

TU Bill: Latest News

On 20th January, peers from all parties voted to set up a cross-party committee to scrutinise the unjustifiable proposals on political funds in the government's Trade Union Bill. The Trade Union Bill's proposals would mean a cut in income to the Labour Party from the unions of at least £35m across a five-year parliament. The loss would come in annual union affiliation fees and grants on top of cuts to state funding of opposition parties – known as Short Money – introduced by introduced by George Osborne in November. Meanwhile the government are doing nothing to address the huge donations individuals and corporations make to the Conservative Party on a regular basis.

The Committee Stage of the bill – a line by line examination - is due to take place in the House of Lords on 8th February.

Branch Action

Amidst the Christmas and New Year celebrations, our branch committee members were busy taking action to oppose the Trade Union Bill which had its second reading in the House of Lords on 11th January.

Activities included a stall in the Union building where our members asked University staff and visitors to sign Christmas cards to University Chancellor Lord Melvyn Bragg. 114 cards, containing a message about the dangers of the bill, were delivered directly to Lord Bragg just before Christmas.

The New Year had barely begun when our branch committee members wrote and posted over 70 individual letters to Lords who might be sympathetic to the trade unions. Of these, 16 gave speeches about the bill at the second reading in the House of Lords. Many Lords backed the Trade Unions and were opposed to most aspects of the Trade Union Bill.

The debate, which included an excellent pro-union speech (see quote below) from the eloquent Lord Bragg, raged from 3pm until 11pm.

"Liberty, Amnesty International and the British Institute of Human Rights argue that the Bill would undermine the rights of all working people. Some 70 local authorities and NHS employers have publicly criticised it.

"Why are the unions the only organisation in the UK legally required to hold postal-only ballots, which tend to be more expensive and lead to lower turnouts? Why is it so rarely said that unionised workplaces are safer places and that union representatives play a big role in improving morale? Yet this Government seem to believe, in an ancient way, that the trade union movement is some sort of demon dragon in our society that needs to be made toothless."

Human Rights Breach

Meanwhile, following an analysis of the Trade Union Bill, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has advised Parliament that a number of measures in the Bill may breach the right to strike. Article 11 of the Human Rights Act gives everyone the right to form and join a union, and to protest peacefully. Some provisions in the Bill could contravene the UK's obligations, including restrictions on how much time public sector employees can spend on union work and also increasing the notice of industrial action from seven days to two weeks.

Lorna McGregor, a Commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission said:

"As it stands, the Trade Union Bill is in danger of imposing potentially unlawful restrictions on everyone's basic human right to strike. Joining a trade union and peacefully picketing outside workplaces is a right not a privilege and restrictions have to be properly justified and proportionate."



Kath Owen and Nick Allen hand over a box of 114 signed Christmas cards to Lord Bragg to highlight the dangers of the Trade Union Bill.

Dates for your Diary

If you 'heart unions', join the TUC's week of action against the Trade Union Bill. This means ensuring the bill remains in the public eye as much as possible. We need to remind politicians and journalists alike of the vital role unions and union members play in our society and economy.

The University of Leeds branch will be hosting a range of events, including:

- 12.45pm on Tuesday, 9th February - 'Big Workplace Meeting' - live meeting with Frances O'Grady, General Secretary of Unison.
- Thursday, 11th February - 'hi-vis' day of action. More details to follow.

For more information visit:
heartunions.org/resources

Don't Forget!

If you have any branch news to share, please email Dawn at d.amesbury@leeds.ac.uk or call: 0113 3430531.