We need a clear plan for Brexit that gets the best for Britain

On Wednesday last week MPs from the cross-party Exiting the EU Select Committee heard evidence on how Brexit could affect the world of work, from the TUC’s Frances O’Grady, CBI’s Carolyn Fairbairn and former BCC Director turned Brexit campaigner, John Longworth.

We’ve heard a lot of promises in recent months from the PM and minsters that our employment rights will be safe after we leave the EU. When Labour’s Hilary Benn asked what she thought of these, to which Frances very diplomatically replied;

*“As a trade unionist I like promises; I prefer guarantees. And of course the Prime Minister also promised not just to protect rights but to enhance them, including for example putting workers on boards.”*

The next day the select committee came to Sunderland to take evidence from the Northern TUC, Trade unions, business and local politicians.

The TUC’s job is to stand up for working people whichever way they voted in the referendum. That’s why we are calling for a new deal for working people to be put at the heart of the government’s Brexit negotiation strategy.

The TUC understands that, by definition, any negotiation involves trade-offs and compromise, even while recognising fundamental principles. But we do know what a fair trade deal would look like. A good deal for British workers – and for working people across the rest of Europe - would deliver more skilled jobs, protect rights and strengthen people’s voice at work. In contrast, bad trade deals destroy jobs, weaken working people’s rights and put public services at risk of privatisation.

At this stage the Government must set out its guiding principles for negotiation. The TUC believes that the Government should:

* promote good jobs by maintaining the EU as our largest trading partner, exporting our goods to the EU tariff-free and without cumbersome rules of origin requirements and other non-tariff barriers, as well as providing services in other EU countries without restrictions;
* protect workers’ rights by enforcing the highest regulatory standards in Europe, especially when it comes to employment, but also consumer and environmental protections; and
* manage migration better by guaranteeing local people opportunities for better jobs and apprenticeships, closer to home, especially in towns and communities hit hard by previous recessions; cracking down on bad employers who use migrants to undercut wages; strengthening union voice; and easing pressure on housing, schools, hospitals and other public services by using tax gains to better fund them.

These objectives would, we believe, secure good jobs at good wages for working people in manufacturing and services, including in the supply chains that export industries depend on.

The TUC has long argued that Britain needs an industrial strategy that combines investment in infrastructure; a plan to develop workforce skills, and the employee engagement needed to ensure that these skills are used effectively at work; smart procurement policy to ensure we are maximising the potential to increase jobs at home, and a clear strategy to take advantage of the opportunities for new technology to help meet our climate commitments.

This would meet the objectives above and be a unique British model for a relationship with the rest of the European Union – specifically tailored to the needs of the British economy and British people.