

AUGUST 2010

## Labour hopefuls make their pitch!

The Labour leadership contest took centre stage at this year's UNISON Labour Link Forum, which was held in Leeds. All five contenders were grilled by delegates in a two-hour session which drew national television coverage from the BBC and Channel Four. The session was chaired by UNISON Labour Link Vice Chair Wendy Nichols.

Every UNISON member who pays the

affiliated political levy is entitled to a vote in the leadership election, with ballot papers being sent out with U magazine at the end of August. UNISON is also entitled to make a supporting nomination, which is decided by the National Committee.

UNISON Labour Link Chair Steve Warwick says that the hustings event will play an important part in the election: "The National Committee decision is informed by wide

consultation with regions and members, as well as what we have learned from the event in Leeds. We have to have a credible alternative to the Con Dems, a leader who believes in protecting the most vulnerable and is not wedded to selling off the public services."

Watch the hustings event at [www.unison.org.uk/labourlink/video.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/labourlink/video.asp)



### Forum slams Neath Port Talbot dismissals

UNISON Labour Link Forum unanimously backed an emergency motion from Neath Port Talbot County Borough condemning the recent actions of the council. Mark Fisher, branch secretary, explained that the Labour controlled authority has recently issued dismissal notices to 7,000 employees, seeking to take them back on poorer terms. Mark warned that 750 to 1,000 job cuts were likely and that among other savings, the council were seeking to cut shift allowances, freeze increments and withdraw usage of council vehicles for people travelling to work.

UNISON Labour Link Chair Steve Warwick condemned the actions and joined other delegates in warning that other councils would be encouraged to take a similar path if this was allowed to go unchallenged.

### Union ramps up Academies fight

UNISON Parliamentarians are keeping up the pressure on the Conservative/Lib Dem Government over rushed plans to introduce new academy schools. The legislation has been introduced in the House of Lords, and UNISON has been working closely with Labour peers to table a swathe of amendments challenging the legislation. The government is trying to get schools to convert to academies by September, with no local consultation – UNISON and others are particularly concerned about the impact on other local schools and the impact on support staff.

# Highlights from



“This could just be what a 21<sup>st</sup> century Labour leader looks like”

**Diane Abbott** had the forum cheering when she told them that they could either have a leader who “looks good outside No 10 in smart suit and tie”, which she admitted probably wasn’t her, or make a leap into the future and choose someone who didn’t look like the conventional picture of a British Prime Minister. She quipped: “In a 21st century increasingly globalised world, this could just be what a Labour leader looks like!” Earlier she had promised that under her leadership there would be no further privatisation and that industrial relations laws would be changed to put employers and employees on an equal footing. She earned applause for saying that she would never be persuaded that there was no connection between hospital cleaning privatisation and the rise in hospital infections. She was also cheered for attacking what she described as ‘phony populism’ on immigration: “If it’s east Europeans today, then it was Jamaicans and Irish yesterday.”

**Ed Balls** injected the first humour when he reminded delegates that Nick Clegg had warned the country that if they didn’t vote Lib Dem they might end up with..... a Tory government! He promised that as leader he would be speaking the language of mums and dads, as well as business leaders and



“I speak the language of mums and dads, as well as business leaders”

urged people to judge him on his record – on making the right judgement on the Euro, on withstanding the media onslaught over Baby P, on working with UNISON on the Million Voices campaign and delivering a national negotiating framework for school support staff. He said

that Labour had lost its way since 2001, particularly with anti-public sector rhetoric which had done lasting damage. He criticised the failure to implement the EU Agency Workers Directive and the way Labour Party Conference had been devalued. He finished by making a strong case for government to intervene to tackle unfairness.

**Andy Burnham** opened by saying that Labour had become too dazzled by big business and had stopped speaking the language of ordinary people. He defended public sector pensions and pointed to his achievements as Health Secretary, including the NHS constitution and working with UNISON to deliver preferred provider status. He wanted to bring NHS cleaning back in-house and made a positive case for raising taxes to tackle the deficit. He won applause for arguing that those refusing to cross an official picket line should be protected from disciplinary action. He spoke passionately about a National Care Service, describing it as Labour’s values being put into

action in this century, just as had been the case with the NHS in the last. He concluded by saying that unions must no longer be treated as awkward relatives by the party, that no more candidates should be parachuted on local parties and that the stage management of party conference has to end, as we move from New Labour to Our Labour.

**David Miliband** reminded delegates that any leader had to be a credible Prime Minister and would need to be able to win seats back in southern England where Labour has lost so much ground. He made a strong defence of social

partnership and the pensions settlements negotiated between Labour and trade unions. He made a powerful defence of the public sector and criticised further restructuring of the NHS. He praised UNISON’s work on tackling

# in the Hustings



“The National Care Service is the big Labour idea for this century”

unequal pay, saying it showed why we need strong trade unions, capable of implementing the law.

He won applause for attacking Nick Clegg’s decision to axe the emergency loan to Sheffield Forgemasters which would have allowed them to become world manufacturing leaders in their field, saying that champagne corks were popping in countries that will be getting the jobs. He similarly praised the role of trade unions in saving the Corus steel works and argued that Labour needs to make more of the relationship with over three and a half million affiliated members. He concluded by pointing to his strong track record, on establishing the huge school rebuilding programme, on setting up the Climate Change Act and his international reputation and contacts established as Foreign Secretary.

**Ed Miliband** won strong applause for arguing that the gap between rich and poor has to be closed, promising a living wage and a high pay commission. He said that Labour would have been a better government if they had listened more closely to the party on issues like housing and privatisation. He criticised experiments like Independent Treatment Centres in the health service which had proved much more costly. He criticised the absence of women from Labour’s election campaign and promised equal representation in his shadow cabinet. He attacked the public sector pay freeze and said the deficit should be funded by the financial sector not the public sector. He concluded by returning to inequality and making the positive case for taxation,

which is the price to be paid for living in a good society. He promised to be leader not just of a parliamentary party, but “a living breathing movement all around the country.”



“We have to narrow the gap between rich and poor – we will win because of our values, not despite them”



“The next leader needs to be a credible PM, and to be able to win for Labour in the south”

# General Secretary sets out challenge for Labour



UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis used his speech to the Labour Link Forum to lay out a series of challenges for Labour, as he urged delegates to make sure that renewal created a party that worked for ordinary UNISON members. While recognising many significant achievements, he argued that New Labour had been too ready to listen to the CBI, too close to George Bush, too dependent on the financial sector, and that deep sustainable change needed more than election victories. He said that too often they had selected the wrong friends, and that while trade unions like UNISON were often warmly thanked, “we were rarely empowered.”

He noted that at the end of the general

election campaign, when Gordon Brown finally seemed to find his voice, his electrifying speech to London Citizens revealed a moral passion that had been seen too little, but it came too late to win the election.

Looking ahead, he argued that the labour movement needed to revive a sense of moral purpose, and said that “this is our time – a chance to remake our party.”

Starting by challenging the onslaught from the current government, the Labour Party must stand alongside trade unions challenging cuts, and develop policies on public services and fairness that would inspire people to join Labour again. In detailing the level of cuts currently faced

by UNISON members, he made it clear that if the coalition attacks the pensions settlement, a ballot for industrial action would follow: “We are not looking for a fight, we are prepared to negotiate and get an agreement, but if government wants a fight, we will be ready.”

He concluded by reassuring delegates that affiliation to Labour was rock solid while he was General Secretary. Holding a map that showed huge swathes of country painted blue, he said that the scale of Labour’s task should not be underestimated, but that council and devolved elections next year would be the starting point and promised that UNISON would be at the heart of Labour’s fightback.



## Mainstreaming the Labour Link

Delegates at UNISON Labour Link Forum took part in detailed discussions about the best ways to implement the conclusions from the Review of Political Fund Effectiveness agreed at National Delegate Conference. In the new situation of opposition, it was widely agreed that Labour Link needs to be at the heart of the union’s campaigns, including the Million Voices campaign. With Labour Party membership rising and activity increasing, there are new opportunities for branches to build closer relationships and influence local Labour campaigns.

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