

APRIL 2009

UNISON welcomes further progress on equal pay

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis has welcomed further government support to help councils meet their equal pay obligations. Local government minister John Healey MP has confirmed that councils will next year be given additional financial flexibility to meet and manage their one-off costs of implementing equal pay by enabling them to borrow against or sell assets.

Since 2006, councils have been granted permission to borrow against, or sell, assets to the tune of over £1 billion to help meet the costs of equal pay - including £455 million last September. The minister said that work of equal value deserves equal pay, in councils as in any sector: "Thousands of council workers, and particularly women, lost out due to unequal pay, which in some cases persisted for decades. It is for councils, working with local unions, to right

this wrong. I will be issuing guidance on the process shortly, which will make clear that directions cannot be used to fund direct payments to solicitors - including no-win, no-fee solicitors."

Dave Prentis said: "This is a great step forward for thousands of women working in local councils who have suffered pay injustice for years. Women have been doubly hit by unequal pay and by the effects of these difficult economic times. It shows that the government is sticking to its commitments to deliver equality and fairness throughout the local government workforce.

"We are very pleased that the local government minister has recognised the role of the unions in bringing about equal pay and that he has closed the door to the no-win, no-fee solicitors making money out of this process."



Affiliated unions press on redundancy pay

UNISON has joined other affiliated unions to support a Labour back-bencher's bid to make redundancy pay fairer. They are pushing for a change to the outdated method for calculating redundancy pay, introduced more than 40 years ago, to pull it into line with earnings. They say such a move is vital at a

time when thousands of people are losing their jobs every week.

Research shows that in nearly every UK constituency a majority of workers depend on the outdated £350 weekly cap on redundancy pay. UNISON wants the government to support Lindsay Hoyle MP's private member's Statutory Redundancy (Amendment) Bill in order that redundancy payments are updated by summer this year.

Publishing his Bill, Lindsay Hoyle MP said: "When redundancy pay was introduced in 1965 it was a progressive measure but it has been allowed to wither drastically in value so that it is now worth around only half of earnings. Losing out on desperately needed cash in these hard times is another kick in the teeth for workers. Justice demands that we bring redundancy pay into line with workers' actual pay."

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "The Hoyle Bill is a fair deal for hard times. With thousands of people facing redundancy every week, this Bill would show Britain's worried workforce that MPs were on their side."



Labour party women's summit



UNISON representatives and members joined Labour MPs, MEPs, councillors and prospective candidates at the recent Labour Party Women's Summit. The summit was called by Labour's deputy leader and minister for women, Harriet Harman MP, and speakers included Glenys Kinnock MEP and the newly elected leader of the European Parliamentary Labour Party, Glenis Willmott MEP.

Harriet Harman said: "There will be no retreat on equality. Fighting for fairness for all is not a luxury we aspire to in more prosperous times - it is an absolute necessity which has an even greater importance in today's current global economic crisis. Fairness is important for our economy - diversity makes us outward facing and helps us compete in the global economy. It is essential that we nurture all the skills we have here in the UK to ensure that we are able to use all our combined talents as a country to get through this recession."

At a time when the Tories are trying to claim to be the party to take forward the equality agenda, she stressed the need to remind voters what Labour had achieved for women, with improvements to flexible working, parental support, greater life opportunities, improved education and training and the minimum wage, but also in political representation - with more than three times the number of women MPs and six times more black and Asian MPs than all the opposition parties put together.

Delegates were also told that it's a myth that David Cameron is popular with women voters - deservedly not, since he has voted against flexible working and longer maternity pay. The Tories are also opposing the government's planned increase in Child Tax Credits from April 2010 and their marriage tax break would penalise families and children who most need help.

The summit was also an opportunity to plan for the 2009 local and European elections. It highlighted

an untapped group of voters who can play a significant part: the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in the UK. Migrant workers from European Union countries have the right to register and vote in the European elections, and identifying and targeting the Labour supporters amongst this group is a priority for June.

Norma Stephenson represents UNISON Labour Link on the Labour Party's NEC and chairs Labour's Women, Race and Equalities Committee. She welcomed the summit: "The key role of the unions was acknowledged, as was the importance of working together to take forward our shared equality agenda on workplace issues, including the need for action on equal pay."

Unions say no to Royal Mail privatisation

UNISON joined other affiliated unions to put a strong message to Prime Minister Gordon Brown at Labour's recent National Policy Forum: 'Don't privatise the Royal Mail'. UNISON delegates used the event to press ministers on a range of key UNISON priorities, including equal pay and equalities and the vital role of public services in tackling the recession, but National Chair Steve Warwick says that Royal Mail was the hot issue: "Labour members, from unions and constituencies, were united in their message to Gordon Brown and to Peter Mandelson that this is going down like a lead balloon. The public has seen what the private sector has done to the banks - why hand them the Royal Mail as well? We will only have to pick up the mess later."

Don't lose out. Don't let the European election pass you by.

says Labour Euro MP Linda McAvan

With less than three months to go before the European Parliament elections on 4 June, out of the glare of the media the battle lines are starting to be drawn. While the media debate will be played out on your TV screens in coming weeks, there's a risk that the real issues at stake will get lost – and UNISON members lose out.

I was contacted recently by the EPSU – the group of public sector unions from across Europe, including UNISON - who are asking MEPs to take the “public service pledge”. I was happy to sign up to a series of commitments: promoting a positive attitude to public services, protecting public healthcare, improving public procurement to include social as well as environmental concerns. As I write, 90% of those MEPs who have signed up to the EPSU pledge are members of the Socialist Group, which includes Labour MEPs and representatives of our sister parties. There are a smattering of Liberals and others, but they have been slow to come forward to support the progressive agenda of UNISON and other public sector unions. It's a good indicator of where loyalties lie.

At the same time, an article from the Institute of Directors (IoD) comes to my attention, critical of Labour's changes to employment legislation over the last decade. The article helpfully points out that six of the 10 major employment regulations since 1997 have come about at least in part through EU laws: working time rules, parental leave, equal terms for part-time and fixed-term workers, sex discrimination

legislation, age discrimination rules and employee consultation rights – all legislation supported by Labour MEPs. The IoD article calls on the government to resist all future EU employment legislation. It even goes so far as to say that any future minimum wage increases should be limited to the rate of inflation.

If only we could be confident that this was a fringe agenda, not to be taken seriously. But it is not. David Cameron is committed

The Tories and their friends on the right might look like they have changed, but theirs is still a terrifying agenda, not just for trade unionists but for many of the weakest members of our society. We must not let it go unchallenged. And when there is a real threat of BNP MEPs being elected in June, that challenge is even more urgent. We need more MEPs in the Socialist Group and more Labour MEPs to protect your rights. I hope you will support our campaign to make it happen.



to pulling Britain out of the European Social Chapter, pandering directly to the Right wing agenda promoted by the IoD authors. In my own region, the UKIP MEP is openly opposed to the very existence of the minimum wage, calls the NHS a “shambolic mess” and says that only socialists believe in taxes to fund schools. And the Lib Dems? They regularly vote with the Tories on employment legislation in the European Parliament.

Linda McAvan is a Labour Member of the European Parliament representing Yorkshire and the Humber and a UNISON member.

For more information about her election campaign – including details of how to register for a postal vote - please visit www.labour4yorkshire.eu.

Charles Clarke MP calls on all housing workers to “join a trade union”

Labour MP for Norwich South Charles Clarke met Circle Anglia Housing staff at a recruitment meeting which was sponsored by Eastern Region UNISON Labour Link. He called for there “to be a greater emphasis on collective bargaining” between trade unions and employers to resolve problems rather than relying on “employment tribunals” and complex expensive “individual legal

remedies”. He praised UNISON and its good reputation as a trade union that “vigorously defends the interests of its members...but also tries to be constructive...it is a progressive union that is listened to by the government and taken seriously by ministers”.

The meeting was chaired by housing officer and UNISON convenor for Circle Anglia John Gray.



Why I became a member of UNISON

Labour activist Nick Dale explains why he joined the union



I became a UNISON member because it is the most suitable union for me as I work in the voluntary sector. I feel that low pay is an issue

that needs to be raised at every level with employers. I feel union membership is particularly important now that people are more likely to lose their jobs. I worry that the contractual terms and conditions of people's employment will suffer as a result of the downturn and about general job security. Joining UNISON gives me protection in my own job!

I also want to have a sense of solidarity with all workers here and in the wider union movement. I was brought up in a household where union membership was seen as an important part of employment. As I am an active member of the Labour Party, it seemed natural for me to join a union when I started work.

Having a disability has made me aware that some employees would see me as a vulnerable worker, so this has made me want to get involved in the disabled members structures. I think my trade unionism will add another dimension to my working and social life and potentially I will become more employable.

UNISON Labour Link national committee meeting

Key decisions 5 March 2009

Members welcomed Labour Party general secretary Ray Collins – questions were raised on issues including Royal Mail privatisation, council housing, public services and relationship between party and government.

- **Labour Link Forum 2009:** National Committee motions to forum were agreed.
- **Labour Party NPF and NEC:** Reports were taken from National Policy Forum and recent Labour NEC meetings.
- **Political Fund Review:** National committee discussed issues arising in the review.
- **Parliamentary Work:** Reports on Equal pay; Pay Campaigns; Redundancy Pay; Apprenticeship and Skills Bill.

What the Tories really think....

A Tory councillor recently let the cat out of the bag when he published a list of a 100 ways to cut Council Tax. Among suggestions from Councillor Phibbs are:

- Do you have a Town Hall canteen? Probably it should be closed.
- Scrap arts subsidies.
- Don't employ Fair Trade Coordinators
- Don't employ Diversity Officers.
- Scrap school governor training / “support”.
- Use sprinklers in care homes allowing a potential reduction in night staff and safer elderly residents.
- Reduce staff training to the statutory minimum.
- Cease to employ staff to be trade union officials.
- Charge for use of the staff car park.
- Scrap politically correct requirements for contractors. For instance requiring a building firm tendering for work to produce an “equalities policy
- Youth Clubs and Youth Centres. These should not be run by the Council: they are typically pretty drab, dreary institutions when they are.
- Cease employing Youth Workers.
- Check the list of those outside bodies being given free or subsidised office space by the Council. For instance trade unions.
- Cease employing European Officers.
- Cease employing Work Experience Coordinators.

For more information about the UNISON Labour Link contact

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