**What social partnership means to the Tories**

The principle of giving employers and unions an equal voice in the oversight of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) came from the understanding that health and safety issues are best dealt with by those who know the workplace and the risks, working together.

If a decision has the support of both unions and employers then it is more likely to be seen as being a good thing in the workplace.

Originally the board was called the Health and Safety Commission, but it was changed to the board of the HSE in 2008. What did not change was the way the board was appointed or the role of employee and employer representatives.

The TUC and trade unions were deeply concerned and appalled by the announcement by the government on 2 September that Susan Johnson, former Chief Executive of Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, who does not appear to have any history of worker representation, had been appointed to the executive board of the Health and Safety Executive as a representative of employees.

The [Health and Safety at Work Act](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37#commentary-c19975101) is very clear. It states that the Secretary of State can only make appointments to the employee representative seats after consulting ‘such organisations representing employees as he considers appropriate’.

Not only did no consultation with the TUC take place, they did not even advertise the post. The last time board positions were advertised there were two vacancies for employee representatives. In the intervening period, Sir Paul Kenny, former General Secretary of the GMB announced he would step down in September, so they decided to fill his post without any further advert, and with a retired employer!

This is a complete insult to every worker in the country. Do the Tories really believe that workers need an employer to represent them or is it just that they have complete contempt for the institutions that workers have created?

Following the adoption of an emergency motion adopted at Congress 2016, the TUC will be undertaking a range of political activities over the coming months aimed at getting the Government to commit to tripartism and reverse the decision.

This won’t go away quietly, in addition to the General Secretary meeting with the Secretary of State, the TUC will be seeking a meeting with the chair and other members of the DWP select committee; briefing the opposition DWP front bench; asking MPs to ask DWP oral PQs; drafting an Early Day Motion; preparing briefs for MPs and Peers (including the All-Party Parliamentary Group on occupational safety and health); and requesting that MPs ask for a Westminster Hall short debate on the issue.

Essentially the government are saying that workers need a retired employer to represent their interests because presumably they are incapable of doing it themselves.

The worst thing about all of this of course is that the arena in which they have chosen to make this ideological move is health and safety. An area where unions have made such a [massive difference](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Union%20effect%202015%20%28pdf%29_0.pdf) and where unionised workforces have half the serious injury rate than non-unionised ones.

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