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General Secretary
Christina McAnea

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Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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14 November 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

I write to you to express my concerns about the danger the Retained EU Law Bill poses to core workers' rights in the UK.

This Bill creates a countdown to the expiry of vital protections in the workplace by 31 December 2023 – removing in one fell swoop over 3,800 pieces of EU-derived legislation. This is an arbitrary deadline set by the government, for itself, that will present it with serious political and practical challenges. There have been concerns expressed by experts and civil servants that there is insufficient capacity to meet the practical challenge the Bill sets.

Without a comprehensive list of what laws will be deleted, what will be retained and what will be restated or rewritten, the public is left to assume that all the following rights will disappear overnight: the right to an entitlement of 20 days' annual leave, family friendly rights, protections from dismissal where employment is transferred/outsourced, maternity, pregnancy, part-time and fixed term worker protections, as well as other core employment law protections including health and safety in the workplace for pregnant women.

Workers and employers rely on these rights day in, day out. They are not luxuries but the very foundation on which their working lives and their family time is built. Our members have expressed alarm that any of these protections could be treated so recklessly. The unequivocal message we received from our members was: *"Leave the rights of workers alone unless you are improving them."*

Even if the government was to give a commitment to extend the December 2023 deadline and to restate employment rights protections in full, UNISON believes this won't be sufficient. This is because the letter of the law has, over decades, been illuminated by the decisions of courts and judges, especially UK courts. It is these shared understandings, careful interpretations and judicial wisdom that will now be lost. If passed into law this Bill will deliberately wipe the slate clean and create confusion around the principle of precedent that UK common law is premised on. It places ideological principles above the lived, practical needs of the UK. Workers and employers will have to re-litigate important principles all over again at great cost to them, the economy and to our rights.

It is now vitally important that we focus our attention on getting the details right so that workers' rights are not damaged by the blunt instruments contained in the REUL Bill. On behalf of UNISON's 1.3 million members, and workers throughout the UK, I am asking you to guarantee and protect any affected workers' rights by:

- removing workplace rights out of the scope of the Bill altogether;
- ensuring reviews take place to identify all relevant legislation and expert advice taken to ensure no dangerous mistakes are made; and
- amending the Bill to change the 2023 sunset deadline to 2033 to give government departments due time for the review process to take place.

I believe the government should be focusing on the real problems our country faces and working to solve them, rather than taking away core rights at work. At a time when people are experiencing huge financial pressures and public services are struggling with lack of funding and staff, the government should be creating stability and certainty – not a bonfire of workers' rights and decades of legal wrangling.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina McAnea". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Christina McAnea
General Secretary
UNISON