



No to the Government's Trade Union Bill!

The Trade Union Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on July 15 by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Sajid Javid. It is stated to “make provision about industrial action, trade unions, employers’ associations and the functions of the Certification Officer”. This was the Bill’s 1st reading, so no debate took place at this stage. The date for the second reading debate has not yet been announced.

Nevertheless, the workers’ movement and all concerned with the right to organise and to fight effectively for the rights of all are taking the bill’s threats very seriously. A public meeting, “Reviewing and Resisting the Trade Union Bill”, was organised in London on July 29 by the Institute of Employment Rights (IER), the Campaign for Trade

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Fighting to Safeguard the Future of the NHS:

What is Behind the Closure of Jarrow Walk-Centre?

As we publish, the people of South Tyneside, and Jarrow and Hebburn in particular, are waging a heroic battle to save their Walk-In Centre at Jarrow, Palmer Hospital from being closed down and moved to the District Hospital A&E in South Shields. The Save Jarrow Walk-In Centre Campaign has engaged hundreds of people from all walks of life in the borough. It has brought together trade unions and different political forces in one of the most broad campaigns seen in the borough in recent years. In spite of this opposition the South Tyneside CCG is still determined to close the walk-centre in October and has ignored the just and reasoned arguments of residents in the borough. The logical arguments that have seen a minor injuries, or a walk in centre in Jarrow since the NHS was founded are completely ignored. Also, insultingly people who use the walk-centre are blamed for the closure. It doesn’t take much to read this message when the CCG says that the 27,000 patient attendances are completely unnecessary and these patients will “self care” and “disappear”.

But besides the CCG and South Tyneside Health and Well Being Board who are closing the centre what is behind the closure of Jarrow Walk-In Centre? For this we have to look at the whole direction that is being taken by the Government on the NHS. Their Health Act in 2012 and the internal market created by the previous Labour government is the bridge on which this anti-social direction has been constructed. In 2013, the Coalition government appointed Sir Bruce Keogh to review A&E

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Union Freedom (CTUF), the Centre for Labour and Social Studies (CLASS) and The People's Assembly Against Austerity.

As soon as the Bill was announced at its first reading in Parliament with its measures to impose a minimum 50% turnout – and public sector strikes would need the backing of at least 40% of those eligible to vote – the trade unions pointed out that it was aimed at making strikes almost impossible for them to organise. The BBC commentators also admitted that what was being presented in the Commons “represents the biggest shake-up in the rules on industrial action in 30 years”. It includes measures to to give employers 14 days’ notice of strike action and allow them to bring in agency staff to cover for striking workers. The legislation could also cut the amount of money unions have to mount political campaigns – or donate to parties – with members actively having to “opt in” to pay the so-called political levy, which is currently automatic unless members opt-out. It also contains measures to limit the amount of facility time available for union organisation in work places making it even more difficult for workers to organise their unions to stand up for the rights and interests of their members. The government tried to claim that the legislation had the public behind it and Conservative efforts to ensure strikes were only called as “a last resort” and the Bill claims that it is “compatible” with the European Convention on Human Rights. However, it is not hard to see through this propaganda aimed against the worker’s “right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”¹ Also, strikes are already “a last resort” of workers. The archaic system of postal balloting imposed on the trade unions costs a large amount of union resources which is not imposed on monopoly corporations and public employers when they take measures against the interests of the workers. Then strikes are only undertaken because workers are faced with constant attacks on their public services and their jobs, terms and conditions of work and pensions. The government are driving this dictatorial neo-liberal agenda of austerity without taking account of the majority in the workplaces and in society. What the government is aiming at with this legislation is to make it even harder for workers to resist this agenda which is to serve the corporate elite over the needs of all in society. The legislation has to be seen as part of the imposition of

the austerity, cuts and privatisation of the public sector and increased expropriation of the wages and conditions of working people across all sectors of the economy. By focusing on “reforming the trade unions” they are also trying to blame this wrecking of society and of public services on the trade unions to deflect the anger from themselves. It is the government that is attacking democratic rights to uphold monopoly right over public right. But it wants to turn truth on its head and claim that it is imposing “democracy” and “human rights” on the trade unions.

This deception is at the heart of the propaganda on the Trade Union Bill. Dave Hopper, General Secretary of the Durham Miners Association pointed out at the Durham Miners Gala on July 11 that this legislation was to “shackle” the trade unions. He said: “How can a government elected by a tiny percentage of the electorate demand that a trade union ballot can only be valid if a certain percentage of people vote. It is even more hypocritical when we consider that in Parliament there are no secret ballots and no requirement for a certain percentage of MPs to vote.”

So then, when one considers that this legislation has nothing to do with democracy, or human rights and that as can be seen the ruling elite care nothing for such considerations when it suits their plans to impose austerity, what are they intending with this legislation? What really concerns them is to prevent the workers from bringing their numbers and organisation into play in their resistance against the anti-social measures that they are trying to force through. Whilst they want to present the trade unions as the ones who are abusing their power by striking to defend the public services and pensions and so on. The actual abuse of power is caused by presenting this Bill for which the government have no mandate.

It should also be noted that the provisions of the Bill will extend to both Wales and Scotland on the grounds that they are not devolved matters. Thus it can be said to further abuse the national rights of the workers and their organisations in these countries to decide how to organise their own affairs, as well as flying in the face of the recognised right of freedom of association. This is particularly so in the light of the cynical formality

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STRONGER TOGETHER NORTH EAST

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Organised by Northern TUC & Northern Public Service Alliance

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of the Secretary of State having to certify that the provisions of the Bill do not contravene the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights (which is *not* a European Union body or declaration).¹

The aim of the government, on behalf of the monopoly elite they represent, is to wipe out any issue of organised workers having a say in anything at work and in society. They want to stop workers being able to organise in any way while they enable the diktat of the ruling elite to ride roughshod over the public sector workers, further excluding them from decisions, cutting jobs, pay and privatising services. Experience shows that already there is an offensive against the right of trade unionists and the representatives of the workforce to organise and speak out both in respect of the interests of the workers and employees and in respect of upholding the public good and the interests of society as a whole. The issue is how to build resistance and defend the workers' organisations against this new and increased offensive.

The question then facing the working class movement is how to be effective in building the opposition to the offensive against workers organising to defend their rights and the rights of all.

The Workers' Opposition has to be built on the basis of a new alternative direction for the economy and for society. There is a growing resistance to the neo-liberal austerity agenda and at the same time, the concern is widespread on how block these attempts to target the trade unions which are at the centre of the resistance. The government must not be allowed to succeed with its Trade Union Bill! All must organise and take a stand!

Note 1 **Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights**

Freedom of assembly and association

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
2. No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This Article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the State.

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services. The result was a “five year forward view” which has as its real remit closure, or downgrading of a large number of the present Accident and Emergency Services. Presently A&E services are backed up by Intensive Care Units, Special Care baby units, and other vital services at the District Hospitals. Services which are all needed to run A&E emergency care. The new “Emergency Centres” will assess and initiate treatment for all patients (meaning both adults and children with physical and/or mental health needs) “and safely transfer them when necessary.” Of course it is deliberately vague as to what back up services the District Hospitals will provide but it can be guessed that the aim is the closure of vital services at District hospitals already under pressure from loss of beds as their budgets are slashed. The way it is already being implemented is that Strategic Urgent Care Networks, of which the North East is one, will designate two types of emergency receiving hospital: Emergency Centres and Major (or Specialist) Emergency Centres.

So what about the CCGs Urgent Care Centre which will replace the walk-in centre in Jarrow at the District Hospital. Professor Jonathan Benger, National Clinical Director for Urgent Care for NHS England pointed out that “Urgent Care Centres will bridge this gap with Emergency Centres (now A&Es -ed). They will encompass all existing urgent care facilities which are not Emergency Departments such as Walk-in Centres, Minor Injuries Units and “Darzi” Centres.” “And all

Emergency Departments should have a *co-located* (our emphasis) Urgent Care Centre, wherever possible.” So, this is the “clinical decision” of the CCG in closing the walk in centre in Jarrow which has nothing to do with the actual clinical need for the walk in centre to remain there. Instead of opening a new walk-in doctor facility at the District Hospital it is simply closing this vital and well placed walk-in centre at Palmer Hospital in Jarrow to create its Urgent Care Centre at the District Hospital. This is the tick box “clinical decision” of the government’s “five year forward view”.

However Professor Jonathan Benger says further on; “Part of the remit of Urgent Care Centres will be to ensure that smaller, more rural and remote communities have local high quality facilities. Stand-alone urgent care centres will be more common and important in remote and rural communities, and our aim is to strengthen the urgent care provision there.” It would seem that remote areas of Sunderland, Gateshead, etc, can keep their walk-in centres (Urgent Care Centres), which is absolutely

right but Jarrow and Hebburn cannot, even though the towns of Jarrow and Hebburn are as remote from South Shields as any other of these walk-in centres.

What is encouraging is that the fight to save Jarrow Walk-Centre has awoken the people of South Tyneside to the threat to their health service and the need to fight to safeguard its future. The Save Jarrow Walk-In Centre Campaign is calling on everyone to sign its petition. The fight is not over and the people of South Tyneside are more and more getting involved in its activities. Over the next few months and years this movement must continue to lay the claims in defence of urgent care and A&E services, as well as hospital beds and community services which are coming under unprecedented attack from constant reviews and cut-backs, fragmentation and privatisation. The claims of the people can only be won by strengthening their organised opposition and their unity with health workers and the whole community to fight to defend their services and to safeguard the future of the NHS. □

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