bent on destroying our public services and attacking the trade union movement. The fight will be difficult, the campaigning hard and often frustrating. However, all my experience tells me we can and must win. I lived and campaigned through the Thatcher years but we came out of that at the other end and achieved many of our goals – not least the minimum wage.



WEST COUNTRY LEADERS SAY NO



PLYMOUTH REJECTS "IDEOLOGICAL" BILL

One of the more contentious aspects of the Trade Union Bill is the removal of check-off – the method by which unions collect subscriptions direct from a member's salary, writes Tim Lezard.

BIS minister Nick Boles said the government was scrapping check-off because it was unfair to expect the employer to shoulder the burden of administering the system. And although he extended the notice period to a year to help unions adjust, he refused to drop it completely.

It is contentious not only because unions have offered to pay the costs themselves, but because the costs are negligible.

"The government says check-off costs the taxpayer tens of thousands of pounds a year, but do you know how much it costs us? Go on – have a guess," challenges Plymouth City Council leader Tudor Evans.

"The figure for the entire year is £300. It costs pennies to administer, less than a pound a day. Once you've set it up it, it's just a question

of adding people once they join the staff. Dealing with stupid requests from the government costs more than that.

"And we can use check-off for other things, such as the Cycle To Work scheme, credit unions, council tax and so on. Why are trade unions being singled out?"

As you might expect from the son of a trade unionist, Tudor Evans is keen to ensure his local authority has good industrial relations with its workforce.

"We consider ourselves to be a good employer, working well and effectively with the local community. Strong trade unions are fundamental to that.

"The Trade Union Bill is an ideological attack on unions. The government is trying to cripple them. That's what the Trade Union Bill is about. It's no longer good enough to get a majority of workers in favour of strike action – they now have to get a majority of a majority, even though there isn't a Conservative politician in the



land who has received 50% of the vote on a 50% turn out. If it doesn't apply to them, why should apply to trade unions?"

He believes unions are a force for good in the workplace, making it easier for managers to deal with issues collectively.

"What's the alternative – to negotiate individually with every member of staff?", he asks. "Trade unions perform a vital function in the workplace, they should be part of the industrial relations machinery of every successful business.

"Businesses in the private and public sectors support trade unions because it's sensible, it makes sense to negotiate with unions rather than staff as individuals.

"But with the Chancellor having worked as a towel-holder in Harrods and Cameron born with a silver spoon in his mouth, the Tories have no idea how normal workplaces, or unions, work."

Plymouth City Council has written to the government stating its opposition to the Bill.

TRADE UNIONS
PERFORM A VITAL
FUNCTION IN THE
WORKPLACE



STOP MEDDLING, BRISTOL TELLS GOVERNMENT



Bristol City Council has written to the government to state its opposition to the Trade Union Bill.

The council in November passed a Labour motion rejecting what it called the government's attacks on unions and its right to manage its own affairs.

A Labour motion to the council read: "We recognise the positive contribution that trade unions and trade union members make in our workplaces. We value the constructive relationship we have with our trade unions and we recognise their commitment, and the commitment of all our staff, to the delivery of good quality public services in Bristol.

"We acknowledge there are around 100,000 trade union members in the Bristol area and we recognise many hardworking Bristol City Council employees have exercised their right to be a member of a trade union. We reaffirm our commitment to support and promote trade union activities in the workplace.

"We note with concern the Trade Union Bill would affect our relationship with our trade unions and our workforce. Furthermore we believe the government's plans will lead to a more confrontational relationship between us and our employees which could damage the public services we provide."

The motion was backed by the city's mayor, George Ferguson, who said: "I have come to the conclusion that the government's proposed Trade Union Bill is an unnecessary measure.



"I HAVE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THE TRADE UNION BILL IS AN UNNECESSARY MEASURE."

"Bristol City Council has a good history of strong working relationships with trade unions on a range of complex and difficult issues that have required sensible compromise. For instance, recently we were able to work with them to secure a working conditions deal which meant that we are now able to give our lowest paid employees the living wage.

"I have recently written to the Secretary of State, Sajid Javid MP, and asked him to take into account the strong concerns of the City Council as expressed in a motion to council in November. I hope that this will help give a greater understanding by government of the potential consequences of a loss of our satisfactory working arrangements with trade unions."

Labour's mayoral candidate Marvin Rees also opposes the Bill, saying: "Trade unions are undoubtedly a force for good in society and, if elected, I look forward to working closely with them to make Bristol a fairer, more equal workplace."

POLICE BOSS DEFENDS UNION LINK



The Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner has written to all MPs in the county expression his concerns over the government's plans to eradicate check-off.

In his letter, Martyn Underhill writes the existence of a police staff union is a vital element in managing a complex and rapidly changing environment.

He says: "Whilst the union may take a different view on some issues, the ability to negotiate with a representative body is a tremendous asset and assists in maintaining a positive relationship with police staff.

"While I accept the world as changed and the majority of individuals have bank accounts and could pay by alternative means, I see no particular benefit in changing a system that works."

Pointing out Dorset Police already deducts from salaries tax, national insurance, pensions, cycle scheme, student loans, child support, welfare, and sports and social

club, he concludes: "To isolate one particular deduction would appear inconsistent at best and potentially damage local relationships."

"THE ABILITY TO NEGOTIATE WITH A REPRESENTATIVE BODY IS A TREMENDOUS ASSET"



BIG SOCIETY SPEAKS OUT AGAINST THE BILL

BILL IS NOT THE RIGHT MEDICINE, SAY NHS CHIEFS

Seventeen NHS trusts in the South West have spoken out against government plans they fear will damage good working relations with trade unions, cost the taxpayer money and disrupt patients.

Ministers want to end the check-off system of employers automatically deducting union subscriptions from workers' pay packets but human resource directors working in Bristol, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire say this would be a mistake.

In a letter to Cabinet Office Minister Matthew Hancock, the directors say: "We have worked with trade unions often in partnerships to bring about change. These discussions require good will and transparency on both sides.

"Although we understand the government wants to explore all

element of cost avoidance, we want to highlight the cost savings we achieve through effective consultation and communication with and through trade unions.

"Effective relations with trade unions will help us expedite the changes we need to make in ways that minimise the disruption to patients and service users."

The news was welcomed by Joanne Kaye, Regional Secretary of UNISON, who said: "While the government in London tries to undermine trade unions, employers in the South West are saying how much unions help them.

"The government says it promotes localism but its instincts are to dictate from the centre. The real risk here is to employment relations. Why pick a fight with trade unions when they're working well with employers to the benefits of both parties?"

HR MANAGERS CONDEMN "COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE" BILL

Government plans to reform trade union laws have been described as "an outdated response" given the challenges employers face today, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has said.

The CIPD warned that controversial policies, outlined in the Trade Union Bill, will make it harder for staff to take strike action and could be potentially "counter-productive".

It said the plans were an outdated response to the challenges of the modern workplace as the number of work days lost to strike action has dropped by more than 90% in the past 20 years.

Today, Industrial action increasingly takes the form of protest action rather than all-out strikes making the legislation even less warranted, the institute said.

CIPD research with employers and consultations with its own members show that employer relationships with trade unions are generally good. Therefore the CIPD has urged the government and organisations to build a better dialogue with their workforces and consider alternative approaches such as no-strike agreements, rather than focusing on ballot thresholds that have been dubbed "draconian" by unions.

CIPD chief executive Peter Cheese said: "It's time to start talking about prevention rather than cure when it comes to strike action and the public sector's workforce challenges in particular.

"Taxpayers' interests are best served by an efficient, engaged and productive public sector workforce. We need to see more consultation and ongoing dialogue, and engagement with, the workforce, rather than the

introduction of mechanisms that reflect the industrial relations challenges of the 1980s. To jump straight to legislating strike activity without considering this seems to be a significant step back."

He said that the current proposals could have "unintended consequences". For example, by creating more division and encouraging trade unions to plan for more localised industrial action to maximise support and make it more likely that the proposed statutory threshold will be met.

The changes could also lead to an increase in unofficial action, or wildcat strikes, which can be hard for employers, trade unions or Acas to resolve, he added.

CIPD employee relations adviser Mike Emmott said: "The new proposals won't make it impossible for trade unions to call lawful strikes. They will, however, harden attitudes and encourage trade unions to plan smaller, more localised protests to maximise support and make it more likely that the proposed statutory threshold for membership turnout will be met."

IT IS HARD TO SEE THE AIM OF THIS BILL AS ANYTHING BUT SEEKING TO UNDERMINE THE RIGHTS OF ALL WORKING PEOPLE.

AMNESTY, BIHR & LIBERTY ADD DISSENTING VOICES

The government's plans to significantly restrict trade union rights represent a major attack on civil liberties in the UK, according to Amnesty UK, the British Institute of Human Rights and Liberty.

In a statement, the three organisations said: "By placing more legal hurdles in the way of unions organising strike action, the Trade Union Bill will undermine ordinary people's ability to organise together

to protect their jobs, livelihoods and the quality of their working lives.

Taken together the unprecedented measures in the Bill would hamper people's basic rights to protest and shift even more power from the employee to the employer.

It is hard to see the aim of this bill as anything but seeking to undermine the rights of all working people. We owe so many of our employment protections to trade unions and we join them in opposing this bill."

LIBERTY
PROTECTING CIVIL LIBERTIES
PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



The British Institute of Human Rights
bihr.org.uk

STUDENTS STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH UNIONS

The University of Bath Students' Union has issued a statement to express its solidarity with unions fighting the Trade Union Bill.

SU president Jordan Kenny said: "We strongly believe the erosion of power that the Trade Union Bill would bring on trades unions' ability to take collective action on behalf of their members is an attack directly on workers' rights.

"Trade unions provide vital support structures for workers, supporting working people to protect and improve pay and conditions of their employment.

"The collective power which trade unions generate ensure workers voices are heard, and influence

achieved, very much like that of a students' union.

"Many of our members are currently, or will go on to become members of trade unions and as such the University of Bath Students' Union strongly believes the rights of Trades' Unions must be protected."



BISHOP EXPRESSES DOUBTS OVER BILL

The Bishop of Bristol, the Rt Rev Mike Hill, has expressed his concerns about the Trade Union Bill.



He said: "I've always been a great believer that the labour force has both the right and the responsibility to organise itself in such a way they can tackle discrimination,

bad working conditions and consistently low wages. This inalienable right should not be tampered with by the law, which is why I'm slightly nervous of aspects of the Trade Union Bill, particularly thresholds. I'd like to see people able to vote online to increase participation.

"I'm also concerned about proposals to opt in to funding because it feels like there is an attempt to undermine the funding of the Labour Party. I'm not trying to make a party political point here, I'm simply making the point that I think we ought to have a commission to look at the funding of all political parties, so they all start on a level playing fields so we can make our choices on their policies rather than whether they can afford glossy TV adverts because someone gave them £10m."

HOW WILL THE TRADE UNION BILL AFFECT YOUR RIGHTS?



RICHARD ARTHUR HEAD OF
TRADE UNION LAW STRATEGY,
THOMPSONS SOLICITORS

In November, trade union members from across the South West travelled to Westminster to lobby against the Trade Union Bill, joining comrades from across the country. Sadly, it has long been the aim of successive Tory governments to bring the trade unions to their knees, to sever their links with the Labour Party and to ensure that the movement's tools of change – collective action, picket lines and the right to protest – are blunted. The Trade Union Bill is the nadir of yet another affront to workers' rights, one that even senior Tory MP David Davis believes would be more at home in Franco's Spain.

The South West is the birthplace of trade unionism. Now more than ever we must remember the spirit of the Tolpuddle Martyrs who founded our movement, who were tried, sentenced and exiled to Australia simply for trying to improve their pay and conditions through collective bargaining. Yet the great strides made since the Martyrs 'raised the watchword for liberty' in the 18th century are set to become undone by draconian measures in the Trade Union Bill which could soon become law – but not without a fight.

Ballots on strike action

The first part of the Bill will introduce higher ballot thresholds in order to make industrial action more difficult



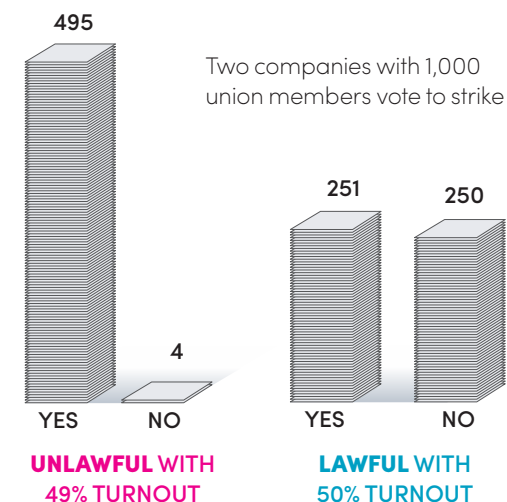
by imposing a new requirement for the turnout to be above 50%. If you happen to work for what the government calls an 'important public service', their definition of which bears little relation to its interpretation by the International Labour Organisation, an additional threshold will apply requiring that at least 40% of those entitled to vote must do so in favour of the action being balloted. Further regulations will also mean that the actions specified on the ballot must be taken within four months of the vote or else a new vote must be taken.

Trade unions are democratic bodies representing the interests of their members. However, the government's refusal to allow unions to introduce electronic



UNIONS ARE COMMITTED TO INCREASING TURNOUTS AND FURTHER DRIVING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT OF MEMBERS."





“THE TRADE UNION
BILL WILL NOT
BECOME LAW
WITHOUT A FIGHT”



balloting which would make voting easier, boost turnout and increase the ability to hold ballots more regularly, by spuriously claiming they are unsafe, is a seemingly strategic move to ‘justify’ the persistence of government attacks on industrial actions for being ‘undemocratic’. Unions are committed to increasing turnouts and further driving democratic engagement of members yet the government is failing to provide them with the proper tools to do so. A strange position indeed given that Zac Goldsmith was selected as the Conservative mayoral

candidate for London through a process of electronic balloting.



Political Fund changes

In another politically vindictive move, the Bill seeks to decouple union financing from political parties by abolishing the policy of the ‘automatic opt-in’ to the political fund. The Tories are quite happy to be bankrolled by rich individuals who hide behind shadows of anonymity, but seek to make it harder for legitimate, transparent and democratic organisations to enjoy political support.

They are also attacking the check off of union dues from salaries at the source. No employer has been complaining about the check off, in fact it suits many employers and, being cynical, it could be said to provide them information about how many of their employees are in a union.

Temporary agency staff

Alongside the Bill the government is also advancing proposals that will allow employers to hire temporary agency staff during a strike. Arming bosses with the ability to simply recruit a temporary workforce

leaves them with the knowledge that the effects of any withdrawal of labour are radically diminished, potentially encouraging slap dash behaviour in how employees treat their workers.

New powers for the Certification Officer

The Certification Officer, who is responsible for union regulation, will be given questionable new powers that will allow him to initiate investigations even when no complaint has been raised. These new powers also include the ability to impose fines of up to £20,000. And who will pick up the tab for the introduction of these unnecessary powers? It is trade unions that will be expected to contribute significantly to the running costs.

Fighting the Bill

As the Trade Union Bill makes its way through parliament, Thompsons is continuing to work closely with all its union partners and allies in the House of Commons to fight it at every stage.

RIGHT ROYALL OPPOSITION IN THE LORDS



THE GOVERNMENT MAY HAVE WON THE COMMONS VOTE, BUT IT LOST MUCH OF THE ARGUMENT.
TIM LEZARD ASKS BARONESS ROYALL OF BLAISDON WHAT THE LORDS WILL BE DOING TO KILL THE BILL.



Protest works! Trade unions successfully campaigned for several aspects of the Trade Union Bill to be dropped in the House of Commons, but there is still much to do as it makes its way through the House of Lords.

Unions hope peers, some of whom are more independently minded than party-loyal MPs, will put up a fight on their behalf.

One peer who will certainly put up a fight is Baroness Royall of Blaisdon. A former leader of the Opposition in the Lords, she grew up in Gloucester and currently lives in the Forest of Dean.

"This Bill is an unacceptable attack on trade unions," she says. "Unions are a part of the body politic in this country and for us, as Labour peers and trade unionists, it is an attack on us and the people we believe we should be supporting.

"Unions have made a huge difference to life in this country in terms of health and safety and wages, but they do so much more,

including poverty, anti-slavery, the whole gamut.

"Unions are an important part of civil society and their role in the workplace and beyond is fundamental in the democracy of this country because democracy shouldn't be a matter of putting a cross in a box once every five years: it should be participating in society, playing a role as a member of society, and that's exactly what trade unions do."

She says Labour peers will put down amendments on the same issues raised by Labour MPs, hoping they will attract support from Liberal Democrat and cross-bench peers.

"The House of Lords works very differently from the House of Commons, which is very adversarial. We have to find different ways of expressing these things, such as through a civil liberties perspective.

"On issues such as e-democracy I think we'll be able to get something because it's patently mad and unfair. None of the arguments stand up."

She says lobbying peers will make a difference, saying: "You don't need to lobby Labour peers – don't waste your time as we'll all be on your side – you need to lobby Lib Dems and cross-benchers.

"WE ARE DETERMINED TO DO ALL WE CAN TO STOP THIS BILL BECAUSE IT'S GOING TO ERODE THE RIGHTS PEOPLE HAVE FOUGHT FOR OVER THE LAST CENTURY"

"THE TRADE UNION BILL IS A TERRIBLE PIECE OF LEGISLATION,"

LORD ROBIN TEVERSON, LIB DEM
PEER FROM CORNWALL

"We are determined to do all we can to stop this Bill because it's going to erode the rights people have fought for over the last century and by forcing people to opt in rather than out of their union's political fund, they're attacking our ability to function.

"That's why they're doing it. They're attacking our funding because they are trying to wipe out the Labour Party by subversive methods and that's totally outrageous.

"The Tories have no problem with being funded by big business. Yes, they have to declare it, but they can give as much as they want, buy a seat in the House of Lords, but if you are democratic trade union, they are trying to cut us off at the neck. Its an outrage."

NEXT STEPS

After going through the Lords, the Bill will return to the Commons. The TUC is asking people to sign a petition asking David Cameron to withdraw the Bill. You can find the petition at <http://heartunions.org>.

The TUC is organising a week of action between February 8th and 14th to celebrate the great work done by union reps and members in our workplaces and in society. We're proud of our unions and reject the government's attempts to damage them with the Trade Union Bill.

All TUC publications may be made available for dyslexic or visually impaired readers, on request, in an agreed electronic format or in accessible formats such as Braille, audio tape and large print, at no extra cost. Contact the South West TUC on 0117 947 0521.

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