

The dreaded Human Rights Act

The 1998 Human Rights Act has come in for considerable criticisms and the Conservatives in their 2015 manifesto had promised to abolish it and to introduce a Bill of Rights reducing the effect of the original act. Parts of the right wing press have maintained a continuous campaign of vilifying the act:

Rwanda deportations are yet more proof that the Human Rights Act undermines democracy.

Prof Richard Ekins, Daily Mail, 13 June 2022

Gloating left-wing lawyers and campaigners were rejoicing after Liz Truss shelved plans to rip up the Human Rights Act.

The Sun, 7 Sept 2022

There's no such thing as human rights [and] they're not worth the paper they're written on.

Peter Hitchens, Daily Mail, 23 June 2022

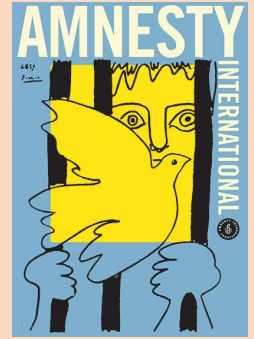
Human Rights Act a charter for criminals and parasites

Mail on Sunday, 15 July, 2012

Millions paid out to criminals thanks to the European Court of Human Rights. Murderers, paedophiles and rapists have been handed £4.4m of tax - payers' money by the European Court. *Daily Express, 8 October 2013*

Foreign lags are to be stopped from exploiting human rights laws to dodge deportation. (If the Bill of Rights became law). *The Sun 14 December 2021*

The examples overleaf are but a small sample of headlines from hundreds (possibly thousands) of articles in newspapers such as the *Daily* and *Sunday Mail*, the *Sun* and the *Daily Express*. Less lurid pieces are published in the *Times* and the *Telegraph*.



WHY? You might ask. One reason is that with falling circulations and increasing costs, papers were looking for stories which were cheap to acquire but were sensational enough to interest readers. This led to the scandal of hacking where newspapers tapped into celebrity's phones, 'blagged' their bank accounts, stole their rubbish, bribed police officers (particularly the Met) and intercepted emails and other forms of electronic communication. This was all revealed in the Leveson Enquiry and amounted to a massive and often illegal intrusion into individual's lives.

The Human Rights Act offered some protection as it gives people a degree of privacy. There was no common law right to privacy prior to the Act. It has been suggested* that this is a major reason for their vilification and ceaseless campaigning to get the act repealed because it damaged their business model.

The benefits of the act are almost never explained



Some of the benefits

Amnesty International, along with other human rights organisations, have produced a list of reasons for keeping the act and the benefits it gives to citizens in the UK. There are too many to describe them all but below are a selection:

- ◆ *It protects freedom of the press.* Thames Valley Police were bugging a journalist and gained access to her bank details. They also filmed her at home. A judge ruled that the police had breached her freedom of expression rights, a decision based on the HRA.
- ◆ *The Hillsborough families* were able to use the act to uncover how their 96 loved ones had died. After the tragedy, the families themselves were blamed. They were able to use the act to achieve a proper inquest and reveal the truth about police failings at the match.
- ◆ *It Protects soldiers.* A frequent story put out by the media and some politicians claims the act is a danger to soldiers. However, Snatch Land Rovers, deployed in Northern Ireland, were used in Iraq and Afghanistan where they became known as 'mobile coffins'. Families of the 37 soldiers who died in them used the act to challenge the government leading to an apology from the MoD. The vehicles are no longer used.
- ◆ *Challenging failure by the police to investigate sexual violence.* Two victims of the 'black cab rapist' John Worboys challenged the police and the Supreme Court ruled that they had failed to carry out a proper investigation. The case was brought under article 3 of the act. Recent crimes by serving police officers shows this is still unfinished business.
- ◆ *Proper care in the NHS.* As many as 1,200 people died unnecessarily at Stafford hospital due to the 'appalling' standards of care provided. The families were able, using the HRA, to launch 119 claims against the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust. This forced the government to hold a public enquiry into what went wrong.

In reporting these events, some of the right wing media will not mention the role of the Act in achieving justice.

Produced by the Salisbury group of
Amnesty International. We always
welcome new members.

*For those wishing to know more go to Adam Wagner's essay *The Monster-ing of Human Rights*, September 2014 or for a slightly different perspective:

<https://salisburyai.com/2016/06/30/why-do-they-hate-the-human-rights-act/>

www.salisburyai.com