**Fight for Our Rights**

**Pauline Bryan Editor**

 **The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill is bad legislation in so many ways. It is a blatant attack on the trade union rights and individual workers. It breaches European Convention on Human Rights and is contrary to the International Labour Organisation Treaty. It is specifically designed to avoid the scrutiny of Parliament. It further undermines the powers of devolved administrations. And it will ultimately lead to a worsening of relations within important public services that depend so much on the good will of workers.**

 It is in a long line of legislation that is trampling over the accepted responsibilities of the developed governments including: UK Internal Markets Act, Nationality and Borders Act, Subsidy Control Act, Elections Act, Levelling up & Regeneration Bill, Retained EU Law Bill, just to name a few.

The Bill covers six services, only one (Border security) is a reserved matter. Health services, education, fire & rescue services, transport services and the decommissioning of nuclear plants are all devolved responsibilities, and it is the elected members of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd and their governments who are ultimately accountable for the delivery of these services. The UK government has no mandate at all for these services.

Not only does this Bill seek to allow Government Ministers to interfere in devolved areas of competency it does not even outline what these powers would involve in the body of the Bill. Parliament is yet again being asked to put its name to blank cheque.

What we do know about the Bill is that it requires employers to issue Work Notices which outline not just the work to be covered but specifically who should do that work. This may be specific posts, but it can be named people. If the person required to work choses to continue to strike, they lose the protection from unfair dismissal. This would allow employers to target trade union representatives and anyone they want to get rid of.

This Bill totally misunderstands the relationship between a trade union and its members. For example, it talks about a union’s role in enforcing Work Notices: it prohibits “an act done by the union to induce a person to take part, or to continue to take part, in the strike.” It allows employers to target union funds if they do not force people to work.

Trade unions don’t call strikes, members call strikes. Over the decades Tory governments thought that strikes could be prevented by having paper ballots, and then requiring that ballots be sent to the member’s home address. It is beyond question that a strike can only take place if a significant percentage of members vote for it.

The authors of this Bill want to make a fundamental change in the relationship between Trade unions and members. They expect Trade Union officers not to represent their members but to police them.

It also ignores the fact that during most strikes care is taken to ensure that vulnerable people are protected from harm.

The majority of workers in these areas deliver far more hours than they are contracted on a regular basis. If teachers, doctors and nurses and train drivers worked to rule their services would grind to a halt. They regularly deliver maximum levels of services not minimum.

The trade union members covering these vital services have long been calling on Governments to ensure safe-staffing levels, but to no avail. It is ironic that the Government is now focusing on minimum staffing levels as a reason to curtail strike action, when protecting services is part of why many workers are striking in the first place.

If the public had to choose between the government or the workers to set minimum standards for essential services, I think we can guess who they would trust to do what is in the best interests of service users, and it wouldn’t be this government that has allowed those very services to be driven into the ground.

This Bill reinforces the case for devolving Employment Rights. This should ensure that there are standards to be enforced across the whole of the UK, but that devolved governments can improve on those rights and in the process help raise demands for greater rights across the UK.