The reality of Labour’s grossly misnamed “Renters’ Rights” Bill

Alex Brown
13 January 2026

Presented as a step forward for tenants, Labour’s Renters’ Rights Act preserves landlord profits and entrenches the dominance of the private rental sector. Providing only the most marginal concessions, its purpose is to prop up collapsing poll numbers.

The legislation passed last October arrives against the backdrop of a deepening housing crisis. According to the Office for National Statistics, the average private renter now spends £1,366 per month on rent. Young people aged 18–24 spend more than half their income simply to keep a roof over their heads, while renters now pay more each month than mortgage holders.

Many young people will never be able to own a home, condemned instead to lifelong dependence on wealthy landlords who extract rent as a permanent levy on wages.

The social consequences are stark. More than 382,000 people are experiencing homelessness, as reported by the charity Shelter, with numbers continuing to rise.

Conditions within the private rented sector are dire. The Building Research Establishment (BRE) estimates that 13 percent of privately rented homes—around 619,000 properties—contain a Category 1 hazard posing an immediate and serious risk to health. Over a million people live with potentially fatal dangers in their own homes.

Injuries and illnesses caused by these conditions cost the National Health Service an estimated £290 million each year. The average repair would cost only £4,039, meaning preventative work would pay for itself many times over—financially and, more importantly, in human lives.

The Act introduces a series of headline reforms. Fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies are abolished, replaced with rolling agreements requiring one calendar month’s notice.

Rent increases are limited to once a year, subject to a two?month notice period. Landlords and letting agents are prohibited from demanding rent in advance before a tenancy is signed, and advance payments thereafter are capped at one month’s rent. Rental bidding wars are banned.

Discrimination against prospective tenants based on benefit status or having children is made unlawful, and tenants are granted the right to keep a pet, which landlords may not unreasonably refuse.

The most heavily promoted change is the eventual abolition of Section 21 “no fault” evictions in England, scheduled for May 1, 2026. Yet this reform comes only after the Starmer government has overseen the eviction of more than 15,000 families under Section 21, with a further 5,000 expected before the ban takes effect, according to Shelter. Labour’s pre?election pledge had been to end the practice immediately.

To replace Section 21, the government has expanded and restructured Section 8—the legal grounds on which landlords can evict tenants—making it the sole route to repossession. This shift requires the streamlining of eviction procedures to handle an increased caseload, given the lack of resources allocated to courts and local authorities. The result is a faster, more automatic system that strengthens landlord power and broadens their ability to remove tenants.

One of the most egregious changes is the introduction of Ground 7B—no right to rent--which allows the eviction of an entire household within just two weeks if any one tenant is found not to have the correct visa. Under the new framework, eviction can proceed without a court order if the Home Office determines that a tenant does not have the right to rent.

Immigration status is elevated above all other considerations, including tenancy conduct and the welfare of those affected. By embedding immigration enforcement into housing law, the Act diverts attention from the real causes of the crisis—the profit system and the chronic shortage of social housing—while reinforcing

narratives promoted by the far?right and increasingly adopted by Labour itself.

The Act also purports to regulate rent affordability. Tenants may appeal rent increases to the First?tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) if they believe a rise exceeds the reasonable market rate. In practice, this right is largely illusory. Tribunal fees—reported by public legal advice organisations to be around £300—along with potential legal costs, place appeals beyond the reach of many working?class renters. Even successful challenges often leave tenants liable for fees in the majority of cases.

During the bill's passage through the House of Lords, a headline amendment further strengthened landlord interests.

Landlords who share ownership of a property were granted the right to re?let just six months after a failed sale, rather than the usual twelve. Given that property sales collapse around one third of the time, this change incentivises the cynical eviction of tenants under the pretence of selling, allowing properties to be re?let at significantly higher, unregulated rents.

To give the appearance of improved accountability, the legislation establishes a new, free?to?use private rent ombudsman and a national private rented sector database to record landlord practices.

Yet enforcement resources are wholly inadequate. Local authorities have been allocated just £18.2 million for 2025–26—less than £4 per property in the sector. Without substantial investment in inspection, enforcement, and rehousing capacity, these mechanisms will remain largely toothless for the most vulnerable tenants.

Health and safety reforms are kicked down the road. The government will extend Awaab's Law to social housing by 2027, while postponing its application to the private rented sector until after reforms to the Decent Homes Standard—expected no earlier than 2035–37, if at all. Named after Awaab Ishak, a two?year?old boy who died in 2020 after inhaling black mould spores in his family's social housing flat, the law sets timeframes for landlords to address serious hazards.

Similarly, the modest uplift of energy efficiency standards to EPC C—for new tenancies by 2028 and all tenancies by 2030—is incremental and easily met through minimal measures. It does nothing to address the millions already living in cold, damp and mould?ridden homes.

These delays are not technical failings but political choices. Labour is protecting the system that ensures public funds to subsidise private landlords, while landlord incomes and asset values soar.

The Conservative government's Right to Buy legislation of 1980 transferred more than two million homes from public to private ownership, initiating the large?scale financialisation of housing. Today, the social housing waiting list stands at over 1.3 million households and is projected to exceed two million within five years.

Housing Benefit—now claimed mainly through housing costs element of Universal Credit —supports around two million private renters. In practice it is a gigantic public subsidy to landlords, transferring £13–14 billion annually from the welfare system into private hands.

This is not a system that can be fixed through regulatory tweaks. It is designed to ensure the continuous transfer of working?class income to a narrow layer of wealthy property owners, while housing quality deteriorates and insecurity deepens.

The "Renters' Rights" Act does nothing to change this—and for good reason. Besides the wider wealthy interests represented by Parliament, 13 percent of MPs are themselves landlords--including 44 from the governing Labour Party--as are an estimated one in six peers in the House of Lords.

The capitalist prioritisation of profit is fundamentally incompatible with a decent standard of living. Genuine change requires the expropriation and democratic socialisation of land and housing, mass public housebuilding, and immediate investment in repairs and insulation as public priorities. This will require a mass movement of the working class in the struggle for socialism.