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Dear Prime Minister

I am writing to express grave concern about the news of your government's intention to introduce legislation to ban strikes in the health and social care sector.

As general secretary of EPSU – the European Federation of Public Service Unions – I speak on behalf of over seven million public service workers in 50 countries. Health and social care workers make up the largest part of our membership and we are recognised by the European Commission as the sole representative trade union federation for the European social dialogue in hospitals and health services.

Many of our affiliates across Europe are in the middle of negotiations over pay and conditions, with some planning or balloting for industrial action. When negotiations are blocked, it should be a fundamental right of trade unions to take industrial action in the face of employer or government resistance to negotiate.

We find it alarming that the government of a country like Finland, with such a positive record on industrial relations and collective bargaining should resort to this kind of tactic rather than make every effort to try to resolve the dispute. You should know very well that our affiliates, Tehy and Super, have planned their industrial action with great care to ensure that essential and emergency services are maintained. Indeed, early this year they decided that industrial action in social care was impossible because of the critical shortage of staff in the sector.

Your actions also mark out Finland as taking a particularly hard line in a surprising contrast to countries like Latvia and the UK where our affiliates in the health sector are planning strike action and are able to do so within the rules set out in those countries.

We would underline that Tehy and Super, like many of our affiliates across Europe, are driven to take industrial action because of the need to address the acute shortage of staff and improvements in pay and conditions are a key way to increase the recruitment of new staff and retain existing workers. This is the issue that your government should be focused on and any attempt to end the dispute through a strike ban is only likely to worsen an already tense situation and lead to even more workers leaving the sector.

On behalf of EPSU and our Finnish affiliates, I would encourage you to withdraw any plans to introduce a strike ban and to play a positive role in helping to end the conflict in the health sector.



Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary