

order". The debate escalated and coalition partner Forza Italia succeeded in smoothing the decree.

The problem of limiting dissent not only concerns Italy. In February 2022, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, an old friend of the Italian right wing, issued a decree restricting the right to strike. Strikes are not formally banned, but the decree had a concrete impact on teachers who were protesting for a better education system and wage increases:

"If I want to strike, I am still obliged to teach at least half my lessons, or even all of them for the final year students," Bea Berta, a Hungarian teacher, [told Domani](#).

Some who engaged in civil disobedience, like Katalin Törley, a teacher in a Budapest high school, were fired.

As workers' protests increase, governments are rushing through anti-strike laws. The Conservative government in the UK has pushed a bill to guarantee a minimum service as a means to indirectly restrict strikes.

Facing protests against pension reform, the French government has made similar considerations: Transport minister Clément Beaune wants to guarantee a "minimum service" during strikes. Ironically enough, they call it "[the Italian model](#)".

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UK unions stand their ground



Angelo Boccato



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UK prime minister Rishi Sunak is choosing a Thatcherite approach to tackling mass strikes in Britain. He is even pushing an [anti-strike bill](#) to mandate minimum service levels in sectors such as health, education, fire and rescue and transport during strike periods. This bill also allows bosses in the private and public sectors to fire striking workers.

Despite the hard talk, trade unions and their members are giving no indication they will bow to government pressure. However, the Tories' insistence on repeating their post-2010s austerity policy, when inequality is so deep in this country, will give workers way more reasons to strike.

Trade unions were blasted by the Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher as the "enemy within" at the height of the "Winter of Discontent", the long series of strikes in 1978 and 1979, which brought down the then-Labour Government. This label has re-entered the debate now, at a time when so many are going on strike.

Trade unions in the UK are central to the country's social development, as they founded the Labour Party, alongside socialist intellectuals in 1900, and helped bring in the Labour government of Clement Atlee in 1945, which established the National Health Service. Union membership rose to 9.5 million, almost 20 percent of the population, in 1950.

Now, the cost of living crisis, the social impact of over twelve years of Conservative austerity measures, mounting inflation and the need to raise wages and improve working conditions are keys to understanding the massive wave of protest.

On 1 February, teachers, civil servants, university lecturers, security guards, train and bus drivers will walk out in what is expected to be the [single largest strike action day in the last 10 years](#), with half a million people expected to withdraw their labour, proving that UK unions are standing their ground, despite all odds.

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"I quit France due to the unions"



Michał Kokot

[Gazeta Wyborcza](#)

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