



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Response to the Trade Union Bill

Thank you for contacting me about the Trade Union Bill.

I recognise that trade unions are valuable institutions in British society and dedicated trade unionists have a strong history of working hard to represent their members, campaigning for improved safety at work and giving support to their members when it's needed. I believe it is only fair, however, that the rights of unions are balanced with the rights of hardworking taxpayers who rely on key public services.

The aim of the Bill is to rebalance the interest of employers, employees and the public with the freedom of trade unions to strike. At present, it is the case that a small minority of union members can disrupt the lives of millions of commuters, parents, workers and employers at short notice and without clear support from the unions' members. Because of the high impact on the normal life on a large group of people, I therefore believe it is completely sensible that such strikes only take place on the basis of a reasonable turnout and substantial vote in favour by those able to vote.

I also recognise that online ballots could be a useful tool to bring about change in the voting process. However, a key challenge is how to be sufficiently confident about both e-security and the confidentiality of the votes. The Electoral Reform Services has acknowledged the challenges of the secrecy of the vote. For instance, it is potentially easier to gain access to huge quantities of electronic votes, which would be much harder to do with postal votes. There are also further issues around security and the significant risk of intimidation in the workplace, possible fraud by trade union officials and the risks of interception of PIN numbers/passwords.

The Open Rights Group have also highlighted these difficulties in the past, stating: "voting is a uniquely difficult question for computer science: the system must verify your eligibility to vote; know whether you have already voted; and allow for audits and recounts. Yet it must always preserve your anonymity and privacy. Currently, there are no practical solutions to this highly complex problem and existing systems are unacceptably flawed."

Rest assured, I will continue to follow the case for the electronic balloting closely. I am aware that the Government has agreed to commission an

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independent review to consider its case again and to ensure that the latest technology has been assessed.

It is important to ensure transparency around collecting party political contributions and union members should be free to make such payments if they wish. The Government's analysis found that 7 out of 10 trade unions with political funds in Great Britain make no reference at all to the right to opt-out on their membership forms.

The Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act already requires shareholder consent for corporate donations. I believe there is still more to do and think it is equally important that the Conservative Party has committed to seeking further agreement on a comprehensive package of party funding reform. The Prime Minister has been clear that he is in favour of a cap on donations to political parties, but at what level that cap should be set at needs careful consideration as we must work to find the means least burdensome on the taxpayer. I look forward, however, to moving forward with this issue and hope a cross-party consensus can be reached.

All measures included in the Bill will continue to be debated and fully scrutinised by Parliament before it is granted Royal Assent. I will continue to follow the Bill closely as well as any amendments that are put forward.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward Timpson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Edward Timpson MP