Workers’ jobs and rights at risk from Brexit

So far in the debate around the European Union we’ve a lot from the politicians and employers but less from people in work who have so much riding on the outcome. Centre for Economic Business and Research (2014) highlight that 156,000 North East jobs dependent on trade with the EU. We already have the highest unemployment in the UK and we can’t afford to lose a single job. This doesn't mean they would disappear overnight but would face greater disadvantage and risk in the future from tariffs and changing investor and customer decisions.

Everyone in work benefits from rights protected at a European level. *A* new paper published by the TUC called *UK Employment Rights and the EU* provides a comprehensive assessment of the employment rights that derive from the UK’s membership of the European Union. And it considers the threat to these rights in the case of the UK voting to leave the EU.

The European Union-wide rights that are used every day by millions of workers and most of us take for granted. They include:

* The right to 20 days' paid annual leave a year.
* The right to not be forced to work longer than 48 hours a week on average.
* The right to paid time off for antenatal appointments; and protections for pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace.
* The right to up to 18 weeks' parental leave per child and to time off for urgent family reasons.
* The right to equal pay for work of equal value between men and women.
* The right to equal treatment for part-time, fixed-term and agency workers with other employees.
* The right for workers' representatives to be informed and consulted on significant changes that could affect jobs.
* The right to high standards of health and safety at work.
* Protections for workers affected by outsourcing or business buy-outs.

Each of these can make a huge different to workers and their family’s lives here in Britain. But if the UK votes to leave the EU, no-one can say what will happen to these rights. The TUC’s fear under a Conservative government, given their current record, is that they would likely get worse not better.

Good employers should be concerned too. Changes to erode basic protections that UK workers currently have could lead to a ‘race to the bottom’ and the undercutting of conditions at work. Without the back-up of EU laws, unscrupulous employers will have free rein to cut many important and hard-earned benefits and protections.

The question for everyone who works in the North East is this: can you risk a leap into the unknown on your workplace rights and the 156,000 North East jobs dependent on trade with the EU? I know I can’t. These are the issues that haven’t been debated anywhere near enough yet in the early stages of the referendum campaign. They urgently need to be.

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