



[Paul Nowak](#)

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## **Channelling the spirit of the brave GCHQ workers**

Before the rally in Cheltenham on 27 January to mark the 40th anniversary of the ban on unions at GCHQ, Paul reflects on the need to keep up the fight to defend trade union rights.

Forty years ago – on 25 January 1984 - Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government attacked trade union rights at GCHQ.

[Trade union members were told to resign their membership or be sacked.](#)

But after a long and heroic campaign marked by the fortitude of the workers and their families, and the solidarity of the whole movement, they were reinstated when an incoming Labour government repealed the ban.

The spirit and fight shown at GCHQ in Cheltenham has never been more badly needed.

Today, the Tories are once again hellbent on attacking the right to strike – a fundamental British liberty. Their draconian Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill is even more extreme than Thatcher’s attack in 1984.

This time over five million workers face losing their right to strike – including PCS members in border security. It would place onerous restrictions on public sector and rail unions and make taking effective industrial action far harder.

Last month the TUC called its first Special Congress in 40 years to discuss how we resist these spiteful new laws.

The message from the trade union movement was unanimous, resounding and clear – we will defend the right to strike at all costs. And we will not rest until this pernicious legislation is repealed from the statute books.

Because let's be clear: if the Tories get their way this is just the start. We should expect further attacks on the rights of workers and trade unions in other sectors not yet affected.

The government wants to use this heinous new bill as a Trojan horse for other anti-union measures, including an attempted clamp-down on picketing. It is an ideological assault on workers' and trade unions' rights and a brazen attempt to silence workers' voices and reduce their power.

The imposition of minimum service levels means that when workers lawfully vote to take strike action, they could be told to attend work – and sacked if they don't comply.

Our public services are crying out for investment to address the recruitment and retention crisis they face. But, instead, the Conservatives are seeking to poison industrial relations, with the result that services deteriorate even more.

It is all driven by an unelected and out-of-touch prime minister who has lost the confidence of the British people. We won't let this happen.

We will use every lever at our disposal to defeat these unworkable – and almost certainly illegal – new laws. We will name and shame any employer or public body that uses this legislation. We will challenge every work notice issued by employers.

And the full force of the whole union movement will stand behind any worker disciplined or sacked for exercising their right to strike.

Please join me – and trade union members from across the country – on Saturday 27 January 2024 [as we march and rally in Cheltenham to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the GCHQ trade union ban.](#)

Let's channel the spirit of those brave GCHQ workers and show our collective defiance against the Tories' attack on the right to strike.

***Get involved in the [march and rally in Cheltenham on 27 January](#) supported by PCS.***