

Strikes

The government's statement on proposed new strikes legislation was short and simple. It praised the nurses for agreeing minimum service levels before going on strike, recognising their greater duty to the public to avoid action which could lead to the death of a patient. The government said it needed to put in place similar minimum service agreements for the NHS , the fire service, education, railways, nuclear decommissioning and borders. They argued they had no wish to take away the right to strike, and were copying practices in some other European countries. The Opposition saw it as an attack on workers rights and said they would oppose.

It will be interesting to see how the government proposes to enforce any such law, as by definition if people have gone on strike it is difficult to get them to come back to work against their will. The Bill implies action for damages against Unions not ensuring the minimum standard, but it will need clarification. Certain workers will be identified as essential to maintain the minimum service and they will be expected to turn up. It will also be difficult to decide what is a safe necessary minimum standard of rail services, given the way motor transport, planes and boats can be substituted for trains. The government intends to consult on minimum standards which will doubtless produce a variety of views. I would be interested in comments on these matters as I do not have settled views myself on how this will work.