

## UNISON welcomes Labour's Equality Bill – but more needed!

UNISON has welcomed the Equality Bill, but warns that more is needed if the long struggle to achieve equal pay is finally to be achieved. The Bill has been fiercely contested, with Labour Deputy Leader Harriet Harman fighting off media hostility and criticism from business. She argues that it will introduce powers to help narrow the gap between rich and poor; outlaw age discrimination; take action to end the gap between what men and women are paid; and significantly strengthen Britain's anti-discrimination legislation.

The Bill will introduce a new public sector duty for strategic public bodies to consider reducing socio-economic inequalities; confer a new Equality Duty on public bodies; use public procurement to improve equality; ban age discrimination outside the workplace; introduce gender pay reports; extend the scope to use positive action; strengthen the powers of employment tribunals to make recommendations in discrimination cases; protect carers by banning "associative" discrimination; protect breastfeeding mothers; ban discrimination in private clubs; and strengthen protection from discrimination for disabled people.

While UNISON have welcomed many aspects of the proposed legislation, the union believes that it will still not go far enough to close the gender pay gap. UNISON director of organising and membership Bronwyn McKenna said: "Unless we have transparency in pay rates, women will never get true equality. We welcome the emphasis on equal pay audits, but this duty will apply to only 0.4% of employers. Employers' organisations have been lining up to condemn this measure, but good employers, whatever their size, who treat their women staff fairly have nothing to fear from this. This Bill is a chance to make equal pay a reality, so we have to get it right."



**Vice Chair of UNISON Labour Link Rachel Voller has particularly welcomed the new duty on Government Ministers, departments and certain public bodies such as local authorities and strategic health authorities to consider what action they can take to reduce the socio-economic inequalities people face. The duty will**



**affect how public bodies make strategic decisions about spending and service delivery. Rachel says:**

**"The principle of this has to be welcome and the introduction of this measure reflects the complex cross-cutting nature of disadvantage. This new duty reflects a wider social need for fairness. What is not clear, however, is what happens when an authority does not have the will or the resources to take action. I can see many Tory authorities ducking out of taking any firm action."**

## Elections reminder!

Don't forget that June 4th is voting day – for elections to the European Parliament, and in many places for local government elections as well. UNISON is encouraging every member to use their vote – staying at home plays into the hands of extremist parties like the BNP. You can help defeat the BNP by signing-up to UNISON's campaign: [June4.unison.org.uk](http://June4.unison.org.uk)

# Why your vote matters.....

says Neena Gill, Labour Member of the European Parliament for West Midlands.

4th June is a crucial date for you. It is the date you get to vote for your Members of the European Parliament. Does this matter to you? It should. Not only are our Labour MEPs working hard for workers rights but they are hard at work drawing in investment into our regions.

Labour MEPs are important because Europe is important to Britain. 60% of British trade is with Europe. Britain needs to be part of the decision making process in Europe and only Labour MEPs speak out for the interest of British workers.

As a woman in a mans world I have been pushing for years to end gender inequality and the pay gap between men and women's wages. I have been outraged when some of the Tory MEPs have voted along with other far-right groups, against reducing the pay gap. They have abstained on crucial votes against domestic violence and homophobic intolerance. There is a huge difference between the Labour MEPs and the Tories.

The Labour MEPs are striving to make Europe greener, cleaner, fairer and safer for workers, families and the vulnerable members of our society. The Tories on the other hand vote along with their friends in UKIP in the interest of the few, denying the need to address climate change and even denying it is even happening. The Tories are still working in the interest of the rich, supporting further deregulation of financial markets, in exactly the same way as they did in the 1980s and which led to the financial problems we face today.

Labour MEPs are working for greater transparency in Europe, and unlike other parties, our accounts are independently audited every year and made public. Labour MEPs are working for greater rights for workers including greater rights for temporary and agency workers. It is important that we return Labour MEPs on 4th June.

But others are looking to 4th June as a crucial date too. Members of the Far Right BNP are looking to get one of their members elected to the European Parliament. Why would a party, totally hostile to Europe and everything it stands for, want to have an MEP? Because it would give them access to greater funds and resources to peddle their message of intolerance and hate.

They would not be able to draw inward investment from Europe into our regions. Quite the opposite, their presence would be a hindrance to those MEPs trying to get investment into the regions.

Could a multi cultural and multi-ethnic region such as the West Midlands be represented by a party founded on a racist ideology? A BNP MEP would have to be invited to official functions across the region.



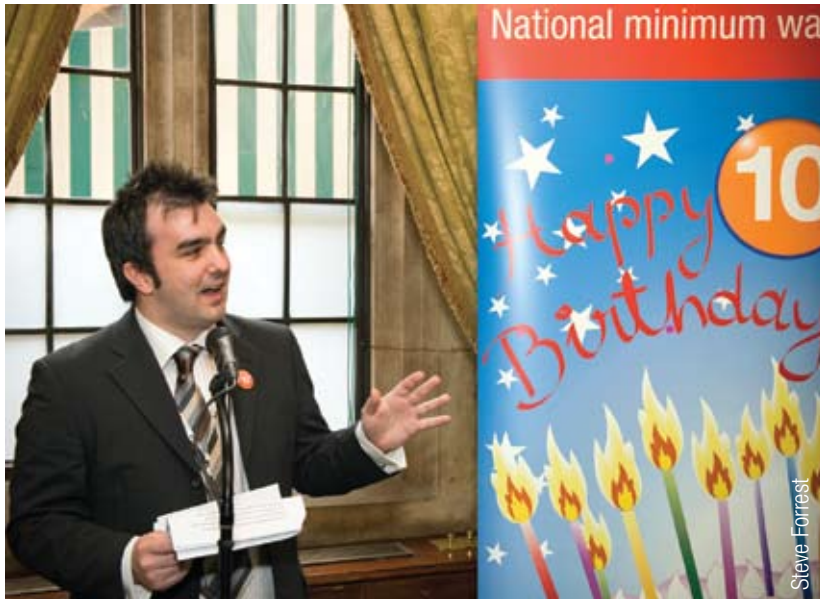
We must realise the challenges the Conservatives and the far right pose, and we must rise to it by spreading the word about what Labour can and have achieved: greater workers' representation, better rights for temporary and agency workers, an end to scams and rip offs when using your mobile abroad.

And what do we seek to achieve over the next 5 years? Better protection for workers, sensible measures for tackling migration, future growth based on sound sustainable principles.

With Labour, Europe can work for the many and not the few. This is what we must fight for on June 4th.

**You can contact Neena Gill at: 0121 569 1921/2, or by writing to Terry Duffy House, Thomas Street, West Bromwich B70 6NT. Email: [contact@neenagill.org.uk](mailto:contact@neenagill.org.uk)**

# UNISON welcomes National Minimum Wage advance...



UNISON has welcomed improvements to the National Minimum Wage announced by the Government. It will rise by 7p to £5.80 an hour in October, with the rate for 18 to 21-year-olds increasing by 6p to £4.83 and, for 16 and 17-year-olds, by 4p to £3.57.

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said: "I am pleased that the government hasn't listened to the CBI and others who

wanted a zero-pence increase. Or those who want to allow it to wither on the vine.

But we believe that the minimum wage should be higher – an extra 7p an hour won't go far to help pay the rising costs of essential items such as food, fuel and housing. Everyone knows that the lowest paid spend the highest proportion of their income on the basics of life."

The government also announced that, from October 2010, 21-year-olds will be covered by the adult minimum wage, a key demand which UNISON has been pursuing through Labour's National Policy Forum. The Low Pay Commission has also recommended that all apprentices

should be covered by the minimum wage, an issue also pursued by UNISON representatives at Labour's Warwick discussions last year.

Young members' representative on the NEC, James Anthony, said: "It's really good news that the Low Pay Commission is recommending the inclusion of apprentices within the national minimum wage.

"UNISON, together with our campaign partners, has made strong arguments about the protection of these workers, and the Low Pay Commission has taken on board many of our arguments."

## While Tories trash it

In the same week Labour boosted the minimum wage, senior Tory Christopher Chope attempted to introduce a Bill which would allow workers to opt-out of the minimum wage. He claims that the minimum wage violates human rights by preventing workers "voluntarily" accepting lower pay. Dave Prentis slammed the move: "only a Tory could suggest that not being able to work for less than minimum wage would be a denial of human rights."

## UNISON urges Polish workers to get involved

UNISON's Migrant Workers unit has hosted a meeting at the House of Commons for Polish community organisations, urging them to make sure that Poles in Britain use their vote in local and European elections. Head of the unit, Greg Thomson, told the meeting

that UNISON was recruiting growing numbers of members from Poland. Former President of

UNISON Dave Anderson, MP for Blaydon, chaired the meeting which

also heard from Europe Minister Caroline Flint MP and Labour MP Andrew Mackinlay and representatives from Polish organisations. Speakers praised the

decision of the Labour Government to allow Polish workers to work in the UK as soon as Poland joined the UK and warned that extremist parties like the BNP wanted to see Poles sent back.



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