

21 October 2019: for immediate use

**THREAT TO HALF A CENTURY OF EQUALITY AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS
NEW CAMPAIGN AND STUDY LAUNCHED**

THE THREAT IN BRIEF

- Equality and workers’ rights in the UK have been hard won over many generations - and enacted under governments of different political colours [see appendix 1 of attached report] - but are now under serious and imminent threat.
- Past comments of current ministers indicate that the present government could move quickly to begin cutting what ministers have described as unnecessary “red tape” (i.e. workers’ and equality rights) if and when the UK leaves the European Union and the transition period ends [see appendix 4 of attached report for a selection of quotes from ministers] .
- Boris Johnson’s Withdrawal Agreement (UK government, 2019a, see bibliography in report), appears to undermine Theresa May’s commitment – in her Agreement of November 2018 [appendix 3 of attached report] - not to weaken workers’ rights post-Brexit. For example -
 - Johnson’s Agreement has dropped Article 4 in Theresa May’s Agreement which provided that - “With the aim of ensuring the proper functioning of the single customs territory, the Union and the United Kingdom *shall* ensure” “non regression of labour and social standards” [emphasis added; see appendix 3(2)(a) of attached report for the full paragraph]. Instead, there is a weak statement of preference (using the term “should” not “shall”) in Johnson’s non-legally binding Political Declaration [see note 0.1 in the attached report].
 - In addition, as the option of creating a single customs territory has now been discarded [see note 0.2(a) in attached report], the putative goal at which non-regression could have been directed (i.e. the proper functioning of that territory) would seem to have been dropped.
 - The idea that a level playing field could be obtained through a Free Trade Deal, and that this would protect workers’ rights, is illusory [see note 0.2(b)]; and, in addition, the possibility of leaving on WTO terms at the end of the transition period appears to be a very real one.
- There are also strong indications that the expected post-Brexit economic downturn would be used as a pretext to cut workers’ rights.
 - For example, Priti Patel (the present Home Secretary), referring to a post-Brexit UK said, - "Just think of how much more success our economy could have if we had the power to reduce the burden of red tape and replace pointless EU rules" (Cited in Clark, 2016).
- It is noted that the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government made at least 22 significant cuts to employment and equality rights [see appendix 1, para 2 in attached report]; and would have cut more rights if EU law had not put these out of reach.

- These rights will no longer be out of reach in a post Brexit future; and Boris Johnson's government seems far more committed to a low rights ("deregulated") economy than the Coalition appeared to be.
- There are dozens of workers and equality rights – currently protected under EU law – which are at possible risk of being repealed or weakened post-Brexit [see appendix 2, para. 1 in the attached report for a list].
- In contrast to the claims that ministers have made about the level and impact of workers' rights -
 - UK workers have fewer employment protections than the majority of their EU counter-parts [see attached report, para 2(a)].
 - Reasonable levels of employment protection appear to be more conducive to productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth, than low levels of protection [see attached report, para 2(b)].
- UK equality and employment laws have made a major contribution to improving the quality of life in the UK [see attached report, paras 2(c)-(d)].

THE CAMPAIGN IN BRIEF

Declaration of employment and equality rights (with "rising floor" of rights and a constitutional lock)

- As part of the campaign launched today, local, national, and international campaigns, charities and other groups are being invited to give their support to the following statement:
 - There should be no reduction in the current levels of UK employment and equality rights and protections.
 - Employment and equality rights and protections should be improved now and in the future so that they are and remain at least equal to those enjoyed in other European countries.
 - Enforcement should be strengthened – including through improving access to legal representation – so that individuals are able to enforce their rights regardless of their income.
 - A "rising floor" of equality and workers' rights and protections (which remains at least equal to those in place in other European countries) should be considered a fundamental right; and should be subject to a constitutional lock.
 - While details would need to be debated and decided, this lock might, for example, entail that reducing rights below this floor requires a two thirds majority in the Commons.
- We hope that as many organisations and groups as possible will sign up to this declaration. Please share and promote the link to the declaration and/or this news release as widely as possible. This is the link:
<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/9F7XXTX>

Study and survey on the value of employment and equality rights

- The campaign will also involve a major study including a public survey, investigating -
 - The impact of equality and employment rights on individuals and businesses in the UK;
 - The possible consequences of leaving the EU; and

- How current rights and protections might be usefully strengthened.
- In the survey, individuals are invited to contribute their experiences (of good and/or bad employment practice) and any proposals they might have for change.
 - This is the survey link - <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/WVKG9VH>
 - Please click on the link if you think that you or someone you know might like to take part in the survey; and please share and promote the link to the survey and/or this media release.
- If you have any questions about the campaign or study, please email Equalityrightscampaign@outlook.com or phone 01792 247 2303.
- For information on the researcher conducting the study, please click on this link for his ResearchGate page. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rupert_Harwood

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COMMENTS

A spokesperson for the campaign stated -

- The Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition government cut 22 important equality and workers' rights; and would have cut more rights if EU law had not put these out of reach. These rights would no longer be out of reach in a post-Brexit future; and Boris Johnson's government seems far more committed to a low rights ("deregulated") economy than the Coalition appeared to be".
- "To our knowledge, there has never been a UK cabinet as personally committed to cutting workers' rights as this one".
- "There is a very real danger that if and when the UK leaves the EU there could be a bonfire of workers' and equality rights the likes of which this country has never before seen".
- "Individuals depend upon hard-won employment and equality rights to be able to support their families and enjoy their lives to the full. These rights should not be sacrificed for short-term political advantage."
- We hope that this campaign will help make clear to this and future governments that there is a consensus of decency in the UK; and that it is not acceptable to go back to a time when individuals could be excluded from jobs or even from renting a room because of the colour of their skin or any other currently protected characteristic".

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please see the attached report published today "Boris 'Unchained': The Threat to Hard-won Equality and Workers' Rights" or email or phone for a copy if one is not attached.

For more information about the campaign, survey, or any other related matter, please email Equalityrightscampaign@outlook.com or phone 01792 472 303.