

29 November 2023

MPs protest threat of anti-strike laws to PCS members

Several MPs – including members of the PCS Parliamentary Group – slammed proposed laws on minimum service levels at a parliamentary committee on Monday (27).

PCS has asked members and MPs to demonstrate their opposition to proposed laws on minimum service levels which would [affect many thousands of our Home Office members](#), including border security staff and some members in the Passport Office.

The legislation would limit the impact of a strike by forcing workers to maintain a level of service in the industry they work through the use of minimum service levels (MSL), effectively stripping the right to strike from many of our members in the Home Office.

The committee meeting came in the same week that the government announced plans to introduce MSLs in schools during strikes by teachers.

Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, [called these plans "shameful" and a "fundamental attack on the democratic freedoms and rights of school staff"](#).

Act of provocation

At a delegated legislation committee on Monday that looked at how MSLs would affect our Home Office members, John McDonnell MP said that it will be “an act of provocation” when the first striker or union is punished by these proposed regulations, since “imposing this legislation undermines the industrial relations climate and worsens it significantly” and will negatively affect recruitment and retention, as well as morale.

McDonnell also told the committee that it would be worthwhile meeting with our members who work in the Border Force – who he called “trained professionals who do actually understand the role that they play in protecting the country

itself” – because they “do not go on strike lightly”.

“I do find it ironic the emphasis that has been put on the importance of the role that [Border Force members] play [in national security]. And yet, when it comes to wage negotiations, that doesn’t seem to be reflected in the offers that they’ve had,” he added.

“That’s why they’ve taken industrial action: because they couldn’t find any other route to secure a wage settlement that in some way met the challenges they’ve faced in the cost-of-living crisis.”

Breach of international law

Labour MP Grahame Morris emphasised that stripping “thousands of Border Force and now, we learn, an as yet undetermined number of Passport Office workers” of their right to strike breaches several “international agreements”.

Noting that this legislation comes in the context of the UK already having “some of the strictest anti-trade union laws in Europe”, he also argued that “if the legislation is really about improving the service to the public, [the government] should address some of the more fundamental issues like under-staffing on non-strike days”.

“The undeniable truth is that these workers in both the Border Force and Home Office play a vital role in the functioning of the United Kingdom,” he said. “Rather than restricting their rights, the government should consider proper remuneration as a means to recognise and appreciate their contributions.”

Stephen Kinnock MP noted Labour’s opposition to the legislation and complained that the government has failed to explain how many Passport Office staff would be affected. Alison Thewliss MP also expressed the SNP’s opposition to minimum service levels in the Home Office, arguing that the legislation will have “an impact people’s fundamental right to withdraw their labour”.

Email your MP

[Email your MP using ActionNetwork](#) to send a clear message that this is their final chance to stand with working people such as teachers, paramedics, rail workers, and the many PCS members in the Home Office who will be affected by these new anti-strike regulations.

If the government gets its way, they will have the power to implement these regulations by Christmas.

PCS will join [a special TUC congress](#) in London on 9 December which will “explore options for non-compliance and resistance” to the government’s anti-trade union restrictions which represent a direct attack on workers’ rights.

Please check back on the PCS website over the next few weeks for more content on these regulations.

Not yet a PCS member? [Join online today](#).