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The United Kingdom's proposed employment rights legislation has sparked significant concern in Wales, with members of the Welsh Parliament warning that the bill could undermine devolution and limit the powers of the Welsh Government.

While the legislation introduces commendable reforms, such as strengthened protections for workers from their first day on the job, revisions to zero-hours contracts, and the elimination of certain union restrictions, critics argue that it grants overreaching authority to ministers in Westminster. One of the central points of contention is the inclusion of so-

called “Henry VIII powers,” a legal mechanism allowing the United Kingdom Government to alter or override Welsh laws without direct parliamentary approval in Cardiff.

Luke Fletcher, a Member of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament), expressed strong reservations about the impact the bill could have on Welsh autonomy. He warned that it could erode the Welsh Government’s ability to act in the interests of its constituents, stating during a debate that, “We are seeing provisions that encroach on the ability of this Government and this place to legislate on behalf of the people of Wales.” Fellow Senedd member Mabon ap Gwynfor echoed these sentiments, labelling the bill’s approach as “dangerous” and “unacceptable.”

A particularly contentious aspect of the bill is a clause requiring Welsh ministers to secure approval from the United Kingdom Government before creating a fair pay body for the social care sector. Critics have argued that this sets a troubling precedent, limiting Welsh lawmakers’ ability to pursue reforms tailored to their region’s needs. Gwynfor added, “We can’t continue to legislate in this way... with powers being taken away from our parliament and our democratic voice being undermined time and time again.”

Other members also voiced dissatisfaction with the legislative process. Peter Fox, chair of the Senedd’s health committee, criticised the lack of engagement with Welsh stakeholders, stating that the decision not to bring forward a Wales-specific bill had limited scrutiny and participation.

Concerns were not limited to constitutional issues. Altaf Hussain, a member of the Senedd, noted the potential economic consequences, warning that the bill could cost businesses across the country up to £5 billion. “Although the intentions behind this legislation appear commendable, I am concerned about the significant burden it will impose on businesses across the UK,” he said.

Despite the criticism, the legislative consent motion was passed by the Senedd on July 15 with 27 votes in favour and 13 against. However, the debate highlighted ongoing tensions between Westminster and Cardiff over the future of devolution and the extent of regional authority in shaping key policy decisions.