



Developing Campaigning & Organising Skills
Organising Effective Industrial Action
Notes & Resources



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Organising Effective Industrial Action

1. Picketing

Introduction

Picketing is the act of inducing workers to support, respect and join the strike action – it is also important as a focus for those workers who have been balloted and as a focus for their struggle.

Picketing is in itself an act of solidarity and self-support; pickets have an important job of communicating the reasons for the dispute and the need for members and colleagues to stand together.

Many brigades and branches have made them almost social events with barbecues (no alcohol), impromptu meetings etc. As well as being an event with an internal audience they are a show of purpose and an opportunity to communicate our aims to the public and media.

It's good to have flags, placards and high visibility jackets to identify the picket line as an official FBU one. Armbands to denote pickets are also helpful.

A professional and determined image is a priority especially in the age of 24 hour news and instant reporting via social media. This is one of the reasons that alcohol must not have a place on a picket line. Leave that for socialising away from the station/workplace afterwards.

Not surprisingly the Government has sought to restrict the influence of pickets and there are some points to be aware of.

General

Pickets are entitled to attend “at or near” their “place of work” for the purpose of:

- ***Peacefully obtaining or communicating information; or***
- ***Peacefully persuading any person to work or abstain from working.***

There is no legal definition of “place of work”, but members are generally only entitled to picket at or near the place where they usually work.

The right is to picket outside the place of work.



There is no legal limit on the number of pickets; however the DTI Code of Practice on Picketing suggests the number be limited to 6 at any location. If more than 6 are present a court may have regard to this in deciding whether picketing is otherwise lawful.

Pickets and organisers must take care not to obstruct the highway, intimidate anyone attending for work or otherwise cause breaches of the peace.

What are the rules on picketing?

Picketing is an indirect form of industrial action that is protected by immunities in the same way as industrial action.

In order to retain immunity from legal proceedings, pickets must:

- ***Be peacefully obtaining or communicating information, or;***
- ***Be peacefully persuading any person not to work***
- ***Not commit any other unlawful act, such as nuisance, trespass or obstruction***
- ***Be picketing at or near their place of work (flying pickets are unlawful)***
- ***Picketing should be confined to a location, or locations, as near as practicable to the place of work***

The law identifies two specific groups in respect of which particular arrangements apply. These groups are:

- ***Workers (e.g. mobile workers) who work at more than one place; and***
- ***Workers for whom it is impracticable to picket at their own place of work because of its location***

The law provides that it is lawful for such workers to picket those premises of their employer from which they work, or those from which their work is administered. This will mean, in practice, the premises of their employer from which they operate.



Being “Moved on”

If you are outside your place of work and not causing an obstruction and a Brigade manager insists you move off their property politely decline and inform them that if they would like you to move then they will need to request the attendance of the police. If and when the police arrive explain you are picketing your workplace as part of a lawful industrial action. If the police require you to move then comply with their request. You should also follow any directions given to you by the police with regards to the picket line.

Union Officials

FBU Officials may, in certain circumstances, picket at workplaces which are not their own place of work. This applies to Officers, Officials and elected branch officials, but only where the work place at which they are picketing:

- *Is the workplace of FBU members whom they represent; and*
- *The officials are accompanying members whom they represent.*

If these conditions are satisfied, then a trade union official has the same legal protection as other pickets who picket lawfully at or near their own place of work.

Can pickets try to prevent other workers crossing the picket line?

There is no right to stop vehicles or physically prevent workers crossing the picket line.

It is lawful for a picket to try and peacefully persuade workers of another employer to break their contract of employment. For example: by persuading a delivery driver or contract worker not to cross a picket line.

Dealing with the media

Members should not give statements to the media but must pass on requests to the FBU media department, to their Brigade Officials or other Lead Official as advised.



2. Preparing in advance

Choose in advance the best place(s) to picket. This should be where you will get best access to people arriving for work so you can persuade them not to go in. Try to cover all entrances.

In addition, you may choose to picket a location such as a busy station, where you can leaflet and speak to the public too.

Get members to volunteer to picket and to commit to a particular time slot.

Identify all the book-on times and draw up a picketing rota. Make sure that you have enough people to picket at the right times of the day.

Arrange transport e.g. Car shares, for members to get to the picket line.

Think about how to fund babysitting for members who need to pay someone to look after their kids so that they can picket.

Make sure you have all the materials you need for picketing:

- ***Picket armbands***
- ***Notebook and pens***
- ***Leaflets***
- ***Radio***
- ***Mobile phone and useful numbers***
- ***Camera***
- ***Advice from other unions, if helpful***
- ***Refreshments (or cash!)***
- ***FBU Hi-Vis***
- ***Tape***
- ***Picket signs; other signs, banners and flags to liven up your picket***
- ***The day before the industrial action, check the weather forecast and prepare accordingly!***



Encourage people to volunteer

Few people will volunteer their help out of the blue. This doesn't mean they don't want to be active – it's just that people wait to be asked. So ask them. Asking builds activity, and activity builds commitment.

- ***Ask in person rather than over the phone or via email***
- ***Make it clear what job you are asking someone to do***
- ***Ask volunteers to do things they can do well***
- ***Tell volunteers how what they will be doing supports the wider campaign and effort to strengthen the FBU***
- ***Let volunteers know that their particular help is needed***
- ***Be prepared to discuss any difficulties***
- ***Ask if there is anything that they would like to know***
- ***Be enthusiastic about the importance of the work***

What motivates a member to be involved?

- ***A feeling of justice or unfairness***
- ***A particular issue that they want to see resolved***
- ***Previous involvement with a union***
- ***A sense that they want a voice, respect and dignity at work***
- ***Already active in other groups, for example in the community, local politics etc.***

What stops people getting involved?

- ***Afraid of being singled out***
- ***Not enough time at work or other commitments***
- ***Not confident enough to get involved***
- ***Feel they lack the skills or knowledge***
- ***Haven't been asked***
- ***Times of meetings/venues are inappropriate***



3. Organising on the day

- *Keep your picket well-staffed, lively and well-decorated.*
- *You have the legal right to picket in connection with an industrial dispute at or near your workplace and to use picketing to peacefully obtain or communicate information or persuade any person to work, or abstain from working.*
- *Whenever someone turns up for work, talk to them about the industrial action and try to persuade them to join it.*
- *Listen to radio coverage of the dispute; ring up phone-lns.*
- *Provide pickets with refreshments.*
- *Take photos of your picket and e-mail them, with a report of your picket, to Head Office as advised.*
- *Note the details of any incidents, in case follow-up is required.*
- *Note any apparent safety breaches in the workplace you are picketing & report these to the union.*
- *Keep in contact with pickets at other locations.*
- *Leaflet passers-by while you picket.*
- *Be friendly to visitors, some of whom may be from the media!*
- *Note down any messages of support.*
- *You may want to use a petition for supporters to sign.*



4. Ten point guide to organising a picket line

Picket lines are used to raise awareness of our demands - it's an opportunity for us to be visible and to help us win.

The aim of a picket line is to ensure that every FBU member supports the strike action by staying away from work and that the reasons for the strike action are explained to every potential member.

This ten point guide aims to help you plan a successful day of action:

a) Set up a Strike co-ordinating committee

This is crucial for organising and building for a successful day of action. The committee should consist of one person from each workplace/section etc. who can provide information on the strength of feeling in each area and develop a plan to get support from any weaker areas.

b) Recruit volunteers

Remember every dispute is the members' dispute. Hold meetings or approach as many members as you are able, face- to-face, to get volunteers to help on the picket line. Get mobile phone numbers of all members on the picket line. Aim to get the support of workers not involved in the dispute - e.g. through using solidarity stickers, donations to the hardship fund.

c) Think about logistics

Hold a discussion about logistics. You need to think about the following:

- *How many entrances do we need to cover?*
- *How many placards do we need?*
- *What time do we need to set up the picket line?*
- *Think about shift working*
- *Do we have experienced reps to compliment newer reps on each picket line?*
- *How are we involving workers from different employers in our workplace who are not involved in our dispute?*



d) Effective communication

Any successful day of action needs effective communication to reinforce our message and win support. A lot of what is reported in the media is fudged and may not represent the real facts surrounding the dispute. Leaflets aimed at the public are an important way of gaining sympathy.

e) Get support from other unions

In the trade union movement, branches often offer messages of support to fellow workplaces when they are involved in industrial action. Tell your local Trades Council and other union branches about our planned industrial action. Messages of support can then be conveyed to members - this reinforces our action and gives members a boost in knowing they aren't alone.

f) Raising money for the Industrial Action/hardship fund

Establishing and collecting for a Industrial Action fund is an integral part of picket line activity. It's an important political tool - the more money you collect, the more solid evidence you have to show how successful the day went. This sends a powerful message to management - it shows that other workers are committing financially to show solidarity with your dispute.

g) On the day itself

Make sure everyone has a role to play – covering entrances, talking to local media, making tea/coffee, handing out leaflets to the public or building up for the rally later on. These are just some examples, each workplace will have different challenges but the main thing is – enjoy it!

h) Approaching people crossing the picket line

It is never easy approaching people who intend to cross a picket line. Only by arming yourself with the facts about the dispute and asking them open questions to gauge their opinions, can you change their point of view and perhaps be successful in stopping them going into work.

Be polite and don't be aggressive - if management think you have intimidated staff, they will use this against you. If you are unsuccessful with someone on the day don't give up, afterwards approach them one to one and engage them again in a positive discussion about why we are taking action and why we would welcome them joining us in future. Avoid being confrontational and negative this is likely to push people away from us. Remember the pressure they have been under from our opponents.



i) Industrial action day rally

Try to get as many people as possible along to the rally. Rallies give the industrial/strike action day a real boost through trade union speakers and activists reinforcing the reasons why the action was taken.

- ***Rallies are a great way to unite members and let them see they are part of a fighting union.***

j) After the day of action

Hold a meeting of the strike co-ordinating committee to assess how the day went. Identify your strengths and weaknesses and discuss how to address these in both the short and longer term. Put a plan together to approach members who did not join the action and try to persuade them to get involved next time.

Ideally a workplace meeting - or meeting off the premises with members - should be organised to report this analysis and get feedback from members.

This will give your brigade and branch an opportunity to build from the action and perhaps identify new activists.

- ***Remember: a picket line is only part of a dispute***
- ***It really matters how you follow it up - you don't want to lose momentum!***