

# Trade union leaders call for orderly transition from Starmer to police working class opposition

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Britain's trade union bureaucracy is working overtime to suppress mounting hostility in the working class to the Labour government, amid the deepening crisis surrounding Keir Starmer's premiership.

The central cause of Labour's electoral debacle in last week's local and devolved elections in Scotland and Wales was its right-wing, pro-business and warmongering agenda.

The trade union bureaucracy bears direct responsibility for delivering the working class into the hands of the Starmer government. It throttled the mass strike movement of 2022–23 involving around 2 million workers and promoted the lie that the incoming Labour government would end 14 years of Tory misrule.

Representatives of 11 Labour-affiliated trade unions, which continue to funnel millions of pounds in members' dues to a government imposing austerity and social devastation, met in private on Tuesday.

According to the *Guardian*, Starmer had been invited but snubbed the offer after fending off an immediate challenge to his leadership from Labour MPs.

The unions involved in the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO) include Unite, UNISON, the GMB, Community and the Communication Workers Union (CWU). The *Guardian* reported that the GMB and Community opposed issuing any statement at all.

The two-paragraph communiqué was crafted to shut out an independent political voice of the working class. Its purpose was to prepare an orderly transition in the replacement of Starmer, while preserving Labour's partnership with the union bureaucracy.

"It's clear that the Prime Minister will not lead Labour into the next election, and at some stage a plan will have to be put in place for the election of a new leader. This is a point where the future of the party we founded will be debated and determined, and we are working closely as unions to shape a shared vision on policy, political strategy and economic policy that will re-orient Labour back to

working people, so Labour does what it was elected to do: govern in the interests of workers."

The claim of a union-led reorientation of Labour back toward working people is claptrap, exposed by the statement's assertion of workers prospering under two years of Starmer, only not fast enough: "Whilst we recognise progress has been made, such as aspects of the Employment Rights Act and the increase in the minimum wage, the results at the election last week were devastating."

The Employment Rights Act (ERA) which came into force in December, has been vetted and watered down in conjunction with big business. It retains fire-and-rehire, one of the central tools used by employers to impose sweeping job cuts and tearing up of terms and conditions. It excludes "day one" rights against unfair dismissal. From the start, Labour dropped its promise to introduce "a single status for workers" to end the bogus classification of workers as "self-employed"—a practice widely used in the gig economy to deny basic employment rights, protections, sick pay and holiday entitlement.

The minimum wage now stands at a miserly £12.71 an hour for workers aged 21 and over. Research shows 12 percent of working-age adults in employment still live in poverty, while a full-time worker on the minimum wage remains almost £7,000 a year below the income required for a minimum acceptable standard of living.

For the trade union bureaucracy—deriving incomes placing them in the top 10 percent—"progress" is measured by integration into government and its partnership with big business.

The "left" union bureaucrats fulfil the chief role in attempts to keep working-class opposition under wraps. Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham produced a press release on Labour's electoral debacle. In a repeat of her performative opposition, Graham railed against a Labour's support for a "rigged system where everyday people always, always pay", warning that unless Labour "shift decisively

towards the working class it is finished.”

In the 16-month-long Birmingham bin dispute, Graham has been working to hand over the fate of Unite members fighting for their livelihoods to those who have prosecuted the strike-breaking operation against them—the Labour authority and the Starmer government. In March, Graham boasted of holding a meeting with Starmer to “get a deal over the line” based on lump-sum compensation payments, entrenching the brutal pay cuts, downgrading and job losses bin workers fought to defeat.

The intervention by Mick Lynch, former general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), over the crisis of the Labour government is particularly damning as he gave wholehearted backing for a vote for Starmer in the 2024 general election.

As leader of the long-running dispute on the national railways, which headed up the 2022–23 strike wave, Lynch was the main figure in the Enough is Enough campaign. But once the sellout deals were pushed through, the militant posturing was replaced by Lynch’s call for a Labour vote and lecturing workers to “come to their senses and grow up a bit.”

Lynch’s backing for Andy Burnham as a prospective candidate against Starmer is a continuation of the same rotten politics. The current Mayor of Greater Manchester was in fact schooled by Blair’s New Labour, having served in senior cabinet posts in that government, including as Health Secretary under Gordon Brown, overseeing market “reforms” and privatisation of the National Health Service.

A further example of the policing role by the “left” was provided by CWU general secretary Dave Ward at the union’s biannual conference in Bournemouth this week.

Ward opened the conference referring to Labour’s collapse at the polls, stating it “has disconnected with working people”. His hypocrisy is off the scale. The CWU is seeking to ram through savage attacks on jobs and imposition of increased workloads against 130,000 Royal Mail workers drawn up directly with billionaire Daniel Kretinky’s EP Group and the Starmer government.

Ward saw off a motion to disaffiliate from Labour to ensure members fees continue to bankroll a government acting as a direct tool of the financial oligarchy, insisting “we can’t walk away from the Labour Party at the moment.”

Why Ward wants to continue the partnership with the Labour government was confirmed over a motion to challenge the ban on secondary strike action which the Employment Rights Act has deliberately kept in place. This called “for support for any future lawful industrial action that tests the boundaries of the current law, with the aim of exposing its undemocratic nature.”

The motion from the United Tech and Allied Workers (UTAW) national branch of the CWU, representing workers employed by Google, Apple and TikTok, was moved by Messi Kajalainen, who told the conference, “For 30 plus years employers and corporations have used this against us by fragmenting our industries, outsourcing and restructuring supply chains to keep workers divided.”

In a reference to the centenary of the 1926 General Strike, she continued, “This year of all years we should feel the weight of that. One hundred years ago workers across this country did not ask which employer they worked for before deciding whether to stand together. Printers, dockers, railwaymen, transport workers—they put down their tools in solidarity with the miners. They understood that an injury to one is an injury to all.”

The appeal to the most powerful traditions of class solidarity triggered Ward. Taking to the rostrum, he demanded the motion be remitted or overwhelmingly defeated, insisting that “under no circumstances” could the union be mandated to take unlawful action.

Ward denounced any mobilisation against the anti-strike laws as using members like a “battering ram to take forward ideological positions.” He railed against the “politics of polarisation,” declaring that this had to be opposed on the right and “it’s time we started more openly opposing it on the left.”

Ward’s intervention, directed at a conference hall dominated by full-time officials and apparatus loyalists, secured the motion’s rejection.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee Zoom meeting on May 17 is an opportunity for Royal Mail workers to organise a fightback against the CWU’s collaboration with Kretinsky and the Starmer government over restructuring, job cuts and worsening conditions. These issues point to a wider struggle across the working class against the Starmer government’s austerity agenda, privatisation drive and the entire corporatist alliance of Labour, big business and the trade union bureaucracy. Register today. Top of Form



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