

## Big gains for workers with Labour

Workers across Britain will benefit from new rights at work which came into force at the beginning of April. Improvements to the national minimum wage, legal entitlement to longer holidays and extra help for working parents were all part of the package of improved rights at work negotiated by UNISON and other trade unions affiliated to Labour in the run-up to the last general election.

Chair of UNISON Labour Link Steve Warwick

says that these changes will make a real difference to many of Britain's most vulnerable workers: "At the last election we asked trade union members to support Labour because we knew we had negotiated a set of detailed proposals that only a Labour government would introduce.

Since the 2005 election those changes have been gradually implemented as we have worked out the detail with the government. Over a million people benefit from the

national minimum wage and tougher enforcement means that even more families will be helped. Millions will gain from the extension of the right to request flexible working.

If you listen to the Tories they will allow the minimum wage to wither and die on the vine (their words). We only have to think about what this will mean for thousands of workers and their families in particular in these hard economic times."

### National minimum wage improvements:

- automatic penalties for employers who underpay ensuring that anyone caught flouting the law faces a stiff penalty
- the most serious cases of non-compliance will be able to go to trial in a Crown Court, which will have the power to impose an unlimited penalty
- fair arrears for NMW underpayment
- a new information gateway to allow officers enforcing the NMW and Employment Agency Standards to share information.

### Increasing the Annual Leave Entitlement to 28 days

- Increasing the annual leave entitlement to 28 days:
- these regulations came into force on a transitional basis some time ago, but from 6 April, the full entitlement applies to all workers
- the minimum entitlement increased from four weeks (20 days if you worked a five day week) to 4.8 weeks (24 days if you work a five day week) on 1 October 2007
- increase to 5.6 weeks (28 days if you work a five day week) from April 2009.

### Flexible working:

- the highly successful right to request flexible working is extended to those with parental responsibility for children aged 16 and under.

The right to request flexible working was introduced in 2003 for parents of children aged up to six and disabled children aged up to 18. It was extended to carers of adults in 2007. Six million parents and carers already have the right to request flexible working from their employers. This change benefits an additional 4.5 million parents.



## 10 years of the national minimum wage

**"The minimum wage is an historic achievement for UNISON and its 10th anniversary is cause for huge celebration," general secretary Dave Prentis told campaigners, as he cut a cake at the House of Commons to mark the wage's 10th anniversary. UNISON led the campaign for the minimum wage in the first place and Dave Prentis pledged that UNISON would continue to campaign for further improvements.**

# Parliamentary round-up

UNISON Labour Link works closely with UNISON members in Parliament to promote the interests of the union. In recent weeks we have been dealing with a variety of issues.

Senior UNISON education officers have briefed MPs on key clauses in the Apprentices, Children, Skills and Learning Bill and given evidence to the Parliamentary committee. Detailed discussions have taken place over the new School Support Staff Negotiating Body which will be established when the Bill becomes law.

Similar detailed discussions have taken place with MPs over the Health Bill, with amendments tabled in the House of Lords and UNISON's concerns about direct payments raised. The government has now tabled an amendment to the Bill to ensure that "bodies or other persons representing staff" should be consulted about changes to the NHS Constitution, which was something UNISON sought during earlier stages of the Bill.

Detailed discussion continues on the Equality Bill, with UNISON speaking directly to Ministers about equal pay. MPs have raised specific

Parliamentary questions and intervened in debates raising points highlighted by UNISON.

UNISON members and other MPs with trade union backgrounds ensured that Lindsay Hoyle's Private Members Bill to improve Statutory Redundancy Pay continues to progress.



***UNISON members from Wigan were in Westminster recently to catch up on how the union uses its Parliamentary links. George Davies, Labour Link Officer from Wigan & Leigh Health Branch led the delegation.***

# Why we need Labour MEPs

**Labour's leader in the European Parliament, Glenis Willmott explains.**

Equal pay for men and women, four weeks paid holiday guaranteed, equal rights for part-time, temporary and agency workers.

Free emergency hospital treatment on holiday, cheap flights.

Consumer rights for internet shopping, affordable mobile phone charges, clean seas and beaches, harmful chemicals banned in food and toys.

Europe isn't the first word that springs to mind is it? Yet all these rights have been secured by Labour MEPs. The European Parliament is the largest democratically elected parliament in the world, and it's your parliament. Your vote is on 4 June.

We are living through the longest period of peace Europe has ever seen, and since the fall of the Iron Curtain, Europe has been reunited for 20 years. However, that is all history, old news. With cheap weekends in Prague and border-free central Europe, we've forgotten how difficult it was to travel and work, when you needed a visa for Italy, or different currency each time you crossed from France, to Belgium, to Luxembourg, to Germany.

But we mustn't forget. It is Europe working together, MEPs from different countries working together, which makes all this possible. Your Labour MEPs are committed to getting the best for Britain, through co-operation and solidarity with our partners across Europe. Your health and safety, holiday rights, maternity and paternity rights wouldn't exist otherwise.

We have achieved a huge amount in the past five years, setting new chemical safety regulations with the REACH package, vastly improving passenger rights on planes and trains, and winning equal rights for temporary and agency workers, and we have great ambition for the next.

In the next Parliament we will consider new anti-discrimination legislation to fill the gaps, so that there is protection against all forms of discrimination – not just in access to employment, but also in goods, facilities and services, a vital step forward for equality. A European energy package will be



**Glenis Willmott MEP (centre) with the UNISON group of Members of the European Parliament Richard Howitt, Linda McAvan, Arlene McCarthy, Mary Honeyball and Claude Moraes.**

implemented, and Labour MEPs will make sure it covers energy security and measures to fight energy poverty.

Financial regulations will be updated to reflect modern global banking, and Labour MEPs will be working for better regulation of all banking sectors, including tax havens and hedge funds, to end 'casino capitalism'. Health and safety will also be at the forefront of our work on employment issues, and we will continue our campaign to protect workers from needle-stick injuries and violence at work.

Labour fights for the issues you care about, the changes you want to see, the action you need taken and the investments you think should be made. Your MEPs are your voice in Europe, and if you don't vote you're leaving it to someone else to decide who represents you.

***Let's protect our jobs, our health, our safety and our planet. Let's get more Labour politicians into the European Parliament.***

# Tory MEP trashes NHS

NHS a “60 year mistake” which kills people – says top Euro Tory



The Tory MEP who tops the Conservative list in the South East in the European elections has delivered an astonishing attack on the National Health Service. Speaking to Fox News on American TV, Dan Hannan warned Americans against adopting a

healthcare system like Britain's NHS, describing it as a “60 year mistake”:

“We've lived through this mistake; we've lived through this mistake for 60 years now... the reality is it hasn't worked. It's made people iller. We spend a lot of money and we get very bad results, you look at survival rates for cancer or for heart disease we are

well down on all the leagues. We have very few doctors. We disincentivise people from practising medicine in this country. A lot of our best and brightest doctors emigrate. A lot of them go to North America because there's no market.”

David Cameron has refused calls to discipline Hannan or remove him from the Tory slate for the European elections.

## UNISON women highlight maternity challenge

UNISON women across the North West have backed an Oxfam campaign to highlight global maternal mortality rates. Knitting squares for a brightly coloured blanket to highlight the numbers of women who die in pregnancy or childbirth was a labour of love for women activists across the region.

The vital campaign – that could make the difference between life and death to more than half a million women in developing countries – captured the hearts of UNISON mums, wives, sisters and daughters.

They not only contributed their own UNISON North West squares to the Oxfam Maternal Mortality project but organised a special unveiling as a springboard to further work to protect women's rights.

The blanket was displayed at a joint event organised by the Regional Women's Forum and Oxfam to mark International Women's Day.

The event also provided a platform to hammer home the reasons why women should vote in the European Elections on 4 June.

Prospective Labour European MP Theresa Griffin outlined how the European Union had



**Labour North West Euro candidate Theresa Griffin (fifth from left) joined Regional Convenor Diane Kelly, Regional Equalities Officer Dion Baugh and UNISON activists in the North West.**

been at the heart of many positive changes for women including directives insisting on equal pay for equal work and the outlawing

of sex discrimination in employment and training. Parents, pregnant women and part-time workers have all gained.

For more information about the UNISON Labour Link contact

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