

WHAT THE BREXITERS REALLY THINK ABOUT WORKERS' RIGHTS

Introduction

The UK's membership of the EU has been overwhelmingly positive for the rights of workers. Having British and European companies operate on a level playing field has prevented a race to the bottom, and helped to drive up employment protections, not only at home but across the continent. Crucially, being a part of the Single Market has also provided a vital bulwark against successive governments that wished to scrap key protections.

For many of those who led the campaign to leave the EU, slashing workers' rights is, and always has been, one of the central motivations for Brexit. Their own words and voting records speak for themselves. They opposed signing up to the EU's social chapter, and many of them see leaving Europe's single market, thereby removing the safety net it provides, as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to launch an all-out assault on employment rights.

Now Theresa May is heading to Brussels having received orders from Jacob Rees-Mogg and the Brexit extremists to negotiate a revised deal which will make the UK £100 billion-a-year poorer, means we become a rule-taker of decisions over rights and protections at work on which we will no longer have a veto or a vote, while offering no closure in the bitter arguments about our future relationship with Europe.

Leading Brexit advocates, including cabinet ministers and even the Prime Minister, have long campaigned against strengthening workers' rights and a host of protections and safety measures in British workplaces.

Theresa May

The Prime Minister Theresa May called the EU social chapter a burden for business: "In so many areas of the Government's policy, Ministers are doing precisely that—increasing the burden on businesses. The Prime Minister claimed that, in signing the social chapter, he would be able to defend businesses from the type of burdens that my hon. Friend mentioned. The reality is that he cannot defend business, because of the voting structure in the European Union. He has been unable to defend businesses in the United Kingdom from such impositions, and, consequently, British businesses will suffer." (Hansard, 17 March 1998, [link](#))

The Prime Minister Theresa May said employers could not afford the EU social chapter: "The measures being introduced by the Government on the back of the social chapter and under the heading of family-friendly practices are, as yet, somewhat lacking in detail ... Where have the Government thought about the impact of what they describe as family-friendly policies on employers and the extent to which employers can afford them?" (Hansard, 8 March 1999, [link](#))

The Prime Minister Theresa May has called the minimum wage costly: "The impact of employment legislation, particularly the loss of income for pre-schools caused by the loss of numbers, is exacerbated in a variety of ways by the increased costs of the minimum wage and the working time directive." (Hansard, 28 April 1999, [link](#))

The Prime Minister has repeatedly refused to rule out scrapping the Working Time Directive:

Angela Smith: "Can I ask the prime minister to give a very simple answer to a very simple question. Will the Working Time Directive be transposed into British law and embedded in British law, yes or no?"

Theresa May: "The EU Withdrawal Bill brings the workers' rights which are currently in EU law into UK law. Which is why it's a bit rich from Labour MPs who voted against bringing it into UK law."

(Huffington Post, 18 December 2017, [link](#))

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson called the employment regulations from "back-breaking": "There is little doubt that it is that extra stuff, the stuff from Brussels, that is helping to furl the arteries to the point of sclerosis. The weight of employment regulation is now back-breaking: the collective redundancies directive, the atypical workers directive, the working time directive and a thousand more." (The Express, 6 June 2014, [link](#)).

Boris Johnson has said the EU social chapter should be scrapped: "Boil it down to the single market. Scrap the social chapter." (The Independent, 4 December 2012, [link](#))

Liam Fox

Liam Fox called for deregulation of the labour market, to make it easier to hire and fire workers: "To restore Britain's competitiveness we must begin by deregulating the labour market. Political objections must be overridden. It is too difficult to hire and fire and too expensive to take on new employees. It is intellectually unsustainable to believe that workplace rights should remain untouchable while output and employment are clearly cyclical." (Financial Times, 21 February 2012, [link](#)).

Liam Fox said the EU social chapter would damage the economy: "The EU can exacerbate economic problems—for example, through the social chapter" (Hansard, 30 June 2005, [link](#))

Liam Fox called the minimum wage an "economic mistake": "That will be coupled with the other economic mistake that the Government are making, by introducing a minimum wage" (Hansard, 21 April 1998, [link](#))

Lord Callanan

Brexit Minister Lord Callanan called for the vital EU employment legislations of the working time directive, the agency workers' directive and the pregnant workers' directive to be scrapped: "Surely one of the best ways for the EU to speed up growth is to scrap the employment and social affairs directorate in the Commission, repatriate its responsibilities to national governments, then we could scrap the working time directive, the agency workers' directive, the pregnant workers' directive, and all of the other barriers to actually employing people if we really want to create jobs in Europe." (The Independent, 30 October 2017, [link](#))

Jacob Rees-Mogg

Jacob Rees-Mogg has said he wishes to reduce EU employment rights: "I don't think those laws need to be made for us by foreigners. A Labour government may wish to campaign for more employment rights; a Conservative government may wish to reduce them. [...] I don't support all the employment rights that come from Europe." (Channel 4 News, 16 February 2016, [link](#))

David Davis

David Davis has said the EU social chapter would destroy jobs: "Those same people are among those who want to impose the job-destroying social chapter on Britain" (Hansard, 12 December 1996, [link](#))

Andrea Leadsom

Andrea Leadsom, a Brexiter and the Leader of the House, has said she would like to "scrap the entire burden of regulation" and have "absolutely no regulation whatsoever" for the smallest companies: "I urge the Government to look carefully at scrapping the entire burden of regulation on micro-businesses with, say, three employees or fewer. I envisage there being absolutely no regulation whatsoever - no minimum wage, no maternity or paternity rights, no unfair dismissal rights, no pension rights - for the smallest companies that are trying to get off the ground." (The Mirror, 5 July 2016, [link](#))

Dominic Raab

Dominic Raab has pressed for an opt-out from the Working Time Directive: "Britain should secure a total opt-out from the Working Time Directive and scrap the UK Regulations, ensuring that this costly, anti-jobs legislation cannot cause further damage to the economy." (CPS, 3 November 2011, [link](#))

Dominic Raab has called for the Government to scrap the Agency Workers' Directive: "Scrap the Agency Worker Regulations that will cost jobs and deny workers flexibility." (Conservative Home, 16 November 2011, [link](#))

Priti Patel

Priti Patel wants to cut social and employment legislation in half: "If we could just halve the burdens of the EU social and employment legislation we could deliver a £4.3 billion boost to our economy and 60,000 new jobs" (Priti Patel, 18 May 2016, [link](#))

Priti Patel has attacked the Working Time Directive and Agency Workers' Directive: "The doctors who treat us in hospital are affected by the Working Time Directive. And the cost of the goods and services we buy are also high due to Europe's bureaucratic requirements, such as the Agency Workers Directive." (Priti Patel, Tiptee Tribune, January 2013)

Iain Duncan Smith

Iain Duncan Smith called for flexibility on workers' rights. "The Working Time Directive of itself gave little or no flexibility to business and to employers at the time. It's been in place and we have had to work with it. But the reality here is ... that you protect the workforce, but you make sure that the competition that they face in terms of their jobs is actually fair competition and not unfair competition. Asked again, if the Working Time Directive was safe, he sounded a lot more shaky than in his initial answer: "UK law would protect what we think is best for the workforce, and that's exactly right. You're a democratic government. The democratic government will decide what it thinks is right. That is possible for Labour or Conservatives to argue and debate. "I believe that it's right to have it, but the question is how flexible you are over the way it's operated." (The Mirror, 2016, [link](#))

Iain Duncan Smith praised Britain being excluded from the social chapter in his maiden speech: "Their achievements in securing our exclusion from the social chapter protocol, and in reserving Parliament's right to decide whether to enter currency union, are greatly appreciated by hon. Members on both sides of the House." (Hansard, 20 May 1992, [link](#))

Iain Duncan Smith has called the Working Time Directive costly and said it's a problem: "The costs to industry will be severe and will be borne across the economy in lost employment... The [Working Time] directive also breaks the historical way in which successive British Governments--ironically, even socialist Governments--have accepted the more laissez-faire and relaxed view on the way in which employers and employees negotiate contracts in this country... The idea that this country would put up with those problems and not have constant turmoil on the streets is unbelievable..." (Hansard, 24 July 1996, [link](#))

Iain Duncan Smith worried that the national minimum wage would "artificially" increase people's pay packets: "That problem is compounded if we take into account the impact of the national minimum wage on the Budget changes. That wage will reduce the number of

people earning between £60 and £80 a week by artificially inflating weekly take-home pay” (Hansard, 19 March 1998, [link](#))

Iain Duncan Smith said the minimum wage was the “wrong way to go”: “Does she agree that regulation—the sort of thing that would be imposed via the social chapter and the minimum wage—is the wrong way to go?” (Hansard, 23 November 1995, [link](#))

John Redwood

John Redwood called for the repeal of the Working Time Directive. Redwood published Freeing Britain to Compete in 2007 as part of a Conservative Party policy review. It called for the inclusion of the Working Time Directive in a Deregulation Bill that would repeal, or significantly reform regulations. (2007, See page 58 of the full document: <https://flipchartfairytails.files.wordpress.com/2007/08/ecpgcomplete1.pdf>)

John Redwood said it was “vital” not to have the EU social chapter: “It is vital to Britain that we do not have the social chapter” (Hansard, 13 February 1995, [link](#))

John Redwood said the EU social chapter was putting off investors: “We cannot afford to put investors off with all the paraphernalia of the social chapter” (Hansard, 28 June 1993, [link](#))

John Redwood called the EU social chapter costly to business: “They know that everything that they are doing in regard to working time, the minimum wage and the social chapter is deeply regulatory, and is imposing more and more cost burdens on British business.” (Hansard, 10 November 1998, [link](#))

John Redwood said we should not have a minimum wage because others would want a wage rise too: “the Government wish to throw more petrol on those inflationary fires. If one employee gets a pay rise, others, including well-paid ones, will want one, too... a minimum wage policy will not work” (Hansard, 18 June 1998, [link](#))

Owen Paterson

Owen Paterson has railed against the minimum wage and the social chapter: “The minimum wage and the social chapter, both of which are inflationary, will have a huge impact on businesses. If employers are forced by the Government to pay people more to produce the same amount of product, that is inflation on wheels.” (Hansard, 18 March 1998, [link](#))

Owen Paterson claimed rural businesses would get rid of their workforces if there was a minimum wage: “Labour Members do not seem to have a clue as to the damage that the minimum wage is doing to small rural businesses...those businesses, which cannot pass on the extra costs to their customers...will simply lay off their work force.” (Hansard, 29 April 1999, [link](#))

David Laws wrote in his memoir that Owen Paterson had suggested pensioners could work as fruit pickers for below the minimum wage when he was Environmental Secretary in 2013. (The Independent, 14 March 2016, [link](#))

Others

Daniel Hannan opposes the minimum wage as a “basic principle”: “Respect free contract. If I want to work for you, and you want to employ me, and we’re both happy with the terms and conditions, the government ought not to come between us and pronounce our arrangement illegal. This ought to be a basic principle in an open society, but its implications are colossal. All statutory insertions into employment contracts – including the minimum wage – would instead be up to the signatories.” (Daniel Hannan, Telegraph, 25 July 2012, [link](#))

Bill Cash said the EU social chapter was ridiculous nonsense and humiliating businesses: “Businesses are subjected to the humiliation, embarrassment, absurdity and expense of this ridiculous nonsense, which is associated with the social chapter” (Hansard, 23 May 1994, [link](#))

Dominic Raab, Liz Truss, Chris Skidmore, Priti Patel, and Kwasi Kwarteng insulted UK workers as “among the worst idlers in the world” and said that “the fear of unemployment and unfair dismissal has led to a system of employment law that discourages small business from taking a risk and hiring new staff.” (Britannia Unchained, 2012, print publication)