

UNISON LABOUR LINK NATIONALFORUM – JULY 2 & 3 2010
LEEDS

Decisions



The General Election

This Forum notes with deep regret the result of the General Election of May 6 2010. Despite our differences with successive Labour Governments since 1997, we recognise the significant advances that were made, particularly in rebuilding our public services, tackling poverty and strengthening Britain's equality laws. For many, Labour's finest achievement was the introduction of a national minimum wage – a policy for which UNISON can claim particular credit.

We now have a coalition government of Tories and Liberal Democrats who are clearly determined to launch a major assault on public service workers. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg describes public sector pensions as “gold-plated, unfair and unaffordable.” Many of Labour's schemes to keep young people in work are being dismantled. Thousands of schools in England are being fast-tracked to become academies with no consultation with parents or staff. These schools will leave UNISON members without their recently gained national bargaining structure. Far from ‘cutting out waste’, as the Tories had promised before the election, the cuts are now very clearly hitting front-line services, just as UNISON predicted.

Forum recognises that UNISON's prime responsibility will be to protect our members and those who depend on public services from this assault. UNISON Labour Link has a particular role to play, working closely with the rest of the union, as we recognise that in the longer term, political change is the only way forward. Forum reaffirms our support for Labour as the political party best-placed to secure the interests of UNISON members and those who use public services. We will therefore:

- As part of a whole-union approach, work closely with Labour elected representatives and engage with the wider community to oppose measures that will damage public services and those who provide them
- Work with the many new councillors elected in the local elections held on the same day as the General Election, and work to secure more still at next year's local elections and in Parliamentary elections in Scotland and Assembly elections in Wales
- Play a full and active role in the selection of the next leader of the Labour Party
- Use our influence within the Labour Party to ensure that UNISON's values as encapsulated in our Million Voices campaign inform future Labour policy development, securing key UNISON priorities such as direct provision of public services, opposing privatisation and delivering new high-quality affordable housing.

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UNISON Labour Link must make it clear to the Party that there must be no repeat of the failed policies of the past. The present government are attacking our members and the communities they live in.

We expect the Labour party and the next Labour government to protect the poorest and most vulnerable in society by developing and adhering to a manifesto that reflects the true values of the trade union movement, Labour party and communities that have been let down by previous Labour governments.

The Budget

This Forum recognises that the emergency budget announced by the Conservative – Liberal Democrat Government marks a significant assault on public services in Britain, and is likely to prolong the economic crisis. Figures revealed this week show that the Government itself anticipates that their measures will cost 1.3 million jobs. Recent research for UNISON has shown clearly the unfair way in which the poorest will suffer most. The 25% cut in departmental budgets will hit the most vulnerable people who rely most heavily on public services.

By announcing a two year pay-freeze for many public sector workers, the Government is making a real cut in the living standards of millions of workers who bear no responsibility for a crisis created in the financial sector. The Government claim that the budget is both fair and that the cuts are 'unavoidable.' Independent research shows neither to be true – the Government has made a political choice to attack the public sector, those in receipt of benefits and investment in jobs. These massive cuts will put the fragile economic recovery at risk. Forum supports UNISON's alternative budget which has highlighted the choices that Osborne could have made:

£4.7bn could be raised every year by introducing a 50% tax rate on incomes over £100,000

£10bn could be raised every year by reforming tax havens and residence rules to reduce tax avoidance by corporations and 'non-domiciled' residents

£14.9bn could be raised every year by using minimum tax rates to stop reliefs being used disproportionately subsidise incomes over £100,000

£30bn could be raised every year by introducing a Major Financial Transactions Tax on UK financial institutions – the Robin Hood Tax

At least £1.5bn could be raised this year by bringing back the windfall tax on bankers' bonuses.

£4bn could be saved this year by cancelling Trident, the project could cost as much as £100bn.

£500m could be saved every year by eradicating healthcare acquired infections from the NHS – the extra cleaners would cost half this.

£495m could be saved every year by adopting measures to improve the health and well-being of NHS staff, thereby reducing sickness absence.

£1bn could be saved every year by halving the local government agency bill, as has been achieved by high performing councils.

£5bn could be raised every year with an Empty Property Tax on vacant dwellings. This only exaggerates housing shortages and harms neighbourhoods.

£2.8bn could be saved every year by ending the central government use of private consultants who bring little discernable benefit

£3bn could be saved in user fees and interest charges every year if PFI schemes were replaced with conventional public procurement.

Forum agrees to campaign with CLPs and Labour MPs to win support in the wider community for UNISON's alternative budget and to expose the Conservative – Lib Dem coalition's attack on public service workers.

Tax Havens

As a contribution to the debate about the International financial crisis Forum agrees that an international agreement is required to deal with the effects of financial havens and harmful tax regimes.

The following should be considered by the international community with the underlying purpose of helping poor countries stem tax evasion and reduce the negative impact of tax havens:

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- ◆ A multilateral approach on common standards to define model tax regimes to minimise avoidance opportunities for both Trans National Companies and international investors.
- ◆ A multilateral agreement to allow states to tax multinationals on a global unitary basis, with appropriate mechanisms to allocate tax revenues internationally.
- ◆ A global tax authority could be set up with the prime objective of ensuring that national tax systems do not have negative global implications.
- ◆ Support for the proposal for an International Convention to facilitate the recovery and repatriation of funds illegally appropriated from national treasuries of poor countries.
- ◆ Standards on payment of taxation in host countries should join environmental and labour standards as part of the corporate responsibility agenda. Standards requiring TNCs to refrain from harmful tax avoidance and evasion should be factored into official and voluntary codes of conduct for TNCs and for the tax planning industry.
- ◆ A multilateral agreement to share information on tax administration to help countries, especially poorer ones, to stem tax evasion.

Forum instructs the Executive to join the campaign for an international consensus to bring financial security to small, poor and vulnerable economies and to help them diversify from a reliance on harmful tax practices and to comply with standards to prevent money laundering.

The Banking System

Forum notes the measures taken by the Labour Government to nationalise parts of the banking system in response to the financial crisis. We also note that hundreds of £ Billions have been spent to shore up the balance sheets of the banks at a time when Public Sector Workers face huge cuts.

We welcome the nationalisation of these banks but we feel that merely nationalising the debts will not solve the problem. In recognition that the banks have failed in their responsibilities of affordable loan provision and accessible services we call for direct public control of these businesses to ensure community benefit. Further, we call for significant public control and regulation of the finance industry and to make sure our savings and pensions are safe and invested responsibly. This should be through a properly resourced independent financial regulatory body underpinned by strong legislation. We call on the government to enact new tax laws to ensure that the culture of excessive risk-taking, rewarded by obscene bonuses, is outlawed as soon as

possible. We oppose all attempts to fund this huge investment in the banking sector through cuts in public services. We call upon the Government to treat this “funding” as long term loans to these financial institutions that must be repaid by them in the long term – public sector workers mustn’t pay for the banking sector crisis!

We also call upon the Government to promote further the use of social ownership within the finance sector, with particular reference on a Post Office Bank.

Build resistance to the Economic Crisis

The present economic crisis is a threat to the living standards, jobs and pensions of all working classes around the world.

In the United Kingdom there are one million young people under the age of 25 out of work and increasing unemployment across the private sector and public sector. A major concern for Black members is that they are targeted for redundancy in the current economic downturn. Many of those currently unemployed or being made redundant through restructures and re-organisations within organisations particularly in the public sector are Black people. The change agenda in the public sector only serves to heighten Black Members’ concerns over job security.

Conference recognises that workers are not to blame for this crisis and so foreign workers and the unemployed should not be made scapegoats, neither should employers be allowed to systematically target Black members out of jobs.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is working with the Department for Work and Pensions on a new study to assess how the recession is affecting disadvantaged groups. The previous Government pledged that steps would be taken to prevent the pattern of entrenched unemployment amongst these groups seen in previous recessions. We ask that the Labour Party pursue this agenda whilst it is in opposition

The review will report on which groups are suffering disproportionately in the downturn; this will inform government policy responses. The reviews aim to make recommendations on how to properly target help towards a post recession recovery.

Conference calls on Labour Link to work with National Black Members’ Committee (NBMC) to:

- Work with the Labour Party to tackle any form of discrimination which may stem out from victimisation, bullying and harassment of trade union members including Black activists when they are part of such

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areas of re-organisations and restructures.

Provision of Final Salary Pensions

Forum reaffirms its commitment to maintaining the principle of the provision of final salary pensions for new and existing members of staff, across the public sector, not only as an important provision to provide re-assurance whilst at work, but also beyond and into retirement.

Conference notes the misguided claims from The Tories and Lib Dems, that they are too expensive and in the long term unsustainable, and therefore commits UNISON Labour Link to argue the case for retention within the Labour Party and current and future Labour Governments.

If, at the time of Forum we do not have a Labour Government, then we call on those Labour MP's left to lead the parliamentary campaign for retention, spelling out to all the economic cost for the state of inadequate pension provision.

Pensions

This Forum is totally opposed to the announcement in the budget to attack public sector pensions and freeze pay, which amounts to a pay cut. We find it unacceptable that public sector workers have to pay for the crises caused by bankers when they still receive their massive pay and pensions packages without any restrictions on their pay and pensions.

This Forum therefore calls on the Labour Link

- (a) To co-ordinate with the GPF a campaign to oppose the announcement
- (b) Lobby MP's on the facts over pay and pensions
- (c) Work with other unions to defeat this move

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

This Forum notes the situation at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council which is a Labour controlled council. As a result of the budget crisis, the Council has served notice on 25th June and received on the 28th June 2010 to UNISON and other Trade Unions that they intend unilaterally to dismiss over 7,000 employees and re-employ them on lower terms, conditions and wages as well as out sourcing 750 to 1,000 jobs with further cuts to come later.

This Forum deplores such bullying tactics and calls on all Labour councillors, Labour members of Parliament, Labour Welsh Assembly members and

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Labour Scottish Members of Parliament to condemn the action of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

Further, this Forum calls on all Labour councillors, particularly those who are also UNISON members to oppose similar future moves in all local authorities.

Further steps to LGBT equality

This Forum welcomes the steps Labour has taken to promote equality, including the input Labour has given to campaigning for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality at home and abroad.

Forum believes that much of what has been achieved is a result of campaigning by UNISON members and through the Labour Link.

Forum is concerned that at times of political and economic uncertainty, the equalities agenda will be left on the shelf gathering dust.

Forum notes that gaps still need filling to achieve full LGBT equality, for example the disparity of the separate arrangements for civil partnerships and marriages.

In particular, married transgender people face a legal nightmare of red tape, financial penalties and distress if they want to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate, as their marriage has to be annulled.

Forum therefore calls for:

1. a campaign for the introduction of equal gender-neutral marriage and civil partnership laws
2. continued campaigning and lobbying for strengthened equalities and human rights legislation and enforcement for LGBT people.

Where appropriate, these should be included in submissions to the Labour Party Policy Forum and raised within the Party at all levels and internationally.

Disabled People and the Personalisation Agenda

In times of recession disabled people are often targeted and left vulnerable due to cuts in vital services which include social care packages. The personalisation of the health and social care agenda is of a major concern, we know that public spending cuts disproportionately affect disabled people. A commitment to maintain funding needs to be given to ensure that disabled people are not left without the services they need and that those providing services are properly protected. It is essential so that disabled people can retain their independence and dignity.

Research shows that support packages based on direct payments are on average a third cheaper than directly provided services often at the expense of those providing the service. There is also the added worry that once in receipt of direct payments, disabled people become the employer with all the responsibilities that go with it. Measures need to be set in place as a support mechanism as some people especially older disabled people may feel unable to cope as we know one size does not fit all.

In health personalisation, the patient becomes the high street purchaser, which means that rogue businesses can set up and provide services that are not monitored or registered, which yet again will leave disabled people at risk of abuse and harm and staff vulnerable. Both systems are not subject to regulation, licensing, safety checks, financial scrutiny or effectiveness.

We call upon Labour Link to work with the National Disabled Members Committee to campaign;

1. To put pressure on the Government to ensure proper protection is afforded to disabled people and to staff by insisting on mandatory professional registration within a professional body.
2. For adequate funding to be provided to support the cost of directly employed staff who are properly protected.
3. For adequate funding for those who choose to receive support services from statutory services.

Fuel Poverty and Disabled People

National Labour Link agrees that the introduction of the annual winter fuel allowance for all people aged sixty and over in the UK has been one of the most successful social developments in recent history.

UNISON has always been at the forefront when campaigning for social justice and dignity for those, who through no fault of their own meet barriers in many shapes and forms. Fuel poverty is one of the major barriers that prevent disabled people from having the opportunity to fully participate in society.

National Labour Link therefore agrees we should mount a campaign to achieve the establishment of annual winter fuel payments for disabled people

Eco Housing

Forum welcomes the Labour Government encouraging builders to build energy efficient housing which not only saves people money but helps to protect the environment.

Currently, it is only mandatory to have a rating as this tends to cut the developer profit it is being ignored. So not only are we failing to cut our carbon footprint but we are not building homes that are affordable to live in.

Forum calls on National Labour Link to:

Campaign to achieve a minimum standard of Code 3 ie 25% energy efficiency for all homes being built for or by housing associations or any developer who has any form of support from the public purse. This should also include any new development in a conservation area.

Call on the Government to enshrine this in strong legislation to include increasing the standard to code level 4 by 2013 and up to Code 6 Zero Carbon by 2016.

Labour Link Organisation

This Forum considers that an active campaigning Labour Link structure is an important asset for members and also for the Labour Party.

Conference instructs the incoming Labour Link Committee to develop an action plan and a series of measures to promote the development of a Labour Link Committee in every Branch, involving as many members as possible in the work of the Labour Link.

Further, that Branches should be encouraged to maximise take up of delegations to local Constituency Labour Parties.

Union Ballots

This Forum notes with concern the actions of BA management's legal challenges against the UNITE strike ballots and the increasing number of employers using legal challenges around strike ballots. It therefore calls on Labour Link to work with the Labour Party to ensure that ballots cannot be ruled unlawful on technicalities that would not have materially affected the outcome and to ensure employers must give all the information a union needs to conduct a lawful ballot, eg up-to-date DOCAS lists.