

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill

Parliamentary Briefing

6 September 2017



Unite, on behalf of its 1.5 million members working across the economy, is seeking a Brexit that will ensure:

- continued frictionless trade and access to the world's biggest market upon which our jobs and communities depend. A hard Brexit will have catastrophic consequences for working people, particularly in our manufacturing sectors, such as automotive, aerospace, engineering, food production and science industries
- safeguards, including stronger collective bargaining rights, to prevent the abuse of labour recruited from abroad
- safeguards for our members' futures on both sides of the Irish border, and in Gibraltar. Ireland must keep a frictionless trade border, while the preservation of freedom of movement for people and services must be retained for Gibraltar. Our members are rightly anxious about the potential of the hardening of borders on their jobs and living standards.
- the security and continuing development of workers' rights
- an end of the race to the bottom culture and a return to the rate for the job which will restore dignity and security to working life in this country.

The wider domestic context is important too: the country currently lacks the coherent and adequately resourced industrial strategy urgently needed to prepare the UK for exit, and continuing austerity is undermining economic performance, holding wages back and denying the Treasury of income.

Unite therefore welcomes MPs' efforts to expose, amend and oppose serious shortcomings in the government's thinking. This includes the draconian measures contained in the European Union (Withdrawal) bill, which infringes a number of Keir Starmer's "six tests". These include retaining a strong and collaborative EU, delivering for all regions and nations of the UK, the protection of workers' rights and employment protections and ensuring the same benefits currently enjoyed within the single market, all of which the bill actively prevents.

1. Henry VIII powers must be amended to uphold democracy, or scrapped

Unite is opposed to the Conservative government's plans to award itself extraordinary "Henry VIII" powers in the repeal bill.

Those who voted to leave were told it was to 'take back control' from the EU; it was not to give unprecedented control to the cabinet and Whitehall to amend or dismantle our laws with no parliamentary scrutiny or accountability.

This could put at risk such important measures as the working time directive which governs, for example, drivers' hours in the UK. There are those on the Conservative benches who have voiced their opposition to this and many such other laws that help keep our working environments safe.

We are extremely concerned that party political objectives will be used to strip back our rights and living standards behind closed doors.

- **We therefore support efforts to stop this and urge MPs to support any amendments that uphold democracy.**

2. No compromise of our devolved powers

Parliament and our devolved assemblies are the correct bodies to consider and make our laws, not the government of the day. We back Labour in resisting the centralisation of over-whelming powers to the Westminster government.

- **Devolved powers must not be compromised.**

3. UK workers' rights must not be frozen in time

Clause 7 (3) allows the government to effectively pull up the drawbridge on continuity of UK laws with EU laws. This will freeze UK workers' rights at the point of exit, leaving workers reliant on the UK government to be persuaded to enhance or develop them in line with the changing economy.

This is not just bad for UK workers, who will, rightly, not be confident that a Conservative government will allow UK workers' rights to keep pace with the emerging world of work, but will also be bad for businesses employing UK workers who look for uniform standards across the biggest global market.

- **We urge MPs to support any amendments to scrap clause 7(3).**

CONCLUSION

In its present form the repeal bill is not fit for purpose. Unite urges MPs to work with amendments that act in the public and national interest.

The government's approach to the Brexit negotiations puts communities and jobs at risk. There must be a full debate of the withdrawal proposals in order to assure people that they are in their best interest.

Unite further believes that Labour's position can achieve a Brexit that protects communities, jobs and workers' rights, ends the exploitation of migrant workers and the race to the bottom attacks on wages, terms and conditions.

We commend Labour for ensuring that these concerns are centre stage during the negotiations.

Many Unite members voted for Brexit. They did not vote to lose their jobs, or to be poorer. And they did not vote for Britain to take back control from the European Union only for that power and control to be handed to a Conservative cabinet.

Unite has launched Brexit Check, a new online resource website, updated daily with Brexit news and views, and the impact of Brexit in workplaces.

You can read analysis of the potential impact of Brexit on Unite's industrial sectors, and the economies, communities and workers of the UK's devolved nations and territories here:
www.unitebrexitcheck.org