



## Employment Rights: Government Plans

House of Commons, January 25, 2021

Speech by James Murray MP (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)

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Over the past nine months, we have seen the shameful tactics of fire and rehire used to hit workers in the middle of a pandemic and in the worst economic crisis in 300 years. The inaction of this Government as that has happened has been inexcusable.

Six months ago, I spoke in this Chamber to raise the case of a constituent of mine who had started working for British Airways more than 20 years ago, and who faced losing their job or being re-hired on worse pay and terms than when they had started.

Despite having taken hundreds of millions of pounds of Government money intended to protect workers' jobs, British Airways laid off more than 12,000 staff altogether, while pushing ahead with plans to fire the rest and to rehire them on worse terms and pay.

At the time, I warned that if the Government let British Airways get away with that, we would see other companies following the same shameful path. That is exactly what happened.

Workers at Heathrow airport were forced to take four days of strike action last month over plans to fire the entire 4,000-strong workforce and to rehire

them on inferior contracts, resulting in pay cuts of up to £8,000 a year. They are due to walk out again in February.

As I said when I attended their rally—organised by Unite—with my neighbours, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), I will stand by them throughout their dispute.

Likewise, British Gas has now announced its own fire and rehire scheme. The GMB is leading the fight against changes to terms and conditions covering the 20,000-strong UK workforce, including pay freezes and changes to working hours. Engineers who refuse to sign will lose their jobs at the end of March.

Fire and rehire is immoral and should be banned. Today's motion seeks to outlaw those tactics, and to protect holiday pay entitlements and the right to work no more than a 48-hour week.

The Prime Minister promised that, after leaving the EU, our standards on workers' rights would be higher than ever before. Members on the Government Benches have the chance to prove today that that is a promise they intend to keep.

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