

# **An Analysis of the Manifestos of the Main Political Parties Contesting the 2019 General Election for the United Kingdom Relating to Issues of Human Rights.**

## **Human Rights**

The future of how the UK government interprets and practises human rights law is uncertain. Traditionally, UK governments have followed the UK's Human Rights Act (1998), which incorporated the into UK domestic law the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Human Rights Act serves to protect human rights safeguards of all people. At René Cassin, we continue to remake the case for human rights, and ensure vulnerable peoples' rights are protected in law.

The Conservative Party's manifesto states that after Brexit they will, "take back control of our laws", including "update the Human Rights Act and administrative law to ensure that there is a proper balance between the rights of individuals, our vital national security and effective government."

The Labour Party takes a more international approach to human rights legislation, stating, "human rights and international humanitarian law are fundamental pillars of a secure global system." Alongside solidifying their commitment to the Human Rights Act, "we are guided by our firm commitment to the Human Rights Act and Convention on Human Rights that have been consistently attacked by the Conservatives. We will ratify both the Istanbul Convention on preventing domestic abuse and the ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment at work."

Similarly, the Liberal Democrats state they will, "defend the Human Rights Act" and "resist any attempt to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights and oppose any laws that unnecessarily erode civil liberties." Additionally, they too would ratify the Istanbul Convention into UK law.

The Green Party pledges to "ensure there is no rolling back of the rights and protections enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights." More so, they plan to "extend the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights to give women in all EU countries access to legal, safe and affordable abortion services."

On the issue of protecting the Human Rights Act only the Conservatives suggest making any changes. They pledge to 'update' the Human Rights Act. The Labour Party, Liberal Democrats and Green Parties all commit to defending the Human Rights Act, with the Green Party calling for an extension to ensure women's access to safe and legal abortions.

## **Immigration**

Immigration policy remains high on the political agenda, as the world continues to face refugee crises. More so, with Brexit negotiations ongoing, the political parties set out their

intentions regarding the UK's participation of freedom of movement within the EU, in their manifestos.

The Conservative Party wants to “overhaul the current immigration system, and make it more fair and compassionate ...We will treat EU and non-EU citizens equally. Regardless of whether they are from Europe or another part of the world, we welcome people who meet our criteria.” This “fair and compassionate” criteria, the manifesto speaks of, will establish immigration controls and end freedom of movement, so as to “attract the high-skilled workers we need to contribute to our economy, our communities and our public services. There will be fewer lower-skilled migrants and overall numbers will come down. And we will ensure that the British people are always in control.”

Whereas, the Labour Party wishes to “end the ‘hostile environment’”, by building a system based on “human rights and aimed at meeting the skills and labour shortages that exist in our economy and public services. Our immigration system must allow us to recruit the people we need, and to welcome them and their families. Our work visa system must fill any skills or labour shortages that arise. The movement of people around the world has enriched our society, our economy and our culture.”

While the language used by the Labour Party is decisively different to that of the Conservatives, both suggest they will assess people's value to British employers when making immigration decisions, possibly seeking to address labour shortages. However, arguably, the Conservatives declaration that they will reduce the numbers of “low-skilled migrants” could suggest a far more sinister system at play.

The Liberal Democrats will work to stop Brexit, thus continuing freedom of movement within the EU. Additionally, they plan to introduce a “fair immigration system that works for everyone.” This will include: scrapping the hostile environment; “establish a new arms-length, non-political agency to take over processing applications”. Like Labour and the Conservatives, they too seem to suggest the adoption of a points-based system, stating they will, “replace Tier 2 work visas with a more flexible merit-based system.”

The Green Party wants to “enshrine Freedom of Movement as a core principle of the EU.” The Party will “scrap the Home Office, and end its decades-long creation of a hostile environment... We will instead create a Ministry for Sanctuary and a Ministry of the Interior.” This Ministry would introduce a new humane immigration system with no minimum income rules for visas, full workplace rights for migrants, the right to work for asylum seekers and recourse to public support for migrants and asylum seekers who need.

## **Refugees and Indefinite Detention**

The European refugee crisis has seen refugees and asylum seekers drown en-route to Europe's borders, live in unsafe and inhumane camps and risk indefinite detention to procure safety. In the midst of an environmental emergency and international political

turmoil, the numbers of displaced people seeking sanctuary is predicted to increase, and it is vital our government responds humanely.

The Conservative Party speaks little of policy in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, only that it “will continue to grant asylum and support to refugees fleeing persecution, with the ultimate aim of helping them to return home if it is safe to do so.” This suggests that they plan to continue with current policies that have been criticised as creating a ‘hostile environment’, such as the inhumane practise of indefinite detention.

On the other hand, The Labour Party “will end indefinite immigration detention, review the alternatives to the inhumane conditions of detention centres, and close Yarl’s Wood and Brook House, from which immediate savings would contribute towards a fund of £20 million to support the survivors of modern slavery, people trafficking and domestic violence.” Their manifesto sympathises with refugees, and holds the Conservative government to account for failing “its international legal obligations to refugees and to allow people to exercise their rights to seek asylum.” “A Labour government will uphold those rights and meet those obligations. We will work with others to resume rescue missions in the Mediterranean, co-operate with the French authorities to put an end to the horrific camps, and establish safe and legal routes for asylum seekers. Once here, refugees will have the right to work, access to public services and will be treated humanely by government at all levels.”

Likewise, the Green Party also call for an end to indefinite detention, “closing the immigration detention centres and ending the culture of abuse and violence that has prevailed in them.” Furthermore, “will immediately suspend all deportation flights and allow refugees to live freely, with a right to work, whilst their applications are considered.” This is listed as part of the Green’s “new humane immigration system” (detailed above) which would enact “the right to work for asylum seekers and recourse to public support for migrants and asylum seekers who need.”

The Liberal Democrats take a mixed approach to refugees and asylum, expressing sympathy and solidarity with refugees, and argue that the present system sees “too many people wrongly denied asylum.” They would work to ensure a fast and easy resettlement scheme for asylum seekers, actively encouraging community participation. Additionally, they would “offer asylum to people fleeing the risk of violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identification, end the culture of disbelief for LGBT+ asylum seekers and never refuse an LGBT+ applicant on the basis that they could be discreet.” However, whilst the Party sees indefinite detention as “an absolute last resort”, unlike Labour and Greens they would not completely abolish it. Rather, the Liberal Democrats would, “introduce a 28-day time limit on detention and close seven of the UK’s nine detention centres.”

## **Hate Crime**

René Cassin’s most recent campaign, the #CutItOut campaign, seeks to address the ways in which some politicians and hateful political rhetoric have emboldened hate crime in the UK, which is now at disastrous levels. Therefore, it is crucial that parties are held to account for

their actions, or inactions, regarding hate crime and whether they choose to recognise the problem in their manifestos.

The Conservative Party states, “we will protect people from physical attack or harassment whether for their sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion or disability, and expand funding for and protect places of worship. We will vigorously combat harassment and violence against all religious groups, and against LGBT people. We will ensure that those who work in countering extremism are protected from threats and intimidation.” They go on to say, “we will ensure that no one is put off from engaging in politics or standing in an election by threats, harassment or abuse, whether in person or online... We will champion freedom of expression and tolerance, both in the UK and overseas.” Whilst the language of the manifesto suggests solidarity, there is little evidence to suggest that the party is paying any more than a lip-service to combat hate crime. Apart from mentioning, “we will support marginalised communities in the developing world, hosting the UK government’s first ever international LGBT conference. We will seek to protect those persecuted for their faith and implement the Truro Review recommendations” there is little concrete policy on the topic. Additionally, whilst the manifesto does mention the dangers of “online abuse and harms”, the focus is on the safety of children. Whilst protecting children from abuse online is vital, the manifesto fails to mention any other “vulnerable” or targeted categories that deserve protection. More so, they are committing to “defending freedom of expression and in particular recognising and defending the invaluable role of a free press.”

It is also vital to bring to attention the hateful rhetoric that was published in the Conservative Party’s manifesto. This hateful language undermines the statements of solidarity to tackle hate and prejudice, by the Conservative Party, stated above. The manifesto states, “we will tackle unauthorised traveller camps. We will give the police new powers to arrest and seize the property and vehicles of trespassers who set up unauthorised encampments, in order to protect our communities. We will make intentional trespass a criminal offence, and we will also give councils greater powers within the planning system.” This paragraph implies the existence of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities is not only “criminal” but threatens the safety of “our communities”. The Conservative’s vow to “protect our communities” from “unauthorized traveller camps” demonizes Roma, Gypsy and Traveller people as a dangerous and criminalised ‘other’. This sort of harmful rhetoric holds particular ties with the Jewish community, who are all too aware of how hateful language and othering can contribute to endangering the lives of innocent and marginalised peoples.

The Labour Party pledges to tackle not just hateful narratives, but structural inequalities that oppress BAME communities, such as in the workforce and criminal justice system, and seeks to end racial profiling in ‘stop-and search’ policing. The Labour Party states that the rise in hate crime “is a wake-up call for all of us.” The Party will, “seek to end the politics of hate and commission an independent review into the threat of far-right extremism and how to tackle it. ...Create an Emancipation Educational Trust to educate around migration and colonialism, and to address the legacy of slavery and teach how it interrupted a rich and powerful black history which is also British history. On religious discrimination, we will:

Strengthen protection for religious communities and amend the law to include attacks on places of worship (including synagogues, temples, mosques and churches) as a specific aggravated offence. ...Review current levels of funding for and access to the Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme, maintain funding in real terms for the Community Security Trust, and consult on giving it statutory protection to ensure that religious communities have the support they need.”

The Green Party seek to address structural inequalities, such as by replacing “‘Prevent’ with community cohesive policing which engages rather than antagonises Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and addresses concerns about the use of stop and search powers.” They wish to “confront racism, antisemitism and prejudice, including from an early age through a broader and decolonialised curriculum in school, focussing on histories and role models from a diverse range of ethnicities and religions.” More so, they defend the right of people of all faiths – to express their faith, be that in religious clothing, food or reasonable accommodation of religious observance “We will also work with religious communities to defend the safety of places of worship.” Additionally, the party would make misogyny a hate crime and “increase the police’s capacity to deal with domestic violence and misogynistic hate crimes.” Furthermore, “funding to support the prevention and prosecution of all hate crimes will be increased, and police officers will be given further training in this area. We need an intersectional approach to hate crime, which recognises the groups of women who are most at risk.” They also seek to reform the Gender Recognition Act and work toward a more LGBTQI+ inclusive society.

The Greens also commit to protecting the rights of Travellers, stating they will “create a new Ministry for the Interior that will be fully committed to upholding human rights. This Ministry will have responsibility for protecting the fundamental rights of Travellers, a group that are often overlooked in efforts to end discrimination.”

The Liberal Democrats hold both the Conservative and Labour Parties to account in their manifesto, for failing “to stand up to hatred or combat entrenched inequalities. The Conservatives have been relentlessly hostile in their rhetoric and policy around migration and have failed to take allegations of Islamophobia within their party seriously; Jeremy Corbyn has failed to tackle institutional anti-Semitism in the Labour Party.” They aim to tackle hate crime “by making them all aggravated offences, giving law enforcement the resources and training they need to identify and prevent them, and condemning inflammatory rhetoric – including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia – by those with public platforms.” Alongside this, they will, “provide funding for protective security measures to places of worship, schools and community centres that are vulnerable to hate crime and terror attacks.” Additionally, the Liberal Democrats seek to reform the Gender Recognition Act “to remove the requirement for medical reports, scrap the fee and recognise non-binary gender identities” and establish a more LGBTQI+ inclusive society. Like Greens and Labour, they seek to address institutional oppression too, such as with pay-gap reporting for gender, BAME, disability and LGBT+.

## Modern Day Slavery

The Conservative Party, state “we will continue our campaigns to promote international media freedom and to eradicate human trafficking and the scourge of modern slavery.”

The Labour Party seek to combat modern day slavery at UK borders, “our border security prevents serious crimes including child abduction, people trafficking, smuggling of drugs and guns, terrorism and modern day slavery... A Labour government will review our border controls to make them more effective.” Additionally, they will use savings obtained from closing the UK’s detention centres to “contribute towards a fund of £20 million to support the survivors of modern slavery, people trafficking and domestic violence.” And “will ensure justice for migrant domestic workers and restore the overseas domestic workers’ visa.”

The Liberal Democrats state they will, “introduce a general duty of care for the environment and human rights – requiring companies, financial institutions and public sector agencies to exercise due diligence in avoiding specified activities such as child labour or modern slavery, or specified products such as commodities produced with deforestation, in their operations and supply chains, and to report on their actions.” Additionally, they will “properly resource the National Crime Agency to combat serious and organised crime, and tackle modern slavery and human trafficking through proactive, intelligence-led enforcement of labour market standards.”

The Green Party include a UK-wide strategy to end gender-based violence where they commit to tackle human trafficking. Though modern slavery is not directly mentioned, The Green Party do state that they will “Seek resolution in line with international law and the principles of self-determination to long running conflicts, illegal occupations and human rights violations.”.