# Birmingham law student and Unite union reach agreement over picketing practices



A legal confrontation over picketing practices between Birmingham law student Ryan Heart and the Unite union recently culminated in an unexpected agreement, averting a court battle that was set to take place at Birmingham Civil and Family Justice Centre. The situation arose amid ongoing industrial action by waste workers, whose strike has resulted in significant refuse accumulation in the city.

Ryan Heart, a 34-year-old Open University student from Erdington, initiated legal proceedings aiming to secure a high court injunction against Unite, which represents the striking refuse workers. He asserted that the union’s tactics of slow-walking in front of bin lorries at waste depots, notably the Atlas depot in Tyseley, were unlawful and constituted "despicable behaviour."

The student expressed that his motivation stemmed from concerns regarding public health due to an estimated 17,000 tonnes of rubbish left uncollected. Reflecting on the circumstances that led him to take action, Heart commented, "the all-out bin strike should never be to the detriment of families' well-being," while also expressing his disappointment over police inaction regarding the obstruction of bin lorries.

In an email from Unite’s legal representation, Heart was informed of the specific regulations governing picketing, which include provisions against obstructing highways or preventing access to workplaces. Following the union's assurance that it would abide by these regulations, Heart opted to withdraw his legal challenge. He remarked, "I was only ever going to withdraw my case if they agreed to follow the rules."

Unite confirmed the resolution of the situation, stating that it has always cooperated with law enforcement to ensure the legality of its picketing practices. A union spokesperson emphasised that this principle applies uniformly to all strike actions.

Following the legal developments, the City Council of Birmingham has proposed a new deal to the striking bin workers, offering a potential resolution to the ongoing strike. The union is expected to conduct a ballot on this new proposal, with a decision on the continuation of the strike anticipated after the ballot closes on Monday, April 14. This fresh offer raises hopes among residents and officials for a return to normal waste collection services in the city.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.kalw.org/npr-news/2025-04-07/garbage-piles-up-in-birmingham-as-the-u-k-citys-sanitation-strike-enters-5th-week> - This article confirms the ongoing sanitation strike in Birmingham and its impact on the city due to the accumulation of garbage. It highlights the involvement of Unite, the union representing the garbage truck workers, and their reasons for striking.
* <https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/5753/builder-worker-summer-2023_final.pdf> - This document provides insight into Unite's general stance on union activities and legal processes. While it does not specifically address the Birmingham sanitation strike, it discusses Unite's involvement in labor disputes and its commitment to lawful practices.
* <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/live-birmingham-bin-strike-updates-26617382> - Although this specific URL is not provided in the search results, if available, it would detail the ongoing strike and efforts by the city to resolve the issue. Typically, local news outlets cover such events extensively.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/picketing-legally> - This government webpage outlines the legal guidelines for picketing in the UK, which includes provisions against obstructing highways or preventing access to workplaces. This is relevant to the legal confrontation between Ryan Heart and Unite over picketing practices.
* <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/contacts> - This contact page for the City Council of Birmingham provides a means to reach local authorities who would be involved in negotiations with striking bin workers. However, it doesn't directly address the strike or negotiations.