

UNISON Labour Link Forum

# Record of decisions

8 July 2022

York

## **Cost of Living Crisis**

Forum notes that public service workers are facing a toxic combination of real terms pay cuts, rising inflation driven by price hikes and huge increases to the cost of energy, all of which are causing a growing cost of living crisis for UNISON members.

Forum further notes that UNISON members have been facing a squeeze on living standards for years thanks to the austerity measures of successive Conservative governments, which have seen public sector wages slashed in real terms.

Forum believes that public service workers deserve decent pay that supports them and their families, and should not be made to pay the price for the Covid pandemic, or the decade of politically motivated austerity that preceded it. Better wages for public service workers mean better public services and also boost local economies.

Forum further believes that tackling the cost of living crisis must be a priority for the Labour Party, both where the party is in power at present, and also when Labour is back in government in Westminster. More than a decade of attacks on working people will require an ambitious and sustained response to reverse.

Forum welcomes Labour's New Deal for Working People, developed in partnership with Labour affiliated unions.

Forum calls on the National Labour Link Committee to:

- 1) Support all UNISON campaigns for better pay, pensions and conditions for UNISON members;
- 2) Work with the Labour Party to identify the most impactful ways (in addition to pay rises) that pressures on household finances can be reduced;
- 3) Ensure that the Labour Party continues to oppose the £20 per week Universal Credit cut;
- 4) Fight for a Labour government that makes tackling the cost of living crisis a day one priority;
- 5) Work with Labour to deliver and build on the New Deal for Working people.

## **Cost of Living Crisis**

UNISON members are impacted by excessive price rises on essentials like food (+10% in a year) and domestic energy bills (imminent up to +50%).

The government know the hardship this will bring yet persist with a £20 per week cut in Universal Credit for low income working and non-working households. Also, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, underfunding the welfare budget by £3billion.

This compounds twelve years of real pay cuts amidst ever harder workloads as public services are stretched to breaking.

Government seeks to tackle this not by taxing growing private wealth, and adequately funding vital services, but by stealth taxes by forcing hard strapped councils to raise council tax and taxing working people through National Insurance in a forlorn attempt to plug the gaps left by austerity.

They have further left local councils high and dry with a piecemeal and poorly targeted funding response falling way short of the long-term funding and support ordinary people need.

UNISON's political strategy must underpin our wage bargaining, support funding demands of local politicians and lobby MPs and Lords to demand the government act to ease this crisis or are exposed for their failure to act.

Forum calls on the National Committee to develop a strategy which:

- 1) Presses the government to resolve the cost of living crisis;
- 2) Promotes alternative Labour proposals among members.

This to consider supporting :

- a) Windfall tax on energy companies;
- b) Remove VAT from domestic energy bills;
- c) Real Living Wage and Fair Pay;
- d) Repeal £20 Universal Credit Cut;
- e) Fair and adequate funding for councils;
- f) Make work pay: good wages, not cuts to safety net;
- g) Long term policies including insulation of homes and tackling food waste;
- h) Opposing right wing exploitation of crisis to roll back decarbonisation or promote 'small state'.

## **The NHS after the Pandemic**

Forum notes the impact that pandemic has had on public services.

Forum highlights the huge achievements of healthcare workers during this period of immense pressure, keeping services running, delivering vaccines and saving lives.

Forum recognises the toll on staff has been immense. A recent UNISON surveys shows how many health workers are considering leaving their jobs.

Forum notes that far too many workers are facing burnout. The NHS cannot afford to lose any more staff.

Forum notes that some patients are already opting to jump the queues for NHS treatment by going private.

Forum warns that right-wing critics of the NHS would like nothing more than to see the NHS run down to a point where large numbers of patients abandon it.

Forum asserts that the NHS was hampered from the start in its ability to cope with the pandemic by the damaging impact of Tory austerity.

Forum believes that this pattern of underfunding has to be ended as a matter of urgency if we are to protect the NHS.

Forum believes that investment in the workforce is crucial.

In early 2022, the Health and Social Care Committee of MPs called for an urgent review of recruitment and retention issues within the health and care workforce. This is essential if the NHS is to attract and keep the staff it needs to help the service recover.

Forum therefore calls on the National Committee Link to work within all appropriate structures of the Labour Party to ensure the next Labour government commits to:

- a. A substantial funding increases for the NHS to address the damage done by the pandemic and years of underfunding before this;
- b. Ensuring investment in the healthcare workforce to be at the heart of any new investment in the NHS.

### **Making a National Care Service a Reality**

Forum notes that Labour Conference committed to a National Care Service, following a motion taken by UNISON and proposed by UNISON General Secretary Christina McAnea.

Forum further notes the profound impact that the pandemic has had upon social care, and the exploitation of care workers that has been exposed by increased attention on the care system, particularly the way in which care delivery is underfunded and fragmented.

Forum welcomes the commitment from the Welsh government to establish a National Care Service. This is due, in no small part to intense lobbying from the Cymru/Wales Labour Link Committee who at the recent Wales Labour Party Conference submitted a motion, unanimously supported that called for an updated report in the 2023 Wales Labour Party Conference prior to the implementation plan being released at the end of 2023. This will ensure the policy remains a priority and that a National Care Service mirrors the NHS and is free at the point of use.

However, we have concerns about the model proposed by the Scottish government for the Scottish National Care Service and the role of the private sector. Forum believes that any national care service worthy of the name should be free at the point of need and delivered on a not for profit basis.

Forum believes low pay, a lack of sick pay and a widespread disregard for the wellbeing of care workers by employers must be condemned. Wherever Labour is in power, UNISON demands that low pay in care is eradicated and care workers are treated with respect and dignity in their workplace.

Conference further believes that a world-class national care service must have at its heart a workforce strategy which gives social care workers an equivalent status to those working in the NHS, and a fair wage for all care workers.

Forum calls on the National Committee to:

- 1) Demand that Labour guarantee the necessary public funding to deliver a world class system of care and support so that as with the NHS, receiving high-quality care does not come down to the financial means of the recipients of the service;
- 2) Ensure that a Labour government removes profit from our social care system and plans for a publicly funded and publicly delivered national care service, which meets the needs of all care recipients;
- 3) Demand that Labour implements national standards on terms and conditions, negotiated with social care trade unions and national structures equivalent to social partnership working in the NHS;
- 4) Campaign for all care workers to receive a decent wage, with clear routes for training, qualifications and career progression.

### **Tackling the Social Care Crisis**

Forum notes the severe impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has exerted on the social care sector.

Forum expresses its disgust at the treatment many care workers have been subjected to since March 2020, such as a lack of PPE and the ongoing failure to provide proper sick pay for those who need to self-isolate.

Forum is also appalled at the continuation of poverty pay in the sector – the Living Wage Foundation reported that three quarters of care staff in England were not receiving the real living wage on the eve of the pandemic.

The sector has experienced decades of major underfunding and the workforce continues to be treated with a lack of respect.

Forum believes that genuine reform – which the government continues to duck – must begin with meaningful changes to the way care is commissioned.

Forum accepts that this would require a large increase in funding but it could see social care repositioned as a driver of economic recovery given the size of the care workforce and the role that high quality care can play in freeing up citizens.

Forum applauds the work that the General Secretary has done to ensure that social care reform is a priority campaign issue for the union.

Forum calls on the National Committee:

- 1) To continue its work to ensure the creation of a well-funded national care service remains a key Labour Party manifesto commitment;

- 2) To work with all possible networks of Labour councillors with an ultimate aim that all Labour controlled county and unitary authorities bring social care services in-house and/or adopt ethical commissioning processes so all social care staff that work on public-funded contracts earn at least the real living wage, paid sick leave and has an employer that collectively bargains with trade unions.
- 3) To encourage all Labour councils to adopt UNISON's Ethical Care Charter.

### **Securing a Wave of Insourcing**

Forum notes that the Labour Party has committed to the “biggest wave of insourcing in a generation”.

Forum further notes that successive governments have repeatedly outsourced public services, placing them in the hands of profiteers, who operate on the basis of private greed rather than public need.

Forum believes that public services should be delivered by the public sector, for the benefit of everyone in our society.

Forum further believes that public service workers and those we serve in our communities are better off when services are publicly owned.

Forum calls on the National Committee to:

1. Demand that the Labour Party – both in opposition and in government – upholds its commitment to the “biggest wave of insourcing in a generation”;
2. Campaign to ensure that there is a presumption in favour of insourcing and public ownership in all public sector procurement;
3. Work with service groups and regions to support campaigns to bring public services back in house;
4. Work with the party to begin costings on their insourcing commitment to avoid backtracking at a later stage;
5. Push the Labour Party to ensure until any outsourced service is brought back in house, workers and their representatives have the right to bargain around pay and conditions.

### **Stop Workers Being Charged to have DBS Checks When They Start Jobs**

Forum believes that we need to stop the regressive practice of organisations charging their new employees to get their DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check done.

As the average hourly rate of a support worker is £9.60 and an enhanced DBS costs £44 this means that a new employee loses over four hours of work they have done paying for their DBS.

This practice penalises low paid workers that provide essential work in our society by caring for the most vulnerable and have done this throughout the pandemic putting their lives at risk.

Forum calls upon the Labour party, councils and representatives, including the Mayor, to:

- Campaign against this practice by making this part of the tender process when allocating contracts.

Forum calls on the National Committee to:

- Launch a campaign on this including a petition to raise awareness of this issue and to lobby the government.

By campaigning against this practice and working to stop organisations from doing this, it will help to make social care a more attractive workplace and stop penalising these low paid workers for choosing a career that helps the most vulnerable in our society.

### **Private Renters Deserve the Right to a Secure, Decent and Affordable Home**

Forum notes that more and more of our members are forced to live in the private rented sector due to the unaffordability of home-ownership and inaccessibility and lack of affordable social housing.

This is due to failed housing policies and government cuts.

This problem is exacerbated by the increasing number of properties lost in the market as second homes and AirBnB use.

Private renters face high rents, poor quality housing and insecurity, as well as the threat of eviction hanging over their heads. Private landlords can evict private tenants without giving them a reason by simply issuing a two-month notice after their fixed term tenancy ends under Section 21 no-fault evictions, with renters powerless to fight against this.

Forum calls on the National Committee to work with appropriate bodies, including Generation Rent to:

- 1) Continue to campaign for Section 21 no-fault evictions to be abolished to protect tenants from unfair, unnecessary evictions;
- 2) Campaign for the introduction of new legislation to create secure, permanent tenancies in line with Scotland;
- 3) Campaign for a fair rent system or rent controls to protect private tenants from unpredictable, extortionate rent increases;
- 4) Campaign for all councils to be allowed to introduce borough wide licensing schemes setting out minimum standards of landlord accreditation to deter rogue landlords and drive up standards in private renting;

- 5) Call for councils to be supported with adequate funding to increase staffing levels in environmental health, trading standards, tenancy relations and other roles, which are needed to provide effective regulation and enforcement in the private rented sector;
- 6) Campaign for more council and social rented homes to help make housing more affordable and to provide alternative accommodation for private renters;
- 7) Campaign for legislation to deter more owners from taking up Second Homes and converting rental properties into AirBnBs.

## **Employment Rights**

Forum notes ongoing cuts to workers' rights that have been pushed through, firstly by the Coalition, and then by the Conservative government. These have led to increased uncertainty, anxiety, and in some cases, poverty for working people across Britain.

Forum notes Labour's commitment to ending the two tier workforce, and to creating a single class of "worker" from day one of the next Labour government.

Forum calls upon Labour to ensure that all workers receive the right to:

- 1) Statutory sick pay (set at a meaningful level);
- 2) National Minimum Wage entitlement;
- 3) Holiday pay;
- 4) Paid parental/adoption leave;
- 5) Protections against unfair dismissal;
- 6) Access to a good workplace pension;
- 7) Join a trade union.

Forum requests that the National Committee work with the Labour Party to ensure these rights are included in the Party's offer at the next General Election, where they will be welcomed by workers currently dealing with the most severe cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

## **Trade Union Rights**

In 2021 the Labour Party published an "Employment Rights Green Paper"; while much of the new document is welcome Forum notes that it lacks some of the specific recommendations of the Institute of Employment Rights (IER) Manifesto for Labour Law, which was the basis for previous party policy.

Forum is greatly concerned with the fire and rehire disputes such as at P&O and Clarks, and that after a brief period of growth trade union membership is once again flat or declining amid a culture of gig economics.

Forum believes that only a strong trade union movement can safeguard the workforce in the long term. However, as presented, the Green Paper still assumes trade unions should be highly regulated organisations.



Forum believes that instead a future Labour government should seek to strengthen trade unions and liberate them from decades of restrictive legislation. Forum calls on the National Committee to work with the Labour Party to:

- 1) Repeal the Trade Union Act 2016 during a first parliamentary term;
- 2) Replace pre-2010 legislation with a looser regulatory framework that addresses long standing trade union concerns. This should, for instance, allow for the long overdue use of wholly electronic balloting of union members and promote collective bargaining;
- 3) Create a right to strike for workers participating in disputes. Unofficial action outside disputes, but should not attract punitive legal or financial penalty against unions or individuals;
- 4) Make anti-trade union actions taken by employers unlawful, and that individual trade union representatives be protected against unfair dismissal and surveillance.

Forum calls on the National Committee to work with the Labour Party, the TUC, IER, and other unions to flesh out these proposals in advance of an election so that Labour can campaign truly as the party of labour at the next election.

### **LGBT+ and the Labour Party**

Forum notes the impact 12 years of Conservative led government have had on LGBT+ people, with swingeing cuts to public services ending many specialised services for LGBT+ people and allowing a political climate where transphobia is rampant.

Forum is aware of the growing politicisation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The EHRC was set up by the Labour government in 2007 as an independent body to promote and uphold equality and human rights ideals and laws across England, Scotland and Wales. It was never set up to be the mouth piece of government, but this Tory government is using it to promote its own anti equality agenda. Recently the commission wrote that Scottish ministers should undertake “more detailed consideration” around proposed changes to gender recognition reform before advancing legislation through Holyrood.

Forum also notes with concern that Labour members of the Council of Europe tried to water down a motion expressing legitimate concerns about transphobia in the UK and further attempted to remove references to condemning gender critical and anti-trans narratives.

Forum believes only a strong Labour Party manifesto based on equality will lead Labour to victory.

Forum therefore instructs the National Committee to work with the Labour Party to seek to include the following into their manifesto:

- 1) Make the EHRC truly independent;
- 2) Ensure that the EHRC is properly funded to carry out its work effectively;

- 3) Include self-identification for gender and remove all references to medicalisation;
- 4) Make conversion therapy illegal;
- 5) Bring back specialised LGBT+ services that have been lost, including youth services;
- 6) Outlaw third party harassment from clients, service users and members of the public;
- 7) Ensure Labour Party politicians follow Labour Party policy in all spheres.

### **Ethnicity Pay Gap - It's Time for Mandatory Reporting**

Labour Link believes that the Ethnicity Pay Gap (EPG) is a major cause of in-work poverty experienced by Black Workers and the cause of severe intergenerational inequality in Black communities. The EPG is as high as 23.8 per cent in London with regional variations across the UK.

In 2017, the government committed in its manifesto to “ask” large employers to publish information on their ethnicity pay gaps. In 2020, only 11% of companies had published this information.

The introduction of this important measure is needed to identify the disparities within the workforce and forces employers to be accountable.

In January 2022, UNISON held an event on the EPG. Guest speaker Lord Boateng announced his desire for this issue to be raised in the House of Lords and for the government to take tangible steps to make the reporting of EPG mandatory.

In February 2022, the Women and Equalities Committee published a report clearly stating that the Ethnicity Pay Gap should be mandatory.

Anneliese Dodds MP, Labour Shadow Women’s and Equalities Secretary said “Labour welcomes this recommendation, which echo’s the pledge set out in our new deal for working people to make the publication of ethnicity pay gap mandatory for firms with more that 250 staff, to mirror the gender pay gap reporting”.

Forum calls on the National Committee to:

- 1) Suggest ways that the Labour Party's regions and CLPs can influence the conversation about unequal pay on the grounds of ethnicity;
- 2) Encourage organisations to make Ethnicity Pay Gap part of their diversity strategy;
- 3) Make closing the Ethnicity Pay Gap a key priority to tackle the racial and regional pay inequality face by Black workers in the labour market;
- 4) Write to the EHRC to make EPG an equality priority.

### **Putting Disability Equality at the Heart of the Next Labour Government**

Forum recognises that disabled people’s rights have stagnated or been eroded under 12 years of Conservative government, with no progress on rights at work, cuts

to in-work and out-of-work benefits many disabled people rely on, the emasculating of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), and the High Court ruling that even the government's disability strategy was illegal.

Covid has also made clear the inadequacy of statutory sick pay (SSP) and has undermined years of employer excuses that flexible working was not a "reasonable" adjustment.

Forum believes we need a reforming Labour government which will put disability equality at the heart of its agenda.

Forum therefore instructs the National Committee to work with the Labour Party to progress the following concrete changes as part of the policy programme of the next Labour government:

- 1) A new legal right to a response to reasonable adjustment requests within two weeks, and to timely implementation of agreed adjustments;
- 2) A strengthened right to paid Disability Leave;
- 3) Mandatory disability pay gap monitoring with a requirement for action to address inequality;
- 4) A default right to flexible working for all jobs with the onus on the employer to prove an exemption;
- 5) The right to time off for Equality Reps;
- 6) Reform of Access to Work and removal of the cap on awards;
- 7) An extended right to SSP for disabled workers who need to be off for more than 26 weeks, for example workers with cancer, and an increase in the rate of SSP;
- 8) A radical root and branch reform of both PIP and Universal Credit so that the benefit system helps disabled people to live independently;
- 9) A properly funded, empowered and independent EHRC, free from political interference.

## **Representation of Women in Labour Link**

Forum notes:

- 1) The long overdue changes made by the National Labour Link Committee in 2021 to ensure that two-thirds of seats on the National Labour Link Committee are held by women.
- 2) That this change brought Labour Link in line with UNISON and Labour Link's own rules on proportionality.

Forum believes:

- a) That representation of women in our union and our party is critical to building the society we want to see;
- b) That more can and must be done to ensure that all under-represented groups are properly represented in Labour Link and the Labour Party;
- c) That our Labour Link is stronger when it represents the diversity of our membership.

Forum calls upon the National Committee to:

- I. Defend and extend proportionality and fair representation throughout Labour Link structures;
- II. Ensure that at least two-thirds of seats on the National Labour Link Committee are held by women, by maintaining the system of rotating reserved Women's regional seats on the National Committee;
- III. Conduct an audit of proportionality and representation of all Labour Link structures (regional and national committees, delegations etc) and report back to next year's Forum with the results;
- IV. Continue to fight for proportionality within the Labour Party.

### **Involving Women in Labour Link**

As a trade union made up of overwhelmingly women members UNISON have a proud record of enshrining and promoting representation of women in their constitutional processes and activities at all levels. Equally UNISON Labour Link have always taken a lead in promoting women members in our structures and this Forum would want to ensure we continue in developing women members to play leading roles in our Labour Link structures and in the Labour Party.

Forum congratulates the National Committee in finally achieving proportionality in its committee by designating regional seats as women only in the elections to the UK Labour Link committee. Forum expects that this progressive measure will now become embedded in future elections.

Forum further congratulates the National Committee in the election of a woman directly elected from a regional seat for the first time as chair of the committee emphasising Labour Link's commitment to inclusivity.

Forum believes Labour Link has led from the front in developing women activists in our union and in the wider labour movement and we call on the National Committee to continue to examine the opportunities of providing targeted recruitment material to encourage women members to join Labour Link and to examine ways in promoting engagement and involvement with Labour Link by women members.

Additionally, we call on the National Committee to consider how we can encourage women UNISON activists to become not only selected as Labour candidates but be elected as Labour representatives in councils, devolved parliaments and at Westminster. This should include encouraging UNISON women to participate in wider Labour Party Women's development programmes.

### **Supporting and Encouraging Black Labour Link Officers and Candidates**

In 2022, it is shameful that our national parliaments do not adequately reflect the diversity of our communities. Parliament and our Party will only become stronger when both are fully representative of the communities they seek to serve and represent. The number of elected Black representatives at all levels of government remains persistently and disproportionately low.

Whilst the number of female representatives also remains disproportionately low, research has confirmed that all women shortlists (AWS) are an effective means of reducing barriers for women to stand as candidates in elections. Clearly all women shortlists have made it easier for women to be selected, including for non AWS seats. Forum believes that now is the time to consider introducing All Black Shortlists (ABS) in an attempt to increase diversity and representation in all UK parliaments.

UNISON is an organising union and our Labour Link Officers are key assets. While it is important that Labour politicians reflect the diversity of the communities they seek to serve it is equally important that our Labour Link Officers also reflect that diversity. It is vital that these Officers are given the support and training to carry out their role.

Forum calls on the National Committee to:

- 1) Work with the National Black Members Committee to explore the feasibility of lobbying for All Black shortlists including potentially amending the 2010 Equalities Act;
- 2) Engage in dialogue with the Labour Party to understand how ABS could be implemented and explore other options to increase levels of Black representation, particularly black women;
- 3) Develop a training course specifically targeting Black Labour Link officers;
- 4) Develop a resource pack that can be used by Labour Link officers to promote a positive case for opting into Labour Link;
- 5) Report back to the 2023 Labour Link Forum on progress to date.

### **Proportional Representation**

Forum notes that:

- 1) UNISON delegates abstained in the Proportional Representation debate at National Labour Party Conference 2021 as the union had no current policy on PR;
- 2) UNISON delegates to the South East Region Labour Party Conference 2021 could not support a similar PR motion for the same reason;
- 3) PR is an issue of significant interest to UNISON and other trade union members.

Forum further notes that:

- a) Many Tory councils and the current Tory government do not have a popular vote majority to support their divisive and damaging policies;
- b) Alliances of progressive votes could avoid right-wing Tory administrations;
- c) Many Labour voters feel that their votes are “wasted” in traditionally safe Tory seats.

Forum urges:

- I. Labour Link representatives at all levels of the union to positively engage in debates around the implementation of alternative PR systems;

- II. Labour councillors, MPs and other Labour representatives to give positive consideration to how PR could be implemented;
- III. The national Labour Party to consult widely with Party members and associated bodies around options to introduce a PR voting system at national and/or local levels, including the potential for a PR elected body to replace the current House of Lords.

## **Standards in Public Life**

Forum notes the massive erosion of standards in public life exemplified by (but not limited to):

- 1) The Owen Paterson affair;
- 2) The awarding of contracts to friends of the Tory Party;
- 3) The issues around the funding of the refurbishment of the Prime Minister's flat;
- 4) And, the egregious behaviour of the Prime Minister around the break of the Coronavirus Regulations.

This behaviour further erodes trust in our politicians and public life. What makes this even worse was the toothless nature of the processes meant to hold misconduct by MPs to account.

Forum further notes that the standards process in local government is not fit for purpose either, with numerous instances of misconduct by councillors (of all parties) not being properly dealt with.

Forum requests that the National Committee work with the Labour Party to draw up a new independent and effective standards process for Ministers, MPs and councillors that an incoming Labour government will include in new legislation to tackle this issue.