# Nigel Farage signals support for trade unions amid Reform UK’s shift to working-class appeal



Nigel Farage, leader of the Reform UK party, has recently expressed support for trade unions, a stance that appears to contrast with the party manifesto from last summer, which advocated for making it easier to hire and fire workers. This shift in tone was evident during a speech delivered by Farage on Tuesday at a working men’s club in County Durham, where he positioned Reform UK as the new voice for ordinary working men and women, aiming to challenge Labour's traditional support in northern England and the Midlands.

During the post-speech question and answer session, Farage expressed a desire for a “sensible relationship” between unions and company managers, despite earlier criticism from the National Education Union labelling Reform UK as “far-right and racist.” When asked about a recent bin workers’ strike in Birmingham, he refrained from criticising the union involved, Unite, choosing instead to direct his criticism towards the Labour-run council overseeing the strike.

This pro-union rhetoric is not entirely new to Farage, who recently visited the British Steel plant in Scunthorpe as part of his call for the steel company to be nationalised. This visit followed significant political attention to the site, which had been under Chinese ownership prior to the state intervention. Farage’s visit came just days before the business secretary, Jonathan Reynolds, made a similar trip, highlighting the political importance of the industrial crisis.

The Guardian reports that Reform UK is seeking to broaden its appeal in forthcoming local elections by promoting messages relevant to voters in post-industrial regions. Recent polling by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) found that about two-thirds of Reform UK voters support key components of the government’s employment rights bill, including bans on zero-hours contracts and rights to sick pay from the start of employment. However, Labour has pointed out that all Reform MPs voted against the bill’s second reading, and Farage was the only party leader present who opposed the third reading.

When questioned about how the party plans to fund substantial tax cuts, Farage’s response emphasised cutting business regulation, an approach traditionally viewed as less supportive of workers’ rights. Trade union officials remain sceptical of Farage’s overtures, with one source describing the party as aligned with “exploitative bosses,” while another labelled Reform UK as part of a broader rise of populist and extreme-right groups across Europe.

Gawain Towler, Farage’s former press officer, provides some context to this apparent contradiction, explaining that Farage has long supported union members but not necessarily their leadership. Towler said: “We are fully in favour of things like collective bargaining and the right of unions to fight their corner. That’s what unions should be about, not the middle-class capture of union management that we now see.” He credited Richard Tice, Reform UK’s deputy leader and former party leader, with steering the party towards a focus on post-industrial issues such as the steel industry, noting the significance of hosting the 2024 Welsh conference in Port Talbot, an area heavily affected by steelworks closures.

Towler also cited a past survey from 2015, showing that 30% of Unison union members supported Ukip, the party from which Reform UK evolved. He recounted writing to union leaders suggesting they consider shifting political donations from Labour to Ukip, though he did not receive a response.

Inside this evolving political landscape, Reform UK continues to challenge traditional party affiliations by appealing to working-class voters in areas with deep-rooted industrial histories, signalling a potential recalibration of the UK’s political dynamics ahead of upcoming elections.

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

## References

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigel_Farage> - This URL provides context on Nigel Farage's political career and his role as the leader of Reform UK, which has evolved from earlier political movements.
* <https://www.politico.eu/article/nigel-farage-labour-rust-belt-britain-reform-uk-steelworks-retire/> - This article highlights Farage's approach to industrial regions and the challenges faced by workers in industries like steel, aligning with Reform UK's quest for broader appeal.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbDOZoU_DDQ> - Although not directly dealing with trade unions, this interview discusses Farage's broader economic policies and political ambitions with Reform UK, which might influence his stance on workers' rights.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk> - The Guardian often covers political developments in the UK, potentially including reporting on trade unions, the Labour Party, and Reform UK's strategies in post-industrial regions.
* <https://tuc.org.uk/> - The Trades Union Congress (TUC) website provides insights into employment rights bills and union activities, which could be relevant to understanding Reform UK's stance on labour issues.