

# CAMPAIGN FOR TRADE UNION FREEDOM

WINTER 2024

## We Must Build Resitance To Anti Union Laws

BY MATT WRACK, FIRE BRIGADES UNION

The UK already has some of the most undemocratic and restrictive anti-union laws in the developed world. It is not a coincidence that real wages in the UK have stagnated. Last summer, real terms pay had fallen to 2005 levels.

To go on strike, trade unions must clear a number of bureaucratic hurdles, and get more than 50% of their members to vote by post, before giving two weeks' notice of any action. In areas classed as 'important public services', more than 40% of members must vote in favour of action.

In many ways, however, the Minimum Service Levels Act is the worst anti-union law yet. Employers in six sectors (health, education services, fire and rescue, border security, transport, and nuclear decommissioning) will now be able to issue 'work notices',

forcing named workers to work even if they have a democratic mandate for strike action and they have met all the other requirements of other laws. Unions will be expected to ensure that members comply with these work notices.

The implementation of the law will be patchy, with different sectors having different minimum service levels. The new regulations already issued in some sectors will not apply in services overseen by devolved governments; a recipe for confusion.

But for many sectors of the economy, including the fire and rescue service, the legislation is an attempt to introduce a de-facto ban on strike action. This is an attack on the basic rights of millions of workers, and is being pursued with the intention of driving down wages and conditions.

The trade union movement cannot passively accept this situation, and it won't. In my capacity as TUC President, I had the privilege of chairing a TUC special congress on Saturday 9th December last year – the first special congress since 1982.

Unions unanimously agreed that they will refuse to tell their members to cross picket lines.

But the special congress was just a start. We must be

willing to turn this sentiment into action - to build a mass movement of resistance and solidarity to break these authoritarian new laws. We cannot rely on judges and politicians to protect us. Workers must defend themselves.

*Matt Wrack writes in his capacity as General Secretary of the FBU. He is also the TUC President this year.*

***"This is an attack on the basic rights of millions of workers, and is being pursued with the intention of driving down wages and conditions."***



# PCS Will Hold Starmer's Feet To The Fire

By FRAN HEATHCOTE, PCS GENERAL SECRETARY

I am honoured to have been recently elected to lead the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) – with around 190,000 members across the civil service and many government agencies.

Mark Serwotka, who led the union for 23 years, has been one of the most inspirational modern leaders in our movement, helping to turn PCS into the bold campaigning union that it is today.

This approach was visible during our successful national campaign in 2023, when we beat the government's pay policy after combining huge national days of strike action with targeted actions across a number of employers. I was proud to be PCS President during this historic campaign.

I am also very proud to be the first woman to lead PCS – or any of its predecessor unions. After all, approximately two-thirds of our membership are women.

2024 sees the 40th anniversary of the banning of trade unions at GCHQ. Four decades after Margaret Thatcher enforced this ban when 14 members stood strong and were sacked, which

provoked a historic campaign by workers that eventually overturned it, another Tory government is now taking a sledgehammer to trade union rights – this time through minimum service levels, which may restrict the right to strike for thousands of PCS members in the Home Office.

The TUC demonstration in Cheltenham on January 27th, commemorates the GCHQ ban and launches the fight against the anti trade union laws and the Minimum Service Levels Legislation.

PCS is not affiliated to the Labour Party but we will hold Sir Keir Starmer's feet to the fire. Labour says within 100 days in office, the party will repeal anti-union legislation.

We welcome this commitment but believe that the devil will be in the detail. The UK has some of the strictest and most restrictive anti-union laws in Europe. Overturning minimum service levels would and should only be a starting point.

Labour must give working people hope that their lives and our society can be better. And part of that must include being supportive of trade union rights.

# CTUF, Strike Map, GFTU Collaboration

By CAROLYN JONES, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, CAMPAIGN FOR TRADE UNION FREEDOM



At the TUC's Special Congress in December, called to discuss the movement's response to the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, it was agreed to pursue a campaign of resistance and non-compliance with the legislation.

As the General Council Statement clearly stated: "The legislation seeks to regulate the content of union communications with their members, requires unions to police their own strikes, and asks unions to take on the role of employers, by informing their members both that they must attend work, and what work they are expected to do. Workers could be sacked for falling foul of the rules and unions hit with huge damages claims."

The TUC Special Congress agreed that "we have no choice but to build mass opposition to the MSLs laws." One focus of the agreed campaign is to "call on all employers and public bodies with oversight to oppose this counterproductive legislation." Such a campaign has already had some success with the Welsh and Scottish governments, together with a number of directly elected mayors and local councils indicating their determination not to issue work notices.

In support of that campaign, CTUF's National Committee agreed to collaborate with Strike Map and the General Federation of Trade Unions to use Strike Map's interactive and visually attractive 'mapping' tools to help engage trade union members and communities in building a mass movement to make MSLs unworkable.

CTUF believes that such a campaign offers an opportunity for us to highlight the restrictive nature of the UK's trade union laws and to build pressure on any future Government to repeal the anti-union laws of the last forty years and implement the promised New Deal for Workers.

Take a look at Strike Map's established mapping tool, used so effectively over recent months to map the many examples of strikes taking place over attacks on pay and conditions, and sign up to the campaign of resistance at [strikemap.org](http://strikemap.org)



# TUC Special Congress

REPORT BY SARAH WOOLLEY, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE BAKERS, FOOD & ALLIED WORKERS UNION AND CO-CHAIR, CAMPAIGN FOR TRADE UNION FREEDOM

At the beginning of December last year the TUC called a special congress of affiliates to debate and vote on a General Council statement calling for the movement to 'take all opportunities to challenge, frustrate and resist this (MSL) legislation and its implementation'.

Matt Wrack the TUC President opened the conference with a

rousing speech, reminding delegates of what has been achieved historically when Governments have tried similar approaches and that without workers not a single wheel can turn.

We heard from workers in each of the sectors that will be initially impacted by the legislation, how their industrial action over the last

12 months has led to increased pay offers, saved jobs, terms and conditions that have been systematically stripped back from over a decade of austerity measures and the devastating impact that has had on the public sector.

Teachers, university lecturers, train drivers and railway workers, doctors, firefighters, NHS workers and civil servants, spoke about how their pay has been eroded, how their workload has increased, including ridiculous amounts of unpaid overtime each week being worked and, in many cases, shamefully in 2023/2024 food bank use by workers across the public sector is continuing to rise.

Trade Union leaders spoke during the debate on the need to have a proper strategy for real non-compliance. Obviously the special conference wasn't the place to discuss the finer details of it as I am sure the Government would be quick to react, but the general mood was clear, real solidarity will likely mean operating outside of the law where we have to, across the movement, regardless of which union is being initially impacted by the legislation itself.

Speaker after speaker reiterated what we knew in the room and

that more and more people are realising in our communities and outside of the movement.

That it isn't strikes that threaten patient, public or passenger safety or the level of education young people are provided, but year after year of under funding by the Government matched with increasing demand. It was even mentioned a few times that minimum service levels would be good to have every day, not just on strike days!

Affiliates were tasked to plan together around the 15 points of the statement, what support they will give, how they will resist, mobilise and push for repeal and work together across sectors and industries to ensure we are not just aligned against the MSL but going forwards too to strengthen our movement and workers' power.

The statement was unanimously and unsurprisingly supported, however, the real work starts now, the legislation is in place and disgracefully is retrospective, so it's only a matter of time before a worker is put in the impossible position of defying their union or their boss. As a movement we can't and shouldn't be waiting for that to happen, we need to be building and agitating now.



## Elon Musk v the Swedish Working Class

By TONY BURKE CO-CHAIR CAMPAIGN FOR TRADE UNION FREEDOM

The strike by 130 members of the Swedish IF Metall union employed by Tesla who are striking to improve conditions and defend the "Swedish model" of trade union rights and sector-wide collective bargaining is in its third month at the time of writing.

Union president Marie Nilsson explained: "If Tesla shows it's possible to operate in Sweden without a collective agreement, other companies could be tempted to do the same. We have a successful model in Sweden. It's very seldom this type of conflict arises."

"The Swedish model" enshrines union recognition and collective bargaining in employment law and is supported widely with around 90% of workers being covered

by a sectoral collective agreements with high levels of union membership.

IF Metall is supported by other Nordic trade unions with members taking action in the Tesla supply chain and Swedish dock workers' have stopped Tesla cars being imported into the country.

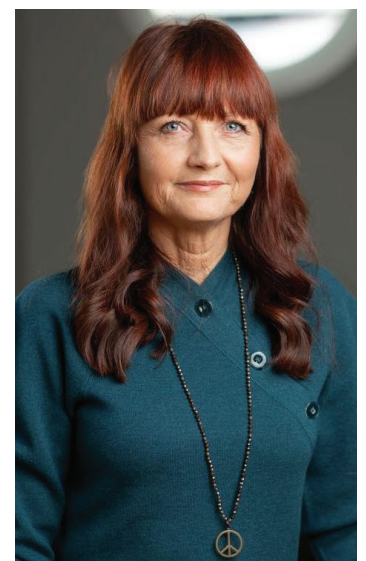
Musk refuses to allow his local management to negotiate with the union and says: "I disagree with the idea of unions. I just don't like anything which creates a lords and peasants sort of thing."

Other Nordic countries have similar arrangements and workers in Sweden and other Nordic unions in transport, ports, painters, engineering and postal workers, are taking action in support of IF Metall.

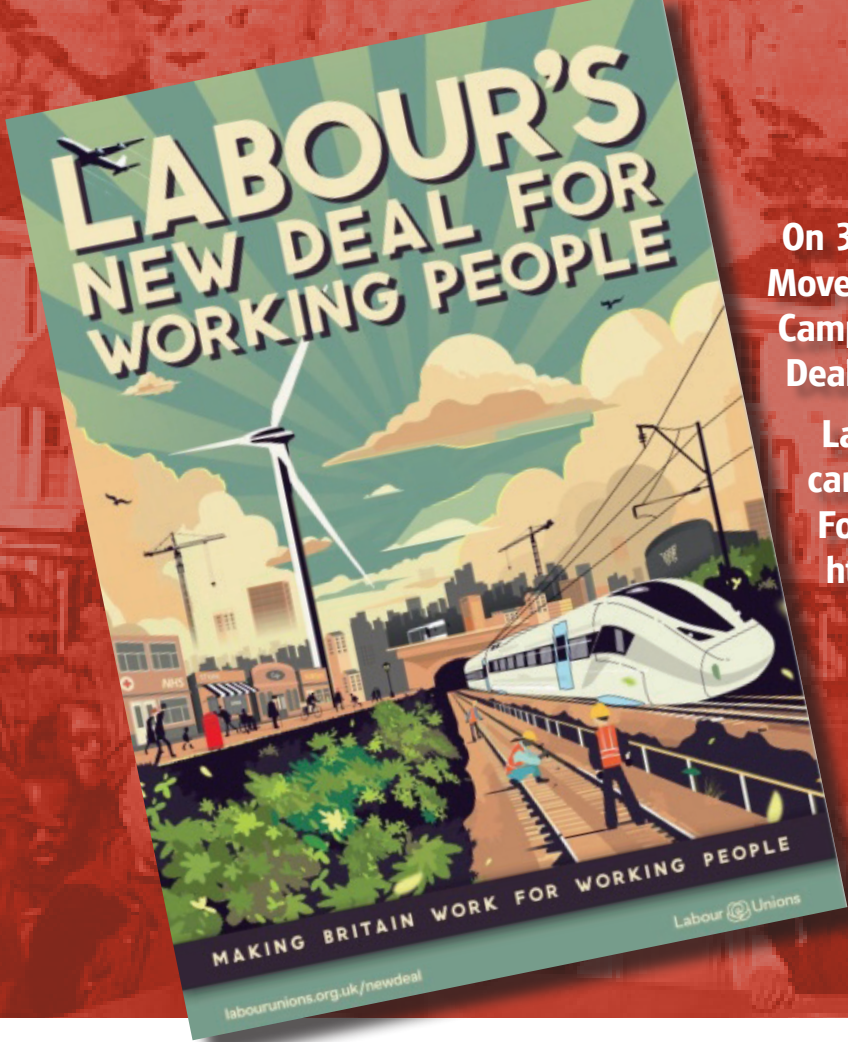
Tesla's investors (including large pension funds) have been critical of Musk's stance and have told him they could withdraw their investment unless the dispute is settled.

Musk attempted to involve the Swedish courts but to no avail and has tried to circumvent action by transport workers by importing Tesla cars via Denmark and Lithuania.

Musk also faces a looming battle over union recognition in Germany where Tesla are refusing to negotiate with the IG Metal union at their plant in Brandenburg and in the USA where the revitalised United Autoworkers Union has Tesla in its sights in a nationwide organising campaign to build union membership in over 15 non unionised auto companies.



Marie Nilsson, President of IF Metall, Sweden.



On 3rd & 4th February the Labour Movement will be uniting for a National Campaign Weekend on Labour's New Deal For Working People.

Labour Unions will be holding campaign events across the country. For more details visit <https://labourunions.org.uk>.

Mick Whelan Chair of Labour Unions and General Secretary of ASLEF: "This will be the big push by Labour's affiliated unions and the Labour Party to ensure the repeal of the anti worker legislation."

# CAMPAIGN FOR TRADE UNION FREEDOM

Union/TUC

National/Region/Branch

Name of secretary

Address

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Complete this affiliation form, take a photo on your phone and email it to [office@tradeunionfreedom.org.uk](mailto:office@tradeunionfreedom.org.uk) We may contact you with information about the Campaign.

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## The Campaign for Trade Union Freedom

is sponsored by 25 national trade union organisations and over 200 branches, trades councils and individuals and financed solely by supporters' fees from trade union bodies and individuals. By becoming a supporter you or your organisation show your agreement with the call to repeal the anti-trade union laws, and aid the Campaign's fight.

Please make cheques payable to Campaign for Trade Union Freedom and send to: CTUF, 4th Floor, 1 Islington, Liverpool, L3 8EG. Donations gratefully received.

