# Ed Miliband's dismissal of anti-slavery proposal sparks ethical concerns



Ed Miliband, the UK energy secretary, is set to dismiss a crucial proposal aimed at preventing the government from procuring solar panels that may be linked to forced labour—a move that raises serious moral questions. This decision comes on the heels of a Lords amendment to the Great British Energy Bill, which aims to block taxpayer money from supporting companies with credible ties to modern slavery in their supply chains. With China casting a long shadow over the UK's renewable energy strategies, concerns about the use of forced labour, particularly regarding Uighurs in Xinjiang, are more pressing than ever.

Last month, the House of Lords passed the amendment with a significant majority of 50 votes, underscoring the urgent need for transparency and ethical responsibility in government procurement. However, the current administration maintains that existing safeguards address human rights issues, a stance that many critics find alarmingly complacent given the weight of evidence against Chinese practices.

Amidst this backdrop, Miliband announced an £180 million project in China, set to install solar panels on 200 school buildings and various NHS sites. Alarmingly, he admitted that a significant portion of these panels will come from China, which dominates about 80% of the global solar panel supply. When questioned about the absence of UK-made alternatives, he lamented the lack of a competitive domestic market, an admission that exposes the government’s failure to prioritize British industry over foreign entities known to exploit human rights.

This ongoing controversy speaks to the government’s cavalier attitude towards contentious sourcing, particularly within the context of the 'ping-pong' legislative process. The Great British Energy Bill, proposing a state-owned entity backed by £8.3 billion in public funds, is ostensibly focused on combating climate change and achieving net-zero emissions—but at what ethical cost?

Lord Alton of Liverpool, an independent peer who championed the amendment, rightfully challenged the government: “This amendment asks Parliament a vital question: Do we desire a slavery-free green transition, or are we ready to let our objectives rest on the backs of those subjected to forced labour in a state accused of genocide?”

In response, Lord Hunt of King's Heath, the energy security minister, offered vague assurances that Great British Energy would have procedures in place to manage human rights abuses within their supply chain. Such reassurances ring hollow as the government continues to overlook the inherent moral responsibilities tied to taxpayer-funded initiatives.

Eleanor Lyons, the independent anti-slavery commissioner, has lent her voice to the call for change, emphasizing the need to safeguard human rights and ensure that taxpayer money is not entangled with forced labour. Meanwhile, Shadow Net Zero Minister Andrew Bowie has pointed out the political landmine Labour faces, raising valid concerns about their commercial connections with China amid ongoing human rights allegations.

As the situation unfolds, fears mount over the UK's increasing reliance on solar imports from China. A report from the business and trade select committee highlights alarming risks, suggesting that the UK could inadvertently become a hub for goods associated with forced labour practices. Labour's Alex Sobel has proposed an amendment aimed at empowering the anti-slavery commissioner to verify claims of forced labour—an initiative that resonates deeply amid this critical discourse.

The complexities surrounding this legislation reveal a government unprepared to tackle the ethical implications of its renewable energy ambitions. While they pursue lofty climate goals, they risk compromising fundamental human rights, leaving room for credible opposition to assert that the nation deserves better leadership—focused not only on environmental sustainability but also on ethical integrity in its procurement practices.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2025/03/22/miliband-accused-blind-eye-slavery-net-zero/> - This article corroborates Ed Miliband's stance on a proposal to prevent GB Energy from sourcing solar panels linked to forced labour, highlighting concerns over appeasing China.
* <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/ed-miliband-net-zero-iain-duncan-smith-china-slave-labour> - This piece details the concerns raised by Sir Iain Duncan Smith regarding Labour's energy policies and their reliance on supply chains potentially linked to slave labor in China.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2025/03/22/ed-miliband-accused-targeting-farmland-build-solar-panels/> - It discusses Ed Miliband's plans to deploy solar panels on farmland, which has raised concerns about food security, and mentions that many of these panels are manufactured in China.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/human-rights-jl-com> - This link provides information on the human rights joint committee, which Lord Alton is part of and has been vocal about modern slavery issues, relevant to the amendment he proposed.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/uk-solar-panels-china-forced-labour-b2316298.html> - This article explores the broader context of the UK's reliance on Chinese solar panels and concerns about forced labour in China, particularly in Xinjiang.
* <https://www.the guardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/19/uk-government-approves-solar-projects-criticised-china-human-rights> - This article highlights past concerns and criticisms regarding the UK government's approval of solar projects, despite associations with Chinese companies implicated in human rights abuses.