

EPSU calls for support for UK unions taking action and their fight against new strike laws



(12 January 2023) Trade unions representing ambulance staff in England were on strike yesterday to secure better pay and conditions. EPSU supports its affiliates – UNISON, GMB and Unite – in this action and condemns the UK government for its plans to toughen up what are already very restrictive strike laws.

EPSU General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan said: “It is deplorable that instead of making every effort to negotiate a deal with health unions, the government is rushing through legislation that will impose further restrictions on the right to strike in the UK and could even lead to the dismissal of public service workers.”

The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill was published on 10 January and, if passed, will apply to health, fire and rescue services, education, transport, nuclear decommissioning and border security. The law goes as far as to allow employers to specify which workers should be on duty to ensure a minimum service and to dismiss any employees who ignore this notice. According to the bill, unions will be consulted but will not have a right to negotiate.

Jan Willem Goudriaan added: "The UK government is attempting to justify the new rules with references to the other countries, such as Italy and Spain. It fails to mention that unions in these countries negotiate their minimum service levels and that they operate in a different legal framework where they don't face the excessive rules and thresholds for balloting imposed in the UK."

The TUC, the UK's trade union confederation, is planning a day of protest against the new strike law on 1 February, the date since chosen by the PCS civil service union for strike action by 100,000 workers across central government. EPSU encourages all its affiliates and trade unions across all sectors to send solidarity messages to UK unions and to support in particular the EPSU unions that are taking action over the next few weeks.

Upcoming strikes and ballots for action in the public services in the UK

- Ambulance workers in England (UNISON, GMB and Unite) will follow up their action today with another day of strike action on 23 January. In Wales, Unite members in the ambulance service have also now voted for action on 19 and 23 January.
- The RCN nursing union, which organised strike action in England and Wales in December for the first time in its history, will take further action on 18 and 19 January.
- The PCS union representing central government workers is in the middle of targeted strike action involving workers in five departments and agencies that runs to 16 January along with the bigger action on 1 February.
- Members of UNISON at the Environment Agency will taken action on pay on 18 January.
- The FBU firefighters' union that will also be impacted by the legislation is holding a ballot for action on pay that runs to 30 January.

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