The Trade Union Bill

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

The Trade Union Bill is a blatant attempt to silence workers from fighting back against cuts and attacks on pay, pensions and conditions.

The Conservatives were put into office with the support of just 24% of the electorate. Only 37% of those who voted backed them. Under their own proposed rules they wouldn't even be in office.

They aim to silence our voice in politics and in the workplace.

It is being pitched as a check on 'trade union barons' - in reality it is an attack on every working person.

The fault for industrial disputes does not lie with unions. Industrial action is always a last resort when government and employers refuse to listen to reasoned arguments.

Check-off

The attack on check-off will do nothing to improve local industrial relations.

Public sector employers are now being told that they must end the voluntary agreements they have with employees and unions.

A number of local authorities have already condemned the move and stated as public sector employers that they do not support the change.

Key Proposals

- A new 50% turnout requirement for all industrial action ballots.
- An additional threshold in 'important public services' - including the fire service. This requires 40% of the entire workforce to vote yes.
- Allowing employers to use agency labour to break industrial action.
- Making trade unions contribute to the running costs of the Certification Officer, which will inevitably rise as a result of the Bill.
- Giving further powers to the Certification Officer to investigate and impose sanctions on unions.
- An increase from 7 to 14 days' notice that must be provided to employers for industrial action to take place.
- Industrial action ballots will only be valid for four months. Once four months has lapsed unions must re-ballot.
- Further reductions in trade union leave for reps in the public sector.
- Making political funds become 'opt-in' as opposed to 'opt-out', affecting a unions campaigning fund.
- The end of the use of check-off for collecting union subs in the public sector.

This change would also mean public sector unions must submit a comprehensive list of all members including their workplace in the event of industrial action.

Government is clearly trying to divert the time and resources of unions and their members from opposing their policies into a long bureaucratic process of switching members to direct debit.

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Ballots

An abstention is treated as a no vote, this is completely undemocratic. The government's consultation could only muster 28% of its respondents to support their proposals for the additional ballot threshold in the fire service.

Every single FBU ballot since 2010 has met the proposed thresholds. The key to increasing membership participation in ballots is solid workplace organisation, with representation in every workplace and at every level.

The Bill as a whole however, aims to undermine our ability to organise. Facility time is being slashed, check-off is being removed and trade unions are being asked to jump through hoops unnecessarily.

Finance

It is a politically motivated attempt to sabotage union finances and to restrict a unions' ability to campaign in politics and the workplace.

The rules on ballots lapsing, political funds, check-off and the Certification Officer are all unnecessary bureaucratic maneuvers, from a government who claims to be 'reducing' red tape.

Trade union money is members' money. Not content with attacking the pay and pensions of firefighters, government now wants to dictate how workers' trade union fees are spent.

The government's own impact assessment, which was published in January, estimates the Bill will cost unions £37 million in the first six years alone.

Initial research by the TUC suggests this figure is optimistic, the real cost is likely to be much higher.

Government is essentially trying to limit how long a union's campaign can last for. That is not up to them. Through democratic structures members drive the policies and campaigns of the union.

The next steps in the campaign

The flawed proposals are being pushed through parliament swiftly. The government did not even publish the impact assessment for the Bill until late January 2016, after it had gone through the House of Commons.

Large parts of the Bill were not even consulted on. The consultation process was very limited with the questions tailored by government to try to gain more ammunition to attack unions with.

The Bill is now in the House of Lords, where the lobbying campaign continues. There have been some victories. Government suffered a setback when peers overwhelmingly voted to properly scrutinise the proposals on political funds in a separate committee.

The Trade Union Bill, like the cuts to the service and government's moves to enable PCCs to take over the service, is a direct attack on firefighters.

These are all linked. All of their attacks are about undermining our organisation and stopping us campaigning against their policies. They want to silence any resistance to their agenda.

In the last few months the government has been forced to backtrack on a number of issues due to mass pressure. The only way to overturn their policies is to build our union, get organised and stick together.

What can you do?

Get involved in your union - attend branch meetings and local events

Talk to your colleagues about the attacks on workers' rights and on the fire service

Campaign against any attacks on the fire service or your rights at work

Switch your membership to Direct Debit- stay protected