

Aberdeen Universities Branch

October 2015

# UNISON *news*

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## protect the right to strike:

**SPECIAL  
EDITION**

# kill the bill



The Trade Union Bill currently before Parliament is unfair, unnecessary and undemocratic. MPs need to focus on the real problems the country faces and talk to us about how we can work together for a better future.

In this special edition we explore what the Trade Union Bill means, explain why it's an outright attack on individual rights and what we need to do to campaign against it!

See the links below for details.

[www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/trade-union-bill-2015](http://www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/trade-union-bill-2015)

[www.tuc.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.tuc.org.uk/get-involved)



## WORTH *it*

Valuing public services and the people who provide them

# PROTECT THE RIGHT TO STRIKE



## 1. AGENCY WORKERS

The government plans to allow agency workers to replace striking workers. And by requiring 14 days' notice of strike action (rather than 7 as at present), employers will have more time to arrange agency workers to cover for strikes. This has been banned in the UK since 1973.



### What are our concerns?

- This fundamentally undermines the right to strike, as it reduces the impact of strike action, and upsets the power balance between workers and employers.
- These changes will make the UK an outlier in Europe. Across the EU large agencies have agreed not to use agency workers to replace striking workers.
- There are health and safety concerns about inexperienced replacement workers taking on the roles of the permanent workforce. Inexperienced agency workers replacing strikers might lead to poorer quality services.

## 2. PICKETING AND PROTESTS

Unions will have to appoint picket supervisors. They will be required to carry a letter of authorisation which must be presented upon request to the police or "to any other person who reasonably asks to see it". The supervisor's details must be given to the police and they must be identifiable by an armband or badge. Failure to comply could result in a court injunction to stop the picket, or thousands of pounds of damages for the union. Local authorities could also have the right to issue anti-social behaviour orders to picket line participants or protesters. The government is even consulting on introducing new criminal offences and sanctions.



Unions may have to report protest plans publicly to employers and regulators 14 days in advance of any action (and will have to give 14 days' notice of any industrial action). Details required would include timings, location, the number of participants and even whether protesters plan to use "loudspeakers, props, banners, etc". If unions don't report their plans then they face significant fines.

### What are our concerns?

- Existing law already requires union members to comply with tough picketing rules. The new regulations are overly bureaucratic and the penalties are disproportionate. The protest restrictions are unjustified and would divert already scarce police resources away from tackling serious crime.
- Unions are currently required to give 7 days' notice before industrial action takes place. Doubling the notice period for strike action to 14 days as well as requiring unions to publish details of protest activities will undermine negotiations and allow employers to recruit agency workers to cover for strikers.
- This level of scrutiny and monitoring is excessive, undermining freedom of speech and threatening the civil liberties of working people who should be free to defend their rights.

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### 3. THRESHOLDS

In 'important public services' (fire, health, education, transport, border security and nuclear decommissioning), 50% of members must turn out to vote and 40% of the entire membership must vote in favour (that amounts to 80% of those voting, on a 50% turnout). The government argues these thresholds are aimed at boosting democracy in the workplace.



#### What are our concerns?

- Strikes are always a last resort but sometimes they are the only way to resolve disputes at work – including in those industries and occupations included in the government's definition of 'important public services'.
- The government's definition of 'important public services' is wider than the definition of 'essential services' in international law.
- If the government was committed to increasing democracy it would allow secure electronic and workplace strike ballots instead of arbitrary thresholds. Online voting is already used by several national membership organisations including the RNIB, the Institute of Chartered Accountants for England and Wales, the National Trust, the Magistrates' Association, the Countryside Alliance and the Royal College of Surgeons. And it is regularly used by political parties – including by the Conservative party to select their London Mayoral candidate.

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### 4. REGULATING UNIONS

The Certification Officer (who regulates unions) will be given powers to investigate unions and access membership lists even if no-one has complained about a union's activities. The regulator will also be able to impose fines of up to £20,000 on unions. The government will be able to charge unions to cover the running costs of the Certification Officer. Costs are likely to increase as the regulator has new responsibilities.



#### What are our concerns?

- There is no reason why the trade union regulator needs new powers now.
- Giving the Certification Officer the power to confiscate copies of membership records and other documents is an intrusion on union members' privacy and their right to have an independent relationship with their union.
- Significant new costs will be placed on unions to pay for this red tape – money that could be better spent protecting and promoting the rights of workers.

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### 5. PUBLIC SECTOR FACILITY TIME

All public sector employers will have to publish information on the cost of time off for union reps, plus a breakdown of what facility time is used for – collective bargaining, representing members in grievances or disciplinary action, or running training programmes. Public sector employers won't be able to offer the option of paying for union membership direct through salaries anymore ("check-off"). The government will be able to cap the time employers allow union reps to spend representing members.



#### What are our concerns?

- These changes will restrict public sector employers from investing in good relations with their own employees.
- Deductions at payroll are a common way that employers help their employees manage their money – often childcare, travel, bike or computer payments are made this way. It's not clear why union membership fees should be singled out.
- These moves will reduce unions' ability to represent their members and resolve disputes before they escalate.
- Individual public sector employers should have the freedom to decide how they manage employment relations. The changes add more red tape for unions, whose time and money would be best spent serving members.

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Find us online:  
[www.aub-unison.org.uk](http://www.aub-unison.org.uk)

Want to get more involved with your union at a local level, and help in campaigns and representation?

We're always ready to welcome anyone who wants to get more involved—just get in touch with one of your local stewards below and they'll point you in the right direction!



So what do you need to do to help fight against the Trade Union Bill?

→ Write to your MP

→ Sign Petitions

Find all the details online:

→ Get an activist pack

[www.tuc.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.tuc.org.uk/get-involved)

→ Attend Rallies

## YOUR BRANCH STEWARDS

### ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

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Julie Yackiminie (Branch Chair)	Nursing & Midwifery, Garthdee	01224 262950
Colin Jones (Treasurer)	IT Services, ICRGU, Garthdee	01224 262178
Iain McLenan (H&S)	Janitorial Group, Garthdee	01224 262890
Anne Campbell	Gray's School of Art	01224 263675
Clare Parks (LLC)	Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator	01224 262167

### UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

Name	Location	Telephone
Trish Burnett (Branch Secretary)	Student Association	01224 273951
Elizabeth Robertson (H&S)	School of Education	01224 274507
Georgia Mannion-Krase	Data Co-ordinator	01224 438193
Owen Cox	Security Officer, Estates	n/a
Christine Burnett	School of Language & Literature	n/a



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- access to training and education courses;
- a members magazine sent to your home address four times a year;
- discounts for members and their families at Croyde Bay, the union's holiday resort on the North Devon coast.

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