

We should be celebrating the defeat of Pimlico Plumbers

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As the [Guardian](#) and many others have noted:

Employment rights of workers in the gig economy have been boosted after a heating engineer won his [claim against Pimlico Plumbers](#) at the supreme court, establishing that he was a worker and not self-employed.

The supreme court's unanimous judgment is likely to set a significant precedent for a series of protracted legal battles, such as those involving the cab firms Uber and Addison Lee, which are in dispute with their drivers over their employment status.

Pimlico Plumbers, which [lost at every stage of the dispute](#), had appealed to the UK's highest court, arguing that those it sent out to repair leaking pipes and malfunctioning dishwashers were self-employed and not "workers".

This matters.

First, from a tax perspective the decision is right and was always going to be found this way. It is absurd that anyone ever thought otherwise. The people working for Pimlico Plumbers were so obviously employees that serious questions have to be asked about the judgement of anyone who could have suggested otherwise. I hope the professional bodies regulating these advisers take note. If I was Mr Mullins I may well be suing.

Second, I hope HMRC now pursue the correct tax from all the firms who have been avoiding the employer's national insurance obligations by inappropriately treating their staff as self-employed people. If they don't, serious questions have to be asked.

Third, if these firms face what Charlie Mullins of Pimlico Plumbers predicted would be a "tsunami of claims", so be it. Making money by avoiding legal obligations to staff and others, as it is now clear has happened in this case, is unacceptable to society. If a business model cannot survive without abusing the tax system then it does not deserve to survive.

And fourth, this is massively important for all; those in deeply vulnerable employments and the sham self employments that have proliferated in recent years and which have supposedly created the impression of full employment in this country know there is no such thing, and that instead vast numbers of people live in perpetual fear of not working because they have no rights or security.

After 1945 this country was rebuilt on the basis of a social safety net that relied on mutual obligations, tax being paid and benefits being available. Those employers who use false self-employed status have sought to challenge this. What this ruling says is that this is no longer acceptable: the safety net must be rebuilt and the obligations must be settled.

The likes of Charlie Mullins might not like this, but the rest of us should celebrate.