

Taking a Million Voices to Labour

UNISON
LABOUR
LINK

The Million Voices Conference

Dave Prentis and UNISON Labour Link chair Steve Warwick describe UNISON's mission to make the Labour Conference the 'Million Voices Conference'



Our Million Voices campaign really came alive at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton last month. In speech after speech, our Labour Link delegates introduced themselves as 'one of UNISON's million voices'. A

million voices for the NHS, a million voices for good local services, a million voices for equality and most of all a million voices for public services. By the end of the week, everyone had got the message!



And during the week, we moved the campaign on – to explain that this isn't an issue for after the election, it needs action now. With public service managers across the country already drawing up future plans, we can see what is in store. We made the point in a really direct and graphic way – by unveiling an ice statue of a lollipop lady, literally melting away. That is what we believe could happen to public services, which is why in our national press advertising, our message is 'Don't Wait'. Don't



wait until your public services disappear before doing something about it.

My worry is that whatever the result of the election next year, the ground is already being laid for huge cuts to public services. It wasn't public services that caused the problem in the first place, but this all too often gets ignored. The Tories and the Liberal Democrats and many media pundits talk as if cuts are the only way forward, and the danger is that Labour is forced to go the same way. Labour ministers must hold firm, and not fall into the trap that is being set for them. Because





Delivering UNISON's message through Labour

there is another way, based on an economy returning to growth, and getting a bigger contribution from those who can best afford it.

So we sent a very clear message to Labour at the conference. That our union will stand up for public services whoever is in power. That our members have a huge number of votes at the election and that we will urge them to vote for the party that will defend public services. We want that party to be Labour – but we need clear manifesto commitments.

We know that the next election will make a significant difference

to the lives and prospects of every UNISON member. It will decide what kind of country we live in. For some, it will quite literally decide whether they still have a job or not. For others, it will determine whether they have to take a pay cut. And for many, it will determine what kind of pension they can expect. In every case, UNISON will be there, fighting for them – but we would far rather be working with a government that is on our side. The threat is very real – but UNISON will make sure that our Million Voices are made to count in defence of your services, your job and your pension.

Every year we take UNISON's message to Labour Party Conference, but the UNISON Labour Link delegation really were on a mission this year – to make sure that everyone got to hear about UNISON's Million Voices campaign. After a week of raising it everywhere and with everyone I think we certainly made an impact. By the end of the week, delegates totally unknown to us were popping up on the conference floor to add their support. On our stand we had a regular stream of visitors wanting to sign up, including many Labour MPs, councillors and an encouraging number of ministers. I say encouraging, because we need to see that they follow through on our campaign, but it shows that the first instinct of many of these people is that they agree with us on public services, and that's really important.

It wasn't just in the conference hall that Labour Link delegates were pushing UNISON's message. We went to policy seminars, we went to fringe meetings organised by a wide range of organisations and we collared constituency delegates to tell them what we are doing. Again, their almost universal reaction was to support us – which shows that we really are in touch with people. They don't need much persuading that good public services are what makes a country successful and local communities good places to live in. They like our message that this is about services, about keeping the economy moving, not just about jobs for our members. And they can be good ambassadors for our message – taking it back to their constituencies and explaining it to more people.

Labour Conference is always a big event for UNISON Labour Link because it gives us a great national profile which we can use to the union's benefit. But our work doesn't stop when the conference finishes. Now we've got the Million Voices message into the minds of many hundreds of constituency delegates, we will be following up, explaining to them why Labour must be the party that promotes and defends our public services as we go into the next election. And we want to work with UNISON branches, getting UNISON members to contact MPs, candidates and councillors from all parties to really put them on the spot and find out which side they're on. It's no good waiting until after the election, which is why we say: 'Don't Wait'.





Sure Start Centres – at risk

UNISON's Head of Education, Christina McAnea explains why UNISON is fighting Tory threats to Sure Start.

Setting up Sure Start Children's Centres has been one of the best things the Labour Government has done – and we need to fight Tory threats to close them down!

Sure Start Centres bring together early education, childcare, health and family support for young children and particularly for those living in poorer areas. We know that when kids have a tough start in life, it's often really hard to catch up later, which is why Sure Start is so important.

Labour started setting them up in 2002 and UNISON quickly saw how important they would be, and started recruiting members!

We pressed Labour to make it a priority, and at the 2005 election they promised a huge expansion. They've done it - there are now over 3000 children's centres in England. They have become community hubs where children and parents can often get quality childcare as well as a range of health and community support programmes.

Sure Start is now an established

extra part of the welfare state, providing a vital service for families that didn't exist before. It's there for everyone, but it is particularly important to help families in poorer areas. It's a challenge, because sometimes people who don't have English as a first language or who face real difficulties at home don't have the confidence to go out and use the services. So Children's Centres have been challenged to really get out into the community to reach out and help those children who face the biggest problems.

Good for Children

When OFSTED looked at Children's Centres, they said 'Children's centres and extended schools make a positive contribution to improving the lives of children and their families.'

Good for Families

Parents have been overwhelmingly positive about the service that they receive from children's centres. In many areas, they report that they have transformed



from the Tories

UNISON has good reason to be worried by the

the co-ordination of services allowing them to see a range of children's professionals in one setting.

Good for Workers

Workers in the early years sector have long suffered from poor pay and conditions but the creation of Children's Centres has also provided new opportunities. Pay in children's centres is typically 50% better than in private and voluntary sector childcare settings.

Tory Cuts

Despite the proven benefits to both children and parents, the Conservatives are planning to cut the Sure Start Programme. This would be a disaster for many children, families and communities as well as for the staff working at the centres.

UNISON says

We need to fight for our children's centres! We need to work with the staff in these centres and the families who use them to make sure people realise that these were set up and funded by a Labour government as part of their commitment to increasing high quality early years services. We will not let the Tories take them away!



Ed Balls tells UNISON Labour Link why Sure Start matters:

Last month I went to the brilliant Morningside Children's Centre in Hackney to launch National Sure Start Week and help promote the universal services on offer for parents and children.

Ten years ago there were no Sure Start Children's Centres - now there are over 3,000 and Labour is on track to fulfil its manifesto pledge of 3,500 centres open by next year.



I know lots of UNISON members use children's centres and thousands of you work in them too. I want to thank all those UNISON members who campaigned long and hard before 1997 for better childcare and support for young children and have helped make Sure Start such a success.

Parents regularly tell me how much they value their local Sure Start centre and the real help they offer with childcare, healthcare and other universal services for their children. All parents can now get free childcare for three and four year olds and from this month we're rolling it out to two year olds too. And I've talked to many Sure Start workers who tell me they love going into work every day, watching children play and develop.

But the Tories want to cut the Sure Start budget by £200 million per year - that's 20 per cent of the £1 billion we now invest each year. This is the equivalent of one in five children's centres having to close their doors, just at the time when families need them most. And this summer George Osborne made clear that - just like schools - Sure Start will not be spared from the deep and immediate cuts to frontline public services the Tories are determined to make if they get back into office.

This Labour Government will keep investing in Sure Start because we know the early years of a child's life are so important. But I don't want to put that at risk by letting the Conservatives cut Sure Start.

So I urge you to join me in the next few months as we defend our record on Sure Start against Tory attack. Remind your friends and family that children's centres are one of Labour's greatest achievements. Support your local Sure Start by spreading the word, letting parents know about the services on offer and highlighting the fantastic work that children's centres are doing day in day out.

We are collecting real stories of people's experiences of Sure Start Children's Centres to demonstrate what a difference they have made. Get involved in our campaign to promote children's centres and preserve them for future generations.

Ed Balls is Labour's Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

Why am I Public Enemy Number One?

UNISON Vice President and Labour Link activist Eleanor Smith delivered a powerful speech to Labour Conference asking a question on the lips of many UNISON members – how is it that we're being asked to pay for the mess created by the bankers?

To cheers from the hall, Eleanor introduced herself as one of UNISON's Million Voices and one of hundreds of thousands of UNISON members working in the NHS.

She explained that she and her colleagues are proud of the difficult job they do and thanks to the Labour government, are much better rewarded than in the past:

“Like everyone else, we have money taken from our wages to help pay towards our pension, and when I retire in a few years time, I'm not expecting riches, but I do expect a pension I can live on. But to read the newspapers or to listen to George Osborne or Vince Cable, I'm public enemy number one. Me and people like me – we're the problem, the people who are unaffordable, the people who are driving the country bankrupt.”

She said that when the newspapers say that the NHS 'isn't funded' it sounds like the money just comes from tax-payers,

“Last year we paid £2bn more into the NHS Pension Fund than was paid out”

when in fact money is taken out of her wages every month to pay for former NHS workers who have now retired: “And when I retire, there will be other nurses coming along who will be paying their contributions, because that's how it works. “



She attacked David Cameron for his plan to change the NHS pension system into one where the money is invested in the stock market, and future staff take their chances on what has happened. Not only highly risky, but it would leave a huge funding gap because there would be no current contributions to pay for staff already retired.

Eleanor also talked about the myth that public sector schemes like the Local Government Pension Scheme and NHS Pension Scheme haven't been updated. As UNISON members will be well aware, there have been big changes and tough negotiations, with staff contributing more, and a clear cap on tax-payer contributions:

“But the scare-mongering doesn't stop – despite the fact that the real gap between contributions and payments in the public sector is only 0.3% of our national income – hardly something to get hysterical about. In fact last year in the NHS Pension Scheme, over £2 billion more was paid in contributions than was paid out as

“Cameron wants our pensions to be a stock-market lottery”

benefits so actually helping government finances.”

Eleanor finished her speech by attacking the obscene pensions on offer to directors of the top private companies. While their average is a whopping £200,000, the average for women in local government is a pension of just £2000 a year.

“So who is the real problem – nurses like me, or the financial wizards who have proved so astute in their handling of our money? We're not the problem – and we're not going to be made to pay for their greed and their mistakes.”

Why does UNISON work with Labour?

Over a century ago, trade unionists found out the hard way that bargaining with employers wasn't enough – employers would use the law against us! Which is why trade unionists needed to have a voice in the politics, in Parliament, to make sure that didn't happen. It may seem a long time ago, but that was how the Labour Party came into being – to give working people a voice.

Fast forward a hundred years and the world may be a very different place, and Labour a very different political

party, but some things don't change. With the battle-lines being drawn up for the next election, it is already clear that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats see cutting public sector jobs, wages and pensions as a priority. So the everyday interests of UNISON members are very much at stake!

Political action by trade unions has always been controversial and is tightly regulated. Money spent on political campaigning can only come from a specific part of the union's funds called a political fund. Members vote on whether the union should have such a fund, which allows the union to campaign on major public policy issues such as tackling racism or fighting privatisation. UNISON members have consistently voted overwhelmingly in favour.

By law, all trade union members have the right to opt-out of any link with a political party, but UNISON goes further. The political fund is divided into two



We can't afford the Tories – I'm switching to Labour Link
Sophie, Aberdeen

parts, a General Fund which is used for campaigns against the BNP and fighting privatisation for example, and the Labour Link fund. Members can choose which fund a small part of their subs should go to. In the Labour Link, members get certain extra rights such as being able to vote in key leadership elections within the Labour Party, and can represent the union within the Labour Party.

You can change which fund you are part of at any time by using this form – it doesn't make any difference to the subs you pay!



I'm switching to the Labour Link because I need a Labour Government!
Sam, Mansfield

Political Fund Transfer Form

I wish to transfer my UNISON political fund contribution. (No change to the level of your membership subscription is involved)

Name (IN BLOCK CAPITALS) _____

Payroll Number (on pay slip) _____

UNISON Membership Number _____

Tick one box
 I wish to transfer to the UNISON Labour-Link

Address (IN BLOCK CAPITALS) _____

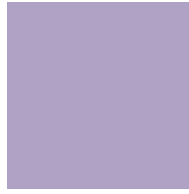
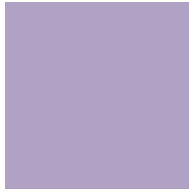
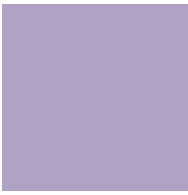
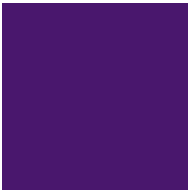
I wish to transfer to the General Political Fund

Post Code _____

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Date _____

Workplace _____

Once completed, please return to: UNISON Labour-Link, Freepost, 1 Mabledon Place LONDON WC1H 9AJ



A Million Voices for Public Services

UNISON's Million Voices campaign challenges the political parties in the run up to the General Election – where do you stand?

UNISON Labour Link is already winning strong support across the Labour Party for the union's case:

Why public service workers are important

Public service workers are on the frontline of dealing with this recession - helping people in financial difficulties, guiding people back into work, creating new opportunities through education and training, dealing with increased rates of homelessness, family breakdown, and mental health problems.

UNISON wants to make sure our members get the support and the resources they need to help people through hard times and lay the foundations of our economic recovery.

UNISON says we need:

- social justice - help for those facing redundancy, repossessions and poverty - not bonuses and tax cuts for millionaires
- good jobs - environmentally sustainable and socially useful jobs, with decent pay and pensions and a strong union voice
- quality public services - no more privatisation. Increased investment in accountable public services like health, education and housing.

But the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats want to:

- Cut public service jobs
- Cut public service pay
- Cut public service pensions

Help make sure that UNISON's issues are at the heart of the General Election:

Sign up to UNISON's Million Voices campaign today