



## Opinion Trade unions

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## Are bosses still blacklisting trade unionists?

### Ricky Tomlinson

The Frank Morris case at Crossrail shows workers still fear the victimisation I and the Shrewsbury 24 went through 40 years ago

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Frank Morris says he was sacked by Crossrail for trade union activity. Photograph: Sophia Evans for the Guardian

Britain's biggest trade union is locked in a campaign with the bosses of the largest engineering project in Europe over claims that workers have been blacklisted for raising health and safety concerns. When I heard from the Unite union about the situation faced by Frank Morris, an electrician who says he was [sacked by Crossrail for trade union activity](#), it reminded me of the time [I was thrown in jail](#), and the suffering my comrades had to endure, for being prepared to stand up to our bosses.

Believe it or not, acting was never my career choice. I got into the entertainment game because I was a victim of blacklisting. In the end I got lucky, but thousands of workers from the construction industry had their lives - and the lives of their families - destroyed as a result of this murky practice.

So when I found out about the allegations of blacklisting at Crossrail by the consortium Bam Ferrovial Kier (BFK) I got really mad, because I can't believe it's still going on. Back in 1972, long before becoming a member of [The Royle Family](#), I worked as a plasterer. I loved the job, and the people I worked with, but there were massive problems in the trade. Between 1971 and 1973 there were 622 deaths in the industry. The situation was so bad that families were genuinely worried when their loved ones went off to work each morning. Things are still bad today: [49 construction workers were killed at work in](#)

[2011-2012](#). If your job is in construction you need someone who is prepared to speak out - your life might depend on it.

We were taking these huge risks for crap money. The national minimum rate for the building trade was £20 for craftsmen and £17 for labourers for a 40-hour week. So it's easy to understand why so many of us pulled together in 1972 for the first [national building workers' strike](#). After a tough old fight, we pulled off a big victory: the basic rates of pay went up by £6 per week for craftsmen and £5 per week for labourers. We proved that organised trade unions could make the building trade fairer for workers.

But as a loud organiser, I paid a huge price for this victory, as did many of my fellow union members. I spent 16 months in prison for my role in helping to organise the campaign, along with my friend Des Warren. He died in 2004, and we firmly believe this was a [result of his mistreatment in prison](#). Dezzie and I were members of the Shrewsbury 24, building workers who were the victims of a miscarriage of justice. [The campaign goes on today to fully clear our names](#).

Being released from prison wasn't the end of the persecution for us. Construction bosses had decided that they were going to take their revenge on "union troublemakers". My name was added to an employers' blacklist, meaning I was unable to secure work in the trade again.

UK employers always denied the existence of blacklists until 2009, when the offices of The Consulting Association, a blacklisting organisation, were raided and a [list with more than 3,000 names was discovered](#). People were on the blacklist because they belonged to a trade union or had raised concerns about health and safety.

Unite has [significant evidence that Frank Morris was dismissed from the Crossrail project because of his union work](#). If blacklisting is going on at Europe's biggest construction project, where else is it still happening?

There is no place for blacklisting in the UK; standing up for your conditions at work is a basic human right. It's about time we had justice for the Shrewsbury 24 and all the others who have suffered years of worklessness through being blacklisted.

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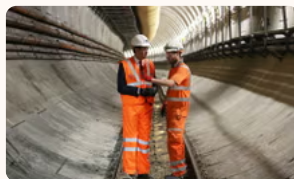
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