

**UNISON LABOUR LINK NATIONAL FORUM  
JULY 8 & 9 2011 LIVERPOOL**

# Decisions



**THE CAMPAIGNING CONFERENCE  
UNISON LABOUR LINK – TAKING UNISON'S MESSAGE INTO THE COMMUNITY**

## **The Economy**

Forum recognises that for UNISON members and their families, the current state of the economy threatens their jobs, their services and every aspect of their lives. Thirty years of 'neo-liberal' economic policies in the UK and globally have seen wages squeezed and employee benefits withdrawn, forcing people to work longer and harder to make ends meet. Social, financial and environmental regulations have been dismantled, putting the pursuit of private gain before responsibility, stability, and sustainability. Vital sectors such as banking, pensions, house-building, health and social care have become more profit-driven and less accountable to the public interest. Companies and the very rich have contributed less in tax, while public spending on benefits and essential services has failed to keep pace with social need.

Since 1997, with positive interventions from the Labour government, some of these trends, such as the growth in poverty or decline of key services, have been alleviated; but they have not been decisively reversed.

This Forum believes that Labour needs to develop measures to tackle these long-term challenges. Decent living standards must be guaranteed through improved measures to support the unemployed, prevent homelessness, and lift people out of poverty. A higher minimum wage, stronger employment rights and enhanced trade union representation are needed to end low pay and raise average earnings. Stronger regulation should prohibit speculative financial activity and channel investment into socially beneficial and environmentally sustainable job creation. Our tax regime must be strengthened and rebalanced, closing havens and loopholes through a Robin Hood tax, and ensuring big companies and the very rich pay a bigger share.

FORUM recognises that there are alternative, more ethical banking alternatives available to our members, such as Credit Unions, The Cooperative Bank, and mutuals such as Friendly and Building societies, which are more community and customer focussed than the profit driven, bailed out and morally, if not financially, bankrupt financial institutions which brought the economy of the UK and other countries to their present desperate state.

FORUM also notes that Hedge Fund and other financial speculators continue to put their own greed above any other considerations by manipulating and speculating on commodity prices without regard to the effect on developing world producers or poor consumers the world over.

UNISON Labour Link will therefore:

- 1) use Labour's policy-making process to develop an economic strategy based on UNISON's Million Voices campaign
- 2) and work with the wider union and Labour movement to persuade the public and our members that there are realistic alternatives.

## **Spending cuts and the disproportionate effects on the Black Community**

On 16 December 2009, the Equality and Human Rights Commission in conjunction with the Government Office (GEO) produced a report that confirmed a marked increase in unemployment rate of Black people during the 2008 recession. The Black community have seen unemployment levels rise by 6.9% from 13.2% in the first quarter of 2008, to 20.1% in the third quarter of 2009. This compares with 2.8% rise in the White unemployment, up from 4.8% to 7.6% over the same period.

Over the last six months the trend has become more apparent with Black unemployment rising by 2.2% and 4.4% respectively, whilst White unemployment has risen by 0.8%. Trevor Phillips Chair of the Commission stated that "The data for the last six months suggests a significant deterioration in employment for those from ethnic minority groups which risks undoing much of the progress made over the last few years..."

Following restructuring of Public Services, more Black employees are facing redundancies, a massive cut in salary and the removal of allowances. The Con-Dem Government attack on benefits will result in members losing Housing benefits and Family Tax Credits.

Cuts in Connexions and Youth Services will seriously affect young Black people not in education and employment making them suffer cutbacks in apprenticeships and other training opportunities. It is vital that UNISON continues to insist on compliance with Equality Act legislation and to refer to and use Equality Impact Assessments in all our negotiations.

Therefore Conference calls on Labour Link to work with the National Black Members Committee (NBMC) to liaise with the National Executive Council and TUC to:

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- 1) Raise awareness of the problems faced by the Black Community following cuts.
- 2) Include recognition of the impact on Black unemployment as part of the 'Million Voices' Campaign.
- 3) To work with the EHRC to develop strategies that could help to reduce the impact of these spending cuts on the Black community.

## **The Economy and Public Services**

Forum notes and condemns the unprecedented attack on public services and jobs resulting from the coalition Government's reckless budget deficit reduction strategy. Forum believes that this approach is not only wrong in principle but will also be disastrous in terms of the quality of services provided for the whole of the community and, in particular, for those disadvantaged members of society who are most reliant on the provision of public services. The coalition Government's approach is also having a devastating effect on the living standards of many UNISON members as vast numbers of jobs are lost and pay and conditions are savagely eroded. There is also a clear danger of this strategy bringing about the conditions for a major economic recession as the private sector is increasingly negatively affected by the attack on public services and jobs.

Forum strongly believes that the current crisis was precipitated by the irresponsible actions of parts of the banking and financial sector and that public service workers and those who need the services they provide should not be made to pay for this.

Forum calls on the National Labour Link Committee to continue to campaign within the Labour Party to ensure that the importance of directly provided public services under democratic control continues to have a central place in Labour policy as part of any plan to rebuild our communities and the economy as a whole. Forum also calls on the National Committee to encourage all Regional Labour Link Forums and Branch Labour Link Committees to work closely with local authority Labour Groups in order to promote the vital importance of directly provided quality public services and the importance of living wage policies.

## **ConDem attacks on Public Service Workers**

Forum notes the cruel and vindictive cuts and attacks the Tory led ConDem Government are making on public services and public sector workers. Forum notes that the justification put forward by the Tories and the Lib Dems to justify these cuts and attacks is the deficit, created by the economic mess the banks made and the consequential and necessary bail out of the Banking system by the previous Labour Government.

Forum finds it contemptible that Cameron, Osborne and Clegg, all of them millionaires, continue to preach that 'we are all in this together' while enforcing cuts and massive pay restraint on the public sector workers, among whom are Nurses, Doctors, Teachers, Police and Police Staff, Social Workers and Care Workers and many others none of whom created this crisis or deficit. Yet at the same time presides over significant increases in the total earnings of Bankers, the people who caused the problem in the first place.

Forum calls on the National Labour Link Committee to campaign within and outwith the Labour Party to do more to expose the unfairness and inequity of this and to adopt the measures in UNISON's alternative budget to prevent the unnecessary cuts and attacks on the Public Sector and its workforce.

## **Assisting low paid workers**

Forum notes with concern the effects of the Con Dem policies on those receiving low pay within our society. For many, Labour's finest achievement was the introduction of National Minimum Wage - a policy for which UNISON can claim particular credit. However, with rising prices, the rise in VAT, rise in fuel duty and falling or stand still wages the low paid in society are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. Many economists have stated that those on low pay and fixed incomes such as pensioners will pay out proportionately more of their incomes as a result of the rises. People who are struggling will be more susceptible to loan sharks and unscrupulous money lenders and could find themselves in ever down ward spirals of increasing debt. Forum recognises that implementing the Living Wage as set by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is a step that can be taken immediately to raise the living standards of people on low incomes

Forum recognises the need to address the Country's financial debt but believes the Con Dem economic policies are based on political dogma. Low

income groups did not cause the financial crisis but they are suffering the most. We are clearly not "all in it together".

Forum believes that there are alternative strategies and calls on National Labour Link to:

- 1) Campaign for a Living Wage and the so called "Robin Hood" tax
- 2) Put pressure on all public service employers to adapt a Living Wage for all staff.
- 3) Put pressure on those who commission services to implement the Living Wage through the procurement agenda.
- 4) Encourage the Labour Party to push for the Living Wage to be adopted right across the public sector, including those workers providing public sector services, who work for private sector companies.

### **Don't CON-DEM Young People**

This Forum believes that young people are amongst those most likely to suffer as a consequence of the damaging policies being pursued by the Con-Dem Government. This Forum also believes that:

- 1) the job losses caused by cuts in the public and private sectors will have a catastrophic impact on the employment opportunities of young people just entering the world of work, or who have recently taken up employment;
- 2) the decision to cancel the Future Jobs Fund - a far from perfect programme, but a step in the right direction - was a serious mistake;
- 3) the cuts in education at all levels will have a disastrous impact now and in the long-term;
- 4) the cuts to services such as Connexions and the youth service are taking place at a time when those services are needed more than ever.

Forum further believes the Con-Dem Government's strategy is to create a high-unemployment /low pay economy as a way to attack crucial legal employment rights and national and local agreements, and to weaken trade union organisation.

Forum calls on the National Labour Link Committee to press the Labour Party to:

- a) ensure that the Labour Party's campaigning against the cuts gives effective voice to young people, encourages their participation, and addresses their concerns;
- b) encourage young workers to join trade unions in order to make sure we have the strongest voice possible for organised labour;
- c) commit to full support for UNISON'S Million Voices campaign;
- d) identify key young Labour groups and organisations which can be recommended as potential partners for UNISON as the Million Voices campaign continues reaching out into communities and building alliances to defend our public services, our jobs, and our pensions.

## **Future of our Pensions**

Forum recognises that for UNISON members, protecting their pension is one of the most important roles of the union. Since the General Election, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have introduced changes that will substantially reduce the standard of living of many UNISON members in retirement.

They are changing the index-linking arrangement, replacing the Retail Prices Index with the Consumer Prices Index. This will leave millions of pensioners much worse off and will force some, particularly women, into poverty. The CPI is usually about 1% less than the RPI. The OBR forecasts that by 2017 the CPI will result in pension increases 8.5% less than the RPI would have produced. The Emergency Budget Red Book said that by 2015 pensioners would be collectively worse off by £6 billion. Lord Hutton predicts that public sector pensioners would be 15% to 25% worse off over a life time.

George Osborne has made a £4 billion raid on public sector pensions by reducing tax-payer contributions to public sector pension schemes. This will mean a huge increase in employee contributions, sometimes by as much as 50% - a tax on our members to pay off the deficit. Even the Tory leader of the LGA has protested, warning that staff will opt out. They are also bringing forward the rise in pensionable age. This particularly hits women currently in their fifties: denying 33,000 women in their mid-fifties over £10,000, and around 500,000 women between £5,000-£10,000.

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Forum believes that this attack on public sector workers, particularly women, is unwarranted. They did not cause the financial crisis. Forum also believes that many people do not understand these changes.

UNISON Labour Link should campaign with others to highlight these threats and press the Labour Party to commit to a fair and sustainable future pensions policy for public service workers.

## **Pensions**

This UNISON Labour Link Forum notes the publication of the Hutton report containing 27 recommendations regarding public sector pension schemes, which essentially claims that Public Sector Pensions are not sustainable or affordable.

Forum also notes that the NHS and Local Government Pension Schemes were reviewed and amended in 2006 to ensure the long term affordability and sustainability of these schemes.

Currently both the NHS and the Local Government are cash rich schemes i.e. the contributions or income far outweighs the pension payments or expenditure, in fact last year the NHS scheme which, unlike the Local Government scheme, is not an investment based scheme, received over £7 Billion pounds in employer and employee contributions and paid out just over £5 Billion in pensions or benefits leaving over £2 Billion in Government coffers.

The proposals that Hutton makes ignore the work already done by the previous Labour Government to make these schemes affordable and sustainable and give credence to the Tory led ConDem Coalitions attempts to rob public sector workers of a decent pension in retirement.

Forum calls on the Labour Link National Committee to instigate a vigorous campaign at all levels in the Labour Party to:

- 1) disassociate the Party from Hutton and his report;
- 2) defend the current NHS and Local Government Pension Schemes; and
- 3) to ensure that a future Labour Government will redress the unfairness of any of Hutton's proposals which the Tory Led ConDem Government implement.

## **Local Government Funding**

The Local Government Finance Settlement has resulted in devastating cuts in jobs and services. Analysis shows that it is also politically motivated. Over the next two years, Labour towns and cities in the North will be hit the hardest. 20 of the 30 worst hit are Labour controlled, 28 out of 30 least hit are Tory controlled.

The Treasury could also be withholding £2 billion of funds that would save thousands of Council jobs. This is by deliberately underestimating how much they will raise in Business Rates.

The Government also restricted the ability of Councils to borrow to fund redundancy payments next year, keeping it to a maximum of £200 million. This had led to Councils to reduce their voluntary redundancy schemes.

Forum calls on the National Labour Link Committee to work with the Labour Party to expose the impact of Local Government Cuts on jobs and services and to agree a clear alternative policy in the future of Local Government Funding.

## **The Death and Rebirth of Public Housing**

Forum notes:-

- 1) That the ConDem government is proposing cuts to Housing Benefits that will result in financial hardship and even evictions for hundreds of thousands of private and public sector tenants.
- 2) Limits to Housing Benefits will mean those with low incomes will be priced out of areas where property prices are higher and cheaper rental areas will face an influx of people and families. Local education, social and medical services will not be able to cope with such dramatic population changes.
- 3) This ConDem government has stopped a hundred year old tradition by all previous political parties of subsidising the cost of building new homes for low income families.
- 4) We believe that this is an ideological attack by the ConDem government upon the low paid and those most at need. There is a

*battle of ideas* in housing that at this moment progressives are not winning.

Forum believes that:

- a) Short term solutions to Britain's housing crisis include the reintroduction of rent controls which will bring down private and public rents to affordable levels and the introduction of a national register for landlords and statutory regulation of letting and managing agents, with compulsory written tenancy agreements.
- b) That the only long term solution to adequately house the 4.5 million on Council waiting lists is to build more homes.
- c) It must be an overriding priority of the next Government that there must be a renaissance and rebirth of good quality, affordable, accountable and secure public housing.

Forum requests that

- i. The National Labour Link affiliates to the Labour Housing Group in order to help win the *battle of ideas* in housing during the next General Election campaign with a focus on points a-c above.
- ii. The National Labour link encourages regional Labour Link Committees to affiliate to their regional Labour Housing Group and if one doesn't exist to work with the Regional Labour Party to establish such a group.

## **Retired Members in Labour Link**

The widespread use of Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy has seen a rise in Retired Members of UNISON who want to take an active role in UNISON Labour Link.

We need to improve our recruitment and organisation of these members and properly collect their annual £5 subscription.

Many of these retired members are prepared to stand as Councillors and promote UNISON policies within Labour Groups.

At present, our rules restrict the involvement of Retired Members to Branch level and prevents them from representing their Branches at Regional and National Level.

Forum calls on the National Labour Link Committee to produce proposals to respond to the demands of Retired Members to have a greater involvement in Labour Link structures.

## **Building our own coalition against the cuts**

Forum rejects the Tory-led government's argument that "we are all in this together". Analyses, including by the House of Commons Library and Fawcett Society, prove the government's cuts disproportionately affect women. Black, disabled and young members are also severely affected. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) members, often more reliant on public sector employment and public services due to discrimination and social isolation, are particularly affected.

Forum condemns the Tory-led government's attack on terms and conditions and equality provisions. The Labour government's Equality Act promised a huge step forward for LGBT rights, but the Tory-led government's decision not to implement the specific duties is a slap in the face for LGBT equality. Privatisation and diminution in terms and conditions mean LGBT workers find it even more difficult to combat bullying and discrimination.

Forum acknowledges that we must build our own progressive, broad based coalition against the cuts and against assaults on terms and conditions and equality. Our coalition must include Self Organised Groups (SOGs) in the structures and activities of the Labour Link and our work with the Labour Party.

Forum recalls Action P in the final report of the Review of Political Fund Effectiveness which committed to a review of Labour Link liaison and representation arrangements for SOGs, ensuring lobbying and campaigning activities reflect their experiences and concerns. Forum looks forward to this review addressing inconsistencies in SOG participation on regional and national Labour Link bodies.

Forum calls on National Labour Link Committee to:

- 1) Work with regional Labour Link committees and national SOGs to implement Action P
- 2) Encourage regional Labour Link committees to work with regional SOGs
- 3) Work with equality groups affiliated to the Labour Party, towards ensuring that Labour's policy making process leads to equality being at the heart of the future Labour government's programme.
- 4) Examine the role that a socio-economic duty can have in this campaign.

## **Turning out the Labour Vote at Elections**

Forum notes that there is a very low turnout in all elections in the United Kingdom. Forum further notes that the vote is lowest amongst young people, women, black communities and disabled people. These groups tend to be those most adversely affected by policies currently being introduced by the Con Dem Government. It is believed that many of these groups would vote Labour if they could be persuaded to cast their vote.

Forum calls on National Labour Link to embark on an action plan to strengthen and grow Labour Link. This plan to include visits to Branch Executive Committees to explain the function of Labour Link and the way it can work to help our members and also to recruit members to Labour Link. As part of this Action Plan, there should also be a programme of education, Labour Link information in leaflets, articles in U magazine etc outlining why it is important for each of the groups to use their vote to return Labour and specific examples of how Government v Labour policies affect them. There should also be encouragement to members to join the Labour Party and stand for elections so as to take the UNISON message into the council chambers and parliaments.

## **Defending Our NHS**

This Forum notes with concern the passage of the Government's Health and Social Care Bill which will effectively destroy the National Health Service by replacing a publically run and accountable service into a conglomerate of competing private companies. Before the General Election, the Tories had promised that there would be no major structural changes to the NHS, while the Liberal Democrats claimed they would protect the NHS and democratise Primary Care Trusts. The promises of both parties have been shown to be

sham: Primary Care Trusts are to be abolished, commissioning handed over to GPs, and NHS services open to tender from 'any willing provider' – in other words, privatisation.

UNISON is just one of many organisations who have protested against these changes and against the substantial breach of trust perpetrated by Conservative and Liberal Democrat politicians. With Labour, investment in the NHS increased substantially, many more patients were treated much more quickly and patient satisfaction reached an all-time high. This was only achieved by a huge effort from everyone involved in the NHS, and strong political support from Labour – but all that is now at risk.

Forum agrees that campaigning to defend the NHS must be a key priority in the coming months. Forum calls upon Labour representatives at all levels of Government across the UK to work closely with UNISON to support local campaigns to build public understanding of the changes, and draw attention to the threat that they pose. Forum further believes it important that Labour's policy-making process reaffirms Labour's commitment to an integrated directly-provided and accountable NHS in future.

## **Education cuts**

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was brought in by Labour as a means tested allowance for college students in England of between £10 and £30 paid to 16 to 19 year olds who stay in education. The EMA assisted with the cost of books, travel and equipment for learning. The EMA has been key to improving participation in further education colleges.

Many of the most deprived areas of the UK will be the hardest hit when the government breaks its pre-election promise and scraps support. In the North West, as in any other areas, as many as 80% of 16-19 year olds receive EMA and this has contributed to the increase of students from the poorest backgrounds continuing into Higher Education.

The Tory-led government's plans to axe this benefit will be a decisive factor in undermining students remaining in education. Cutting the EMA will not only hit the most disadvantaged students, making it impossible for them to continue with their education, it is an attack on their life chances.

Education for all our young people is vital to the economic recovery of our country. All young people have the potential to change our society for the

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better and punitive tuition fees in both FE and HE will exclude the poorer members of our society.

Forum therefore condemns the exorbitant rise in tuition fees in FE and HE imposed by this ConDem government and call on Labour Link to lobby all UNISON MPs and others to ensure this iniquitous legislation is overturned on the return of a Labour Government.

UNISON must work at every level in the Labour Party to ensure the reinstatement of available quality education, for our young people of all ages, is guaranteed as part of a future Labour Government's policy and manifesto.

### **Strike Ballots**

Forum condemns the failure of Labour MPs to support the Lawful Industrial Action (Minor Errors) Bill put forward as a private members bill in October. We note that the Labour Party is always keen for our help and money at election time. Surely giving up one Friday constituency day to support such an important bill was not a lot to ask of our MPs in return.

We further note the massive and unjustified cuts to our public services and the increasing likelihood of unions having to take strike action to defend members and the public against these barbaric cuts. Recent years have seen an increasing number of strikes declared unlawful by the courts on spurious grounds and this bill would have gone a long way to prevent this. It cannot be right that strike can be declared unlawful by, for instance, a union not notifying its members of the number of spoilt ballot papers when these are an insignificant percentage of the total papers returned.

Forum urges our representatives on the National Policy Forum to press for the adoption of a policy of support for a similar bill by the Labour Party when it returns to power. It further urges support for any future private members bill on similar lines to the Lawful Industrial Action (Minor Errors) Bill, and indeed urges any Labour MP who comes high enough up the ballot to have a chance of getting a bill through, to adopt such a bill.

## **Families against corporate killers**

Families against corporate killers - FACK - is a national network which campaigns to stop death caused by preventable workplace incidents. FACK also directs bereaved families to sources of legal and emotional support.

FACK believe that bereaved families feel they have been robbed twice: once of their loved ones in incidents that could have been prevented by employers obeying workplace health and safety laws; and secondly of their right to justice.

The Young Review (October 2010) which seemed to rule out any commitment from the Government to the occupational health agenda, was followed by deep cuts to spending which will make it easier for employers to avoid their legal obligations to keep their staff safe at work.

The HSE budget was cut by 35 per cent and that, combined with a 28 per cent cut in local government funding, will have a damaging impact on safety in workplaces throughout the UK. Workers need their safety and health protecting now more than ever. Over one million workers are currently suffering from an illness or injury caused by their work: last year over 30 million days were lost due to preventable work-related sickness absence costing employers £3.7 billion.

UNISON figures (October 2010) show that the number of assaults on council staff, NHS workers, police officers and further-education staff rose to more than 28,000 in 2009-10, up from 25,407 the previous year.

FACK have produced a DVD showing the effects on the families of those who have been killed in work.

We call upon the National UNISON Labour Link to show support for the FACK campaign by arranging for Members of Parliament to see this DVD alongside guest speakers from the FACK campaign.

We also encourage the regional Labour Links to arrange to screen the DVD to their respective Councils and Devolved Governments.