

Implementing the TUC's AI Bill Is A No Brainer

By Tony Burke

The Institute Of Employment Rights booklets have for years provided an authoritative analysis of employment rights issues and in some instances have pointed the way forward and helped draft future employment legislation.

IER's new 'Algorithmic Management And A New Generation Of Rights At Work', written by Dr Joe Atkinson (University of Southampton) and Professor Philippa Collins (University of Bristol) is one such booklet that all incoming Labour MPs should read along with the TUC's draft 'Artificial Intelligence (Employment and Regulation) Bill'.

How AI will effect workers has been much talked about. A low point was Sunak's 'AI Summit' at Bletchley Park to which unions were not invited and ended as little more than photo opportunity for Sunak to smooze with Elon Musk.

I have no doubt there will be many benefits for working people and society from the use of AI, but one of its biggest drawbacks is AI's potential for intrusiveness coupled with the ability to produce in nono-seconds what it would take humans to do in hours.

As Unite National Officer for the Media Louisa Bull (one of the areas where there will be a big downside to the use of AI could be in the media) and where the union is busy organising digital and tech workers told the global union Union Network International: "It is never acceptable to pass off responsibility for key decisions to non-human agents and yet that is happening".

The authors rightly point out that: "Technology has revolutionised the way we work over the last 30 years, and is now changing radically the way in which working people are managed.

"Rapid advances in 'artificial intelligence' have given rise to complex and powerful algorithmic management tools that pose an increasing threat to the right of workers to enjoy decent working conditions and exercise agency over their working lives."

Although the Labour manifesto has a reference to "updating regulations to outlaw the use of predictive technologies for blacklisting and safeguard against the singling out of workers for mistreatment or the sack without any evidence of human interaction" overall the current outdated employment protections will just not be enough to provide the protections workers will need.

As the authors point out - with collective bargaining in the UK at low levels - for millions of people protection will not be available to those engaged in business models that exploit workers.

They correctly contend that what is needed is: "a new regulatory framework giving workers and unions a genuine voice in the use of algorithmic management tools, alongside recognition and protection of their rights and access to justice that ensures their employers can be held to account".

Without widespread sectoral collective bargaining a new frame work of protection for non-human interventions and decisions underpinned by law, not a toothless code of practice - is now essential.

Coupled with the TUC's recent work, this LRD booklet sets out the way forward. A Labour government needs to agree wider employment protections in consultation with those unions already in at the deep end and have members working and organising in digital and tech companies such as Unite, Prospect, Equity, NUJ, CWU along with the TUC to implement the TUCs 'Artificial Intelligence (Employment and Regulation) Bill' as first step.

For Labour the spade work already done - coupled with the research by Atkinson and Collins' work - its a no brainer.