

WORKER PROTECTIONS

How to engage Red Wall Realists

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative research with 25 switch voters in October 2021
- All first time Conservative voters in December 2019, most had voted Leave.
- Constituencies: Burnley, Hyndburn, Macclesfield

OBJECTIVES

- To explore attitudes towards worker protections and their enforcement among 'Red Wall' voters
- To test which narratives are most effective at 'activating' support for worker protections
- To feed insights back to campaigners in the workers' rights space

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR LABOUR MARKET REGULATION IS HIGH

- **Three out of five** believe that businesses should be more regulated, while only one in fourteen believe in deregulation. **C|T Group**
- Banning zero-hours contracts to ensure that all contracts offer a guaranteed number of hours reflecting their regular working pattern – **70% net support** ([NEON](#))
- **47% of UK public** think businesses should be for their workers ([Social Market Foundation](#))
- Only **17% of Leave voters** support lowering or removing the EU Working Time Directive ([IPPR](#))

HEADLINE FINDINGS

- Strong support based on values / worldview
- Widespread lived experience of abuse and discrimination
- But – **not** a ‘burning platform’:
 - Low levels of dissatisfaction – “We’re pretty good at the minute.”
 - Low relevance – “It’s for people who do the jobs we don’t want to do.”
 - Impractical / Impossible – “There will always be discrimination.”
 - Moderate / high perceived pain – “We’re our own worst enemy.”

WHAT WE KNOW

- ✓ these voters are not hedonistic libertarians, railing against lack of freedom...
- ✓ they are keen on **respect, discipline, law and order, enforcement**
- ✓ admire **strength** and **decisiveness**
- ✓ pragmatic – looking for practical ways to get things done
- ✓ **patriotic** but don't see a global role for Britain as a good thing

I do get both sides. So, yes, **you should be able to choose your hours but then I used to work for a vehicle safety company, I've seen a lot of accidents because guys fall asleep at the wheel.** But this is a consumer led market and we the people are driving this, we are making this happen. I think by **what we're demanding as consumers and forcing companies to go down that road to pay less wages, to do all these things.** (Burnley)

Activate views in **green** (and don't reinforce those in **red**)

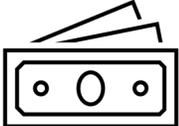
Certainly in the last 20 years every job that I've worked in, **everything is health and safety, health and safety.** When I did my apprenticeship, Jesus, **I was spraying resin, I had no breathing apparatus or anything a lot of businesses are worried about the after effects of,** you know, like the **claims and things.** (Burnley)

WE TESTS FIVE NARRATIVES

Established narrative:

 Rights and Justice

Opposition narrative:

 Burden

Alternative narratives:

 British Standards

 One rule for everyone

 March of British Progress



Narrative 1 – RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

The UK is letting workers down.
Exploitation is rife. Too many people are
made to work in unsafe conditions or are
forced to work on insecure contracts.
This is unjust and needs to change.

Did:

✓ Inspire feelings of ‘disgust’ and ‘aversion’

But:

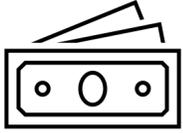
- Associated with **‘others’**

‘Boohoo was like in India...’

‘They’ll work for a pittance just to, inverted commas, try to be ‘normal’.

- Intensifies sense of **lack of agency...**

‘There will always be discrimination.’



Narrative 2 – BURDEN

Employers are dealing with more regulations than ever before. This includes reporting on pay gaps between female and male employees, having to offer agency workers full contracts after 12 weeks, limits on what you can work and carrying out new checks when hiring staff. Ultimately this costs workers because fewer jobs are created.

Did:

✓ Resonate - a (frustrating) part of **daily life**

*‘Stripping away the **silly rules.**’*

✓ Respect for people who **stand up for themselves**

‘Why should the government be getting involved in that?’

‘It relies on people exposing them (employers) ...’

But:

- **Not** a pro-business stance
- Supportive of specific policies named



Narrative 3 – EXPORTING BRITISH STANDARDS

We left the EU because we wanted Britain to be better, and to lead the world when it comes to standards. We should aim high, so that other countries look up to the way that we are doing things. Britain is a country where rules count, and standards matter.

- Did not resonate

*'...people wanted the way we worked and the rules to change, not to make the country better and **not to lead the world when it comes to standards.**'*

- Interpreted as doing things abroad / for others at the expense of sorting things out at home

*'I don't want to be a world leader, I want to look after **our people.**'*

- Sceptical about our level of influence

*'...if we say try to challenge that and they say, 'That's alright, we'll take our business somewhere else, we'll take it to Europe, wherever', and then we're kind of like, in a word, **blackmailed into being submissive** to them and let them rule Britannia type of thing.'*



Narrative 4 – ONE RULE FOR EVERYONE

Worker protections are there for all of us. Whether you are a dad who wants to request flexible working to spend more time with your kids, or a woman who is getting paid less for doing the same job, this is a question of fairness for all workers. Without them, we all lose out.

Did

- ✓ Inspire **self-evaluation** of own experiences at work
- ✓ Understood as a source individual **agency** / personal responsibility

*'It's **illegal**. If they were robbing your house you'd go and report them to the police.'*

- ✓ Played into notion of **fair play** and anger about playing by different set of rules



Narrative 5 – MARCH OF BRITISH PROGRESS

We should learn from our history. We were among the first countries to ban child labour, introduce equal pay for women and men, and ban discrimination against disabled people. Many of these rules were put in place after accidents or as the result of campaigns by workers. We shouldn't turn the clock back.

Did:

✓ Trigger **Pride / Agency**

*'I do feel like we have improved and things, and I never even thought of it. It has improved, the child labour and things, **we've improved it in our country**, but I never even thought, we are buying from countries that are exploiting, they're still doing it...'*

✓ Play into **common sense** – push forwards

'We don't want to start taking a step backwards.'

NB - 'the result of campaigns by workers' = miners' strikes

KEY INSIGHTS

- **MARCH OF BRITISH PROGRESS** resonated across the 3 audiences
- **ONE RULE FOR EVERYONE** resonated more than narrative focused on vulnerability / workers
- **MESSENGERS** – trust self-made, successful (local) entrepreneurs