

UNISON's Million Voices tell Labour: public services are the answer, not the problem



John Thompson, Moussetrap Media

Speaker after speaker took UNISON's message to the Labour Party Conference in Brighton: if you want to have a chance in the election, you need public service workers on your side.

UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis spelled it out loud and clear. In his speech he condemned privatisation and attacked the dishonesty of the Tories for calling for savage cuts in spending. He paid tribute to public service workers, calling for a stop to tax avoidance by the rich and for the bankers to honour their debts to society.

He told the Conference: "Public services are not just a trade union issue, but the biggest concern of constituency parties. Members of UNISON will not support policies or a manifesto that seeks to reverse the

investment we've made in the last decade. It's time to be bold. To put clear red water between Labour and parties of the right. To challenge the political consensus that the market knows best. To show we're on the side of working people and their families. To reject an orthodoxy that says there's one law for the rich and another for the rest of us."

In debates throughout the week, UNISON Labour Link delegates were making the union's case. Ann Price called on Health Minister Andy Burnham to make sure that his recent pledge that the NHS is 'preferred provider' is translated into action. Irene Stacey condemned low pay in local government and urged delegates to sign up to the Million Voices campaign. Eleanor Smith attacked the dishonest reporting about public sector pensions. Carole Maleham spoke about the vital role played by police staff. Steve Warwick urged swift action to help councils struggling with the way grant has been distributed to fund concessionary bus fares. Wendy Nichols called for more action to tackle unequal pay. In addition to members of the UNISON delegation, individual members from constituencies also came to the rostrum to add their voices to UNISON's campaign.



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UNISON slam Tory public-sector pay-freeze

UNISON has reacted sharply to plans announced by Shadow Chancellor George Osborne to freeze public sector pay. His speech came on the same day that Labour confirmed it will honour the three year pay deal for health workers. UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis said: "It's clear that the Tories want to use the economic recession as a stick to beat ordinary hard-working people. The Shadow Chancellor has wrapped up public sector cuts, public sector pay freezes, a rise in retirement age and reduced pension rights in warm words that will ring hollow with Britain's army of public sector workers. It's no good the shadow chancellor having tough words for the bankers and those who wriggle out of paying their fair share of taxation, but he failed to spell out any tough action.

UNISON Head of Health, Karen Jennings, said: "We are pleased that Labour is honouring the three-year pay deal for our hard-working health members – many of whom are low-paid women. They will breathe a sigh of relief that they won't have their pay frozen. The deal has given a decent increase for our members and established a new minimum wage of £6.77 an hour."

The 3 year deal gave 2.75% from April 2008; 2.54% in year 2 and a minimum wage of £6.77 an hour and, in year 3, an increase of 2.5%, including a flat rate increase of £420 for the bottom three grades.



UNISON Head of Health Karen Jennings

A day in the life of Kelvin Hopkins

MPs return to Westminster this month – with more embarrassment likely when the next round of expense claims are published. Before the summer recess, UNISON Labour Link News speaks to Kelvin Hopkins, who are co-convenors of the UNISON group of MPs at Westminster, to give us an account of what life is really like for a backbencher. We hear from Kelvin:

Never a dull day, frequently an exciting day, often an exhausting day and sometimes a worrying day – at least that is my experience of parliamentary life. By way of illustration I simply take today, starting with writing this article after breakfast at home and after having signed some 40 letters typed the previous day.

In an hour or so I shall call in at my constituency office to consult with my three local staff members and deal with any matters of immediate concern. Then I shall drive to Luton railway station for my

daily commute to Westminster. I shall call in briefly at my Westminster office to be briefed by my parliamentary researcher, and then off to my first two meetings, both starting at 1.00pm.

The GMB are having a meeting on Remploy in Committee Room 9, and at the same time there is a briefing for the East of England MPs on Big Lottery Funding. I shall try to call in at both before moving on to the Family Courts Unions Cross Party Group which is to be addressed by the Chair of the Social Work Task Force Moira

Gibb. Then possibly to Question Time in the Commons Chamber, which today is for Communities and Local Government. I shall try to catch the Speaker's eye to ask a supplementary question on council housing but suspect that many Members will be standing so my chances may be slim.

After 3.30pm, the Report Stage of the Finance Bill will commence. I am supporting Frank Field's amendment calling in effect for the restoration of the 10p tax rate and I can be sure that the Whips will be doing everything possible to resist this.



MP

hed. While some members clearly have much explaining to do, many have been asked Kelvin Hopkins, MP for Luton North, and Judy Mallaber MP for Amber Valley, Kibbench MP at Westminster. Last month we brought you Judy's account, this month



Then at 4.00pm, the high point of the day, no less than the UNISON Group of MPs! I shall slip away early to another important meeting on public funding for Social Care, an issue on which I have campaigned vigorously for the last decade. By this time I have missed out on a meeting of the RMT Group of MPs which clashes with the UNISON Group.

The annual TUC reception will seduce me away after 6.30 where I shall meet a dozen old friends and indulge in some mutual ear-bending with trade union comrades. (I spent five years of my earlier life at the TUC.) After an hour or so I may move on to another event – divisions permitting.

After late Commons Divisions at 10.00pm I shall scurry away to the Jubilee Line on the first stage of my journey back home to Luton, there to receive an immediate welcome by the cat, a chat over a glass of wine with my wife and BBC's midnight news before bed.

Every day in my political life is unique and often very different from other days. Moreover, each Member of Parliament leads their own unique and particular life and what other Members do may be very different from what I do. I confess to a wide range of political interests and a commitment to promote democratic socialist policies and ideas as well as the cause of trade unionism at every turn. I try therefore to make the most of every opportunity and to maximise any influence I might have on the direction of affairs. What I do does not always please the Whips but that is how it has to be.

UNISON Labour Link National Committee report

UNISON Labour Link's National Committee met in Liverpool at the end of a hectic week at the TUC promoting the union's Million Voices campaign. Top of the agenda was a presentation from UNISON Chair of Policy, Jane Carolan. She explained the next stages in the campaign and the committee then discussed how best UNISON Labour Link can promote it within the Labour Party.

Elections

Chair: Steve Warwick
Vice Chairs: Rachel Voller and Wendy Nichols

Labour Party Conference 2009

The UNISON contemporary issue was agreed: 'Rebuilding the public finances and protecting public services'.

Committee agreed strategy for promoting Million Voices at Labour Conference.

Labour Party NEC

Reports were taken from Labour NEC meetings.

Political Fund Review

National committee discussed consultation paper about to be issued

Labour Link Forum

Gary Ransford and Sue Forster elected to SOC 2010

Report on follow-up to Forum 2009

Elections 2010

Discussion on plans for General Election and local/mayoral elections

At Labour Conference, constituency Labour Parties have a separate ballot to identify their top four priority issues. Public services came number one – to the delight of



UNISON Labour Link Chair Steve Warwick: "UNISON Labour Link has been working hard with local parties to explain the importance of public services.

Sustained investment will help get the economy out of recession and build a better society. It is really good to see that local Labour party members share our view."

Labour recognises UNISON's role in protecting vulnerable workers

says **Greg Thomson, Head of UNISON's Migrant Workers Unit**



UNISON has secured matched funding from the Labour Government for a project to help vulnerable workers in the privatised sector. Government funding was made available in the third round of the Union Modernisation Funding for projects aimed at providing protection for vulnerable workers. As announced at the TUC, UNISON has been awarded the maximum available for a two year project to provide support for vulnerable contracted out workers.

Dave Prentis was a member of the TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment, their report last year 'Hard Work, Hidden Lives' identified around 2 million workers in vulnerable employment in the UK. A large number of these workers are employed by private companies

doing work that has been outsourced by the public sector.

While UNISON remains opposed to privatisation it is vital that as the leading public sector trade union we reach out and organise workers who work in the privatised part of the public sector, so that we can provide advice, support and representation. All workers whether employed by the public sector or not are entitled to the protection of a trade union. Many workers in the privatised workforce are particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous employers. It is just these workers who need most help; yet they are often the hardest to reach.

Funding for the new project recognises the crucial role that UNISON can play in protecting workers in the contracted out part of the public sector.

A better deal for Student Nurses?

UNISON have welcomed the Government's review into the bursary system for student nurses – the first such review since the system was introduced in the early 1990s. UNISON have long campaigned for a proper salary for student nurses, but have welcomed the review and are encouraging student nurses to respond. The Department of Health for England has been working with the trade unions and a number of other interested parties to develop a series of options to consult on. To help students look at the options, UNISON have developed different case studies to show what impact the different financial changes might have on different healthcare students based on their circumstances e.g. what they are studying, where they live and their income level. The consultation closes at the end of November.



Send your stories to labourlink@unison.co.uk

For more information about the UNISON Labour Link contact **0845 355 0845**

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