

The Conservative Government's proposed strike ballot thresholds: The challenge to trade unions

by Professor Ralph Darlington
and Dr John Dobson



Ralph Darlington is Professor of Employment Relations at the University of Salford. His research is concerned with the dynamics of trade union organisation, activity and consciousness in Britain and internationally within both contemporary and historical settings. He is author of *The Dynamics of Workplace Unionism* (Mansell, 1994) and *Radical Unionism* (Haymarket, 2013); co-author of *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain, 1972*, (Bookmarks, 2001); and editor of *What's the Point of Industrial Relations? In Defence of Critical Social Science* (BUIRA, 2009). He is an executive member of the British Universities Industrial Relations Association and secretary of the Manchester Industrial Relations Society.



John Dobson has published widely on the operation of labour markets in Central and Eastern Europe and is currently Associated Professor at Riga International School of Economics and Business Administration, Latvia. He was previously a senior lecturer in Industrial Relations at the University of Salford, where he was Head of the School of Management (2002-6) and President of the Salford Branch of the University and College Union (UCU) from 2007-9. He also served on the UCU National Executive from 2009-11.

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contents

CHAPTER ONE

introduction 1

CHAPTER TWO

justification and motivation 5

- the case for change 5
- the case against 6
- assessment 6

CHAPTER THREE

unsubstantiated assumptions and
illogical implications 8

- are non-voters against strikes? 8
- the impact of tactical abstention 9
- are members opposed to strikes? 10
- why the special treatment for strike ballots? 11

CHAPTER FOUR

competing models of union democracy 12

- ballots and democracy 13
- collective versus individual participation 14
- the case for workplace ballots 14

CHAPTER FIVE

other factors influencing participation rates 17

- undecided members 17
- general factors: 18
 - economic climate and employment restructuring 18
 - employment laws 18

strike defeats	19
the crisis of political engagement	19
specific factors:	20
size of the union	20
nature of the union	20
nature of the workforce	20
management structures and behaviour	21
trade union leadership	21
workplace union organisation	22
variable mix	23

CHAPTER SIX

database evidence	24
the effect of introducing a 50 per cent turnout threshold	26
the effect of introducing a 40 per cent 'important public services' threshold	28
fire service	29
health	29
education	30
transport	30
border security	31
the case for a separate 'important public services' threshold	31

CHAPTER SEVEN

three enabling features of participation	32
the level of collective bargaining	32
occupational identity	32
left-wing union leadership	33

CHAPTER EIGHT

union responses	34
illegal action	34
strategic balloting	35
legal challenges	35
leverage campaigns and citizen bargaining	36
unofficial strikes	36
endnotes	37

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The Institute of Employment Rights seeks to develop an alternative approach to labour law and industrial relations and makes a constructive contribution to the debate on the future of trade union freedoms.

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The Institute of Employment Rights
4th Floor Jack Jones House
1 Islington
Liverpool, L3 8EG
Tel: 0151 207 5265
Email: **office@ier.org.uk**
Twitter: @ieruk

According to the authors of this timely report, the government is attempting to rush into law ‘the most sweeping and radical tightening of rules on industrial action since the Thatcher era of the 1980’s’. They warn that such proposals could result in ‘the biggest showdown over industrial relations for a generation’ and go on to drill down into one aspect of the government’s proposals – strike ballots.

The publication first explores the justification and underlying motivation for the introduction of new tougher strike ballot laws before questioning whether the technical measure proposed would increase balloting turn-outs. The pamphlet then retrospectively applies the new laws to previously held ballots by analysing a database the authors have compiled of ballots over the period 1997-2015. They conclude that the new legislation will make it very difficult for unions to mount officially sanctioned strikes in response to government-initiated austerity measures, especially those relating to national bargaining in the public sector and end by reflecting on the unions’ potential responses to the new legislation.

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