# UK government vows to uphold comprehensive employment rights bill despite ministerial reshuffle



Bridget Phillipson, the UK Education Secretary, has strongly reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to deliver the Employment Rights Bill in its entirety, dismissing fears that recent ministerial changes could lead to the dilution of this landmark legislation. Speaking at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) conference, Phillipson emphasised that the Bill—aimed at significantly strengthening workers’ rights—would not be watered down during its final parliamentary stages. She declared, “No ifs, no buts – forward. Let’s change this country together,” signalling a clear intention to proceed with the Bill as initially promised.

The Employment Rights Bill has attracted widespread attention as one of the most significant reforms in decades, aiming to ban zero-hours contracts, end the practice of “fire and rehire,” and provide sick pay from the first day of employment. It was championed by former Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner and former employment rights minister Justin Madders, both recently departed from their roles. Their exit sparked speculation among unions and industry watchers that some of the Bill’s key provisions might be weakened or removed. However, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has reassured MPs that the legislation’s core substance and timeline remain unchanged, despite the reshuffle.

Union leaders have been vocal in urging the Government not to retreat on these reforms. Paul Nowak, General Secretary of the TUC, welcomed Phillipson’s assurances and called for the Bill to be delivered “in full,” reflecting both union and public expectations. He highlighted that stronger workers’ protections are broadly popular and necessary to modernise employment law, which currently often fails to protect workers adequately in a changing economy. Nowak described the Bill’s aims as common-sense changes that can end exploitative practices and criticised the existing status quo as “broken.”

Nevertheless, some union voices have expressed frustration and concern about the government’s track record. Sharon Graham of Unite criticised the Bill’s current form as a “paper tiger,” warning that further legislative tweaks or dilution could undermine its impact, especially through secondary legislation. There is widespread wariness among unions that without firm political commitment, such transformational reforms risk being weakened before becoming law. Business groups, for their part, also watch closely, recognising that significant changes to employment protections could require adjustments in corporate practices.

Phillipson’s speech also took a political tone, contrasting Labour’s forward-looking agenda with the positions of Reform UK and its leader Nigel Farage. She criticised Farage for his stance on maternity leave and pay, arguing that Labour’s vision is one of progress on equality and workers’ rights, while Reform UK would represent a backward step to the 1950s. This framing underscored Labour’s broader aspiration to shape the UK’s future with a focus on fairness and modernisation, touching on education reforms with an extension of regional support teams aimed at raising school standards.

The TUC leadership remains critical of the pace of change since Labour’s election, with Nowak warning that the promised improvements in jobs, public services, and living standards must materialise to maintain public support. He has previously accused Sir Keir Starmer’s government of making change feel like “a slogan, not a reality,” signalling ongoing pressure on Labour to convert commitments into tangible outcomes.

The proposed Employment Rights Bill is part of a broader "New Deal for Working People," which also includes raising the minimum wage and enhancing protections against unfair dismissal. Advocates argue these measures could improve worker security and contribute to increased productivity and economic growth. Nowak described this agenda as a potential "gamechanger" for the UK’s economy after years of stagnation and real-terms pay decline under the previous Conservative government.

In parallel, the TUC has maintained a critical stance on other government labour policies, such as the controversial Strikes Bill. Nowak has accused the government of undermining workers’ rights further and plans to challenge the legislation at the International Labour Organisation for breaching international legal standards. This reflects deep-rooted tensions around labour rights within the current political landscape.

Overall, Bridget Phillipson’s reaffirmation of the Government’s commitment to the Employment Rights Bill carries significant weight amid political upheaval and union scepticism. How Labour manages to navigate between delivering on these promises and responding to pressures from various stakeholders will be closely watched as the Bill progresses through Parliament in the coming months.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/phillipson-insists-workers-rights-bill-will-not-be-watered-down-RLIXRJNZQRLHRBLXCHOY3B3K4A/), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/unions-demand-no-retreat-on-workers-rights-after-rayner-quits-13426073)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/phillipson-insists-workers-rights-bill-will-not-be-watered-down-RLIXRJNZQRLHRBLXCHOY3B3K4A/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/34869ca5-0f76-4172-960e-87d1c639547c), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/unions-demand-no-retreat-on-workers-rights-after-rayner-quits-13426073)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/phillipson-insists-workers-rights-bill-will-not-be-watered-down-RLIXRJNZQRLHRBLXCHOY3B3K4A/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/labour-failing-to-deliver-change-that-people-voted-for-tuc-chief-13426927), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/phillipson-insists-workers-rights-bill-will-not-be-watered-down-RLIXRJNZQRLHRBLXCHOY3B3K4A/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/07/14/employers-pay-labour-shake-up-workers-union-chief/), [[6]](https://www.fenews.co.uk/employability/labours-new-deal-would-be-a-gamechanger-for-productivity-and-boost-growth-tuc-head-tells-cbi/), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/phillipson-insists-workers-rights-bill-will-not-be-watered-down-RLIXRJNZQRLHRBLXCHOY3B3K4A/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[7]](https://news.sky.com/story/tuc-to-report-government-to-un-watchdog-over-controversial-strikes-bill-12958408), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/labour-failing-to-deliver-change-that-people-voted-for-tuc-chief-13426927)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/phillipson-insists-workers-rights-bill-will-not-be-watered-down-RLIXRJNZQRLHRBLXCHOY3B3K4A/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/34869ca5-0f76-4172-960e-87d1c639547c), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/unions-demand-no-retreat-on-workers-rights-after-rayner-quits-13426073)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/phillipson-insists-workers-rights-bill-will-not-be-watered-down-RLIXRJNZQRLHRBLXCHOY3B3K4A/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/34869ca5-0f76-4172-960e-87d1c639547c> - Trade unions have cautioned UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer against diluting Labour's proposed employment rights legislation, considered the most significant overhaul in a generation. Concerns emerged following the resignation of Angela Rayner, a key advocate of the bill, and the dismissal of Justin Madders, the minister overseeing it. Union leaders fear that essential protections, such as banning 'fire and rehire' practices, may be weakened. Unite's Sharon Graham criticised the bill's current form as a 'paper tiger,' accusing the government of backtracking. Despite reassurances from Labour leadership, unions worry about potential further dilution through secondary legislation. Both union and business leaders believe that any additional legislative changes could significantly alter the bill's impact. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/34869ca5-0f76-4172-960e-87d1c639547c?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://news.sky.com/story/unions-demand-no-retreat-on-workers-rights-after-rayner-quits-13426073> - Union leaders are urging the UK government not to dilute its flagship Employment Rights Bill following recent ministerial changes. The bill, championed by former Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, is in its final parliamentary stages. With Rayner's resignation and the demotion of Justin Madders, concerns have arisen about potential weakening of key provisions. TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak emphasised the need for the government to deliver on its promises, stating that the bill will level the playing field and protect workers from exploitative practices. He called on the government to reject amendments aimed at weakening the legislation. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/unions-demand-no-retreat-on-workers-rights-after-rayner-quits-13426073?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://news.sky.com/story/labour-failing-to-deliver-change-that-people-voted-for-tuc-chief-13426927> - The leader of Britain's trade unions, TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak, has accused Sir Keir Starmer of failing to deliver the change Labour promised during the election campaign. In his keynote speech at the TUC conference in Brighton, Nowak claimed that for too many people, change still feels like a slogan, not a reality. After a troubled first year in government, which saw Labour lose support to Reform UK, Nowak warned that the lack of change cannot continue and the government must deliver on jobs, public services, and living standards. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/labour-failing-to-deliver-change-that-people-voted-for-tuc-chief-13426927?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/07/14/employers-pay-labour-shake-up-workers-union-chief/> - Paul Nowak, TUC General Secretary, anticipates that the King's Speech will demonstrate to employers that Labour's radical overhaul of workers' rights is proceeding as planned. Nowak stated that companies are right to be concerned about the changes, but only if they are among the 'bad apples.' He listed companies like Amazon, Sports Direct, P&O Ferries, and Wetherspoons as examples of 'anti-union employers' who have built their business models on low-paid, insecure employment. The proposed 'New Deal for Working People' includes measures such as protection from unfair dismissal from day one, ending zero-hour contracts, banning 'fire and rehire' practices, and increasing the minimum wage. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/07/14/employers-pay-labour-shake-up-workers-union-chief/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.fenews.co.uk/employability/labours-new-deal-would-be-a-gamechanger-for-productivity-and-boost-growth-tuc-head-tells-cbi/> - The TUC General Secretary has stated that Labour's New Deal for Working People would be a 'gamechanger for productivity in the UK' and would 'boost growth' after years of economic decline. Nowak called on good employers to 'embrace Labour's economic reset' and work with unions to boost productivity, skills, and security at work. He contrasted Labour's approach with the past 13 years of Conservative government, which he characterised by stagnant growth, poor productivity, a boom in insecure work, and the longest squeeze in living standards in 200 years. ([fenews.co.uk](https://www.fenews.co.uk/employability/labours-new-deal-would-be-a-gamechanger-for-productivity-and-boost-growth-tuc-head-tells-cbi/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://news.sky.com/story/tuc-to-report-government-to-un-watchdog-over-controversial-strikes-bill-12958408> - The Trades Union Congress (TUC) is reporting the UK government to the UN workers' rights watchdog over its controversial strikes bill. General Secretary Paul Nowak stated that the union will lodge a case at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) because the legislation, which will enforce minimum service levels during strike action, 'falls far short' of international legal standards. Nowak argued that the bill is unworkable, undemocratic, and almost certainly in breach of international law, and that it has been designed to escalate industrial tensions rather than resolve them. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/tuc-to-report-government-to-un-watchdog-over-controversial-strikes-bill-12958408?utm_source=openai))