

17 January 2023

Tory Anti-Strike Bill passes on to next stage

MPs vote 309 to 249 following heated debate in the Commons

On Monday 15 January MPs from all parties took part in the next stage of the Tories' anti-strike Bill which was published last week. The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, which is likely to pass through the Commons before the end of the month, has been met with outcry from trade unions across the UK, and opposition MPs took the opportunity in this 5-hour debate to put on record their fears surrounding this undemocratic legislation.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State for BEIS, Grant Shapps, heralded the Bill as a way to retain public safety during periods of strike action, despite the word safety not appearing in the Bill once. He stated that 'We must be able to have confidence that when strikes occur, people's lives and livelihoods are not put at undue risk. As has become clear from recent industrial action, that is not always the case, so we need a safety net in place to ensure that the public do not become collateral damage.'

The Minister also used his opening remarks to confirm that his government, despite facing public sector wide industrial action and a growing epidemic of poverty across the country, would not be funding any above inflation pay rises stating that 'if we were to meet all the inflation busting demands of the unions, that would make life harder not only for some but for every single family in this country. That is why we cannot do that.'

The majority of Tory MPs who attended, spoke and supported the legislation, were all reading from the same, very choreographed hymn sheet in which they demonised those workers who took action, and insisted that the public were being put at physical and financial risk. Many Labour and opposition MPs rightly pointed out that many of the Tories' own constituents, who democratically voted for action, were likely being put at risk before any action took place due to chronic underfunding of key services.

Dozens of opposition MPs stood up and condemned the government and its attack on workers' democratic right to withhold their labour. MPs also voiced their concerns regarding the impact assessment relating to the Bill, which has yet to be seen. MPs argued that they should not be voting on such a significant piece of legislation without all the necessary information, including the related statutory instruments and regulations associated with the proposals.

PCS Parliamentary Group member Ian Lavery MP spoke against the Bill and declared that despite the proposed legislation, including the ability to sack those who take action in the face of a work notice, there is still the well-upheld principle that 'thou shalt never cross a picket line'. Labour MP Paula Barker, who has been incredibly supportive of PCS members in her own constituency referred to the Bill as the 'bosses charter' highlighting the overwhelming power which will be handed to Ministers and employers should the Bill pass in its current form. Numerous members of the PCS Parliamentary Group attended and contributed to the debate, however due to the high demand MPs were limited to 3 minutes for each contribution.

It was confirmed that the Bill will move to the next stage which will be a Committee of the whole House, a quicker way for the Bill to pass through parliament. MPs will be given a few hours to debate the legislation line by line and attempt to amend the government's attempt to curb strike action. It is expected to return to the House shortly.

[Read the transcript of the debate in full online.](#)