

Labour Party Conference 2013 Brighton

Annual Report



Lord Mandelson's reaction to Miliband's speech

GMB Yorkshire Region
Steve Jennings MCIPD

LABOUR CONFERENCE REPORT 2013

Sunday pick of the day

Party reform debate

The party reform debate was lively but relatively good humoured. The leadership remained at pains to stress the desire to “mend not end” the union link (both Harriet Harman and Lord Collins made a point of using the phrase) and to stress Labour’s pride in our links to working people and the union movement.



Paul Kenny

Paul Kenny, of GMB, gave a barnstorming speech in defence of the union collective voice. He said “trade unions have only put in one speaker for the debate. That is because they think the party should be speaking about jobs and living standards, not navel gazing. The Collins document contains some inaccuracies. The unions see this document as a starting point. But the removal of our collective voice is not on the agenda. The unions will not take any advice from people who brought the party the cash for honours scandal in constituencies; they are also trying to impose cuckoos in the nest”.

The debate was incredibly short and low key after Paul Kenny’s contribution. Rather than hearing from ordinary members of unions and the Party, it was dominated by those who already have a pretty powerful voice. MPs Jonathan Ashworth & Dave Anderson both made good points from different sides of the debate but it was better when we heard from delegates from Stevenage & Northampton who don’t have as many other opportunities to pitch in.

The debate is far from over. We need to work to ensure the voices any reform would seek to empower are better heard as it continues.

Monday pick of the day



Ed balls

Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, has announced that a Labour government would increase the bank levy by £800m to fund the expansion of free childcare for three and four-year-olds, from 15 hours a week to 25 hours a week.

For the past three years pundits and members of the public have been saying that they want to hear what Labour would do differently. Today, Ed Balls confronted that head-on and delivered a lengthy and explicit answer. Gordon Brown was fond of using lists in his speeches and Balls used the same device at least twice, when he was reminding the audience what the last Labour government achieved and when he told them, right at the end, what Labour would do in 2015. It was a checklist for activists, ideal for campaigners who need to be able to answer the "why vote Labour" question on the doorstep.

There was a lot of interest in what he had to say about HS2. He has been using the no "blank cheque" line for some time now but to put that up in headlights in a conference speech signals more clearly than before that Labour is threatening to pull the plug on the project; if you want to know why, it helps to look at the polls.

Public support for HS2 is falling. More people are now opposed than in favour and Labour supporters are particularly hostile to the idea. The chances of HS2 ever actually going ahead are looking less likely than they were.

Other debating points



Len McCluskey

When Len McCluskey, Unite's general secretary, finished his speech to the conference, delegates debated employment rights and Unite tabled an emergency motion calling for stronger collective rights for workers.

McCluskey talked about his experiences on the Liverpool docks and he explained why this mattered.

“When I left school and went to work on the Liverpool docks - dockers used to crowd into a hall every morning hoping for work. Bosses used to walk amongst them tapping them on the shoulder and handing out brass tallies which were needed to get a day’s work.

And when the bosses got tired of that, they would throw the remaining tallies into the air and watch men fight each other and I mean fight, because it meant putting food in their kids’ bellies. Zero hours in another age. The only thing that stopped it then and the only thing that will stop it now, are strong trade unions”.

He also said that Labour would only have a future if it represented organised Labour.

“One thing is certain, that if our party is to have a future it must speak for ordinary workers and it must represent the voice of organised Labour.

More and more economists recognise - what we’ve always known - that wage depression is a fundamental obstacle to sustainable growth in our economy. That’s why this motion seeks to address the disgraceful treatment, in 21st century Britain, of trade unionists.

Trade unionists are the people in this land who create the wealth of our nation and who are responsible for the very fabric of the civilised communities in which we live. And everyone in this Party, everyone should be proud of our link with them through their trade unions”.

Labour delegates have demanded an end to the public sector pay freeze. They applauded Dave Prentis, the Unison general secretary, when he put the demand at the heart of his speech to the conference.



Dave Prentis

More than anything our people need hope. They need to know now, that when elected, our party will end the pay cap which is blighting so many lives. It's not rocket science. If this is a cost of living conference, then the pay freeze must end. No ifs, no buts - a clear commitment to end the Tory pay freeze.

They overwhelmingly backed an emergency motion, passed without opposition, saying the next Labour manifesto should include a strategy to end the public sector pay cap to help support economic growth, improve services and tackle the cost of living crisis. Afterwards a party spokesman played down the suggestion that this meant the party was committed to lifting the pay cap.

Of course Labour supports a strategy to return to growth. As public sector pay caps are currently set until 2016, it is right that this motion was amended before it was debated. Labour Party policy is made via the National Policy Forum.

In his speech, Prentis also called for the value of the national minimum wage to be lifted so it matches that of the living wage.

What is so wrong with a clear, unambiguous Labour promise to turn a statutory minimum wage into a statutory living wage?

The General Secretary's speech



Ian McNichol

Iain McNichol, Labour's general secretary, has said Labour should embrace community organising as the key to its future success. He made the point in his speech to the conference.

“What matters now is how we organise, how we build campaigns, tackle cynicism and prove the worth of politics. If you study how Labour's pioneers created our party, one vital insight shines from the pages of our history - we were not founded as a Westminster caucus or a cosy club. We were a movement, sending men and women into parliament, to breach the walls of privilege and to give the people a platform.

Unlike the Tories, unlike the Liberals, Labour was a party of the community first and Westminster second. The trade union branches, the socialists, the Fabians, the co-operators, the youth and the women's leagues - these were the community organisers in those early days.

Community organising is not just our tradition, it is the shining key to our future as an organisation. Modern parties must be more than vote-harvesting machines, no longer top-down, centralised and all about spin. That belongs to an age when people listened to cassettes, when messages came via pagers and when only birds tweeted. So, we change and where we've made the change, we've shown it works.

When we listen, and learn, and trust, and then give power back to the people, we win their support”.

He also said that over the last year, Labour has hired 90 full-time organisers, with another 20 due to start next month.

Tuesday pick of the day

The speech from Ed Miliband the Leader of the Labour Party



Ed Miliband

Key extracts:

Here are the best quotes from Ed Miliband's speech.

- Miliband said his main theme was that Britain could do better.

“I want to start today with the simplest of thoughts. An idea that has inspired change for generations. The belief that helped drive us out of the Second World War and into that great reforming government of 1945. An ambition that is more important now than it has been for decades. An emotion that is felt across our country at kitchen tables every night. A feeling that is so threatening to those who want to keep things as they are. Words that are so basic and yet so powerful, so modest and yet so hard to believe. Six simple words that say: Britain can do better than this. Britain can do better than this; we are Britain, we are better than this”.

- He said he believed that listening to others and understanding their problems was the most important thing a leader could do.

“My mother is the most patient, generous person I have met in my whole life. And she taught me never to be contemptuous of others, never to be dismissive of their struggle. Now she was teaching me a lesson of life. And some people will say, ah yeah but you have to leave decency behind when it comes to politics. Well I say they are wrong, because only if you reach out and listen can you do the most important thing a leader can do, the most important qualification in my view for being Prime Minister. Only then will you have the ability to walk in the shoes of others and know who to fight for, whoever your opponent, however powerful they are, guided by the only thing that matters: your sense of what is right. This is what I believe, this is where I stand, this is the leadership Britain needs”.

He said the key problem for Britain was that ordinary people were no longer benefiting from growth.

“Now what I’m about to tell you is the most important thing I’m going to say today about what needs to change about our country. For generations in Britain when the economy grew the majority got better off. And then somewhere along the way that vital link between the growing wealth of the country and your family finances was broken. This is, this goes beyond one party or one government. It is more important to you than which party is in power, even more important than that.

They used to say a rising tide lifts all boats, now the rising tide just seems to lift the yachts. Now I say this to the people of Britain. If I were you I wouldn’t even take a second look at a political party unless they make this their central defining purpose because your future depends on it. Your children’s future depends on it. Britain’s future depends on it. I say we are Britain we can do better than this”.

He said this problem was linked to David Cameron's approach to what Cameron calls "the global race".

“The cost of living crisis isn’t an accident of David Cameron’s economic policy it is in his economic policy. Let me explain why. You see he believes in this thing called the global race, but what he doesn’t tell you is that he thinks for Britain to win the global race you have to lose, lower wages, worse terms and conditions, fewer rights at work. But Britain can’t win a race for the lowest wages against countries where wages rates are pennies an hour and the more we try the worse things will get for you. Britain can’t win a race for the fewest rights at work against the sweat shops of the world and the more we try the worse things will get for you. And Britain can’t win a race for the lowest skilled jobs against countries where kids leave school at the age of 11. And the more we try the worse things will get for you. It is a race to the bottom. Britain cannot and should not win that race”.

He said the Tories were only interested in those at the top.

“So when they tell you the economy is healing, that everything is fixed, just remember, they are not talking about your life, they are talking about their friends at the top. That is who they are talking about; it is high hopes for them. And every so often you know the mask slips doesn't it. The other day a man they call Lord Howell, he was I think their advisor on fracking at one point... There is nothing funny about that. He said it was wrong to frack in some areas but it was ok in others, it was ok in the North East of England because he said, and I quote 'it was full of desolate and uninhabited areas.' In one casual aside dismissing one who le region of the country. Let's tell these Tories about the North East of England and every other part of Britain. People go out to work. They love their kids. They bring up their families. They care for their neighbours. They look out for each other. They are proud of their communities. They are proud of their communities. They hope for the future. The Tories call them inhabitants of desolate areas. We call them our friends, our neighbours, the heroes of our country. They are fed up of a government that doesn't understand their lives and a Prime Minister who cannot walk in their shoes. We are Britain, we are better than this”.

He said Labour would freeze gas and electricity bills.

“Take the gas and electricity companies. We need successful energy companies, in Britain. We need them to invest for the future. But you need to get a fair deal and frankly, there will never be public consent for that investment unless you do get a fair deal. And the system is broken and we are going to fix it.

If we win the election 2015 the next Labour government will freeze gas and electricity prices until the start of 2017. Your bills will not rise. It will benefit millions of families and millions of businesses. That's what I mean by a government that fights for you. That's what I mean when I say Britain can do better than this”.

He said Labour would get house building up to 200,000 a year by 2020.

“There are 9 million people in this country renting a home, many of whom who would want to buy. 9 million people - we don't just have a

cost of living crisis, we have a housing crisis too. In 2010 when we left office there was a problem. There were one million too few homes in Britain. If we carry on as we are, by 2020 there will be two million too few homes in Britain. That is the equivalent of two cities the size of Birmingham. We've got to do something about it and the next Labour government will. So we'll say to private developers, you can't just sit on land and refuse to build. We will give them a very clear message - either use the land or lose the land, that is what the next Labour government will do.

We'll say to local authorities that they have a right to grow, and neighbouring authorities can't just stop them. We'll identify new towns and garden cities and we'll have a clear aim that by the end of the parliament Britain will be building 200,000 homes a year, more than at any time in a generation. That's how we make Britain better than this".

He said Labour did rescue the NHS.

"When we came to office there were waiting time targets of 18 months that were not being met, when we left office there were waiting time targets of 18 weeks that were being met. When we came to office there was an annual winter A&E crisis, when we left office the people had A&E services they could rely on. When we came to office there were fewer doctors and nurses, when we left office more doctors and nurses than ever before. And when we came to office people said well the health service, it was a good idea in previous generations but I don't really believe it will be there in the next, and we left office with the highest public satisfaction in the history of the health services. Yes friends, we did rescue the National Health Service".

He said he would happily fight David Cameron on the question of leadership and character.

"But the next election isn't just going to be about policy. It is going to be about how we lead and the character we show. I have got a message for the Tories today: if they want to have a debate about leadership and character, be my guest. And if you want to know the difference between me and David Cameron, here's an easy way to

remember it. When it was Murdoch versus the McCanns, he took the side of Murdoch. When it was the tobacco lobby versus the cancer charities, he took the side of the tobacco lobby. When it was the millionaires who wanted a tax cut versus people paying the bedroom tax, he took the side of the millionaires. Come to think of it, here is an even easier way to remember it: David Cameron was the Prime Minister who introduced the bedroom tax; I'll be the Prime Minister who repeals the bedroom tax.

You see here is the thing about David Cameron. He may be strong at standing up to the weak, but he is always weak when it comes to standing up against the strong. That is the difference between me and David Cameron, so let's have that debate about leadership and character, and I relish that debate”.

Reaction

Paul Kenny, leader of the GMB

“It was a very polished performance, with the welcome theme that Britain can do better. Millions of people know that life can be better. That was a completely different Labour leader to the one we saw three years ago. No prompts, no plastic performance - he has grown into being a prime minister”.

From Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the TUC



Francis O'Grady

“This was a defining speech that rightly focussed on the living standards crisis and went on to offer hope. At its heart was a clear break from the view that Britain succeeds by reducing the rights, pay and prospects of people at work.

More importantly the clear pledges made today and during the rest of this week showed that there will be a real choice at the next election - no-one can now say that the parties are all the same”.

Len McCluskey, the Unite leader, on the speech.

“People at home urgently wanting to know what a Labour government will do for them will certainly have a better idea today. They will know that this is a leader and a party that is on their side.

Ed Miliband should never be afraid to articulate a courageous vision for this nation because that is what these extraordinary, fearful times urgently need.

Voters are hungry for something better for Britain than food banks, tattered wages and Wonga-nomics. They want to hear about homes, that their children will have a future in this country, about a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. They need Labour to stand for a better life for the people of this country than the worry and insecurity this miserable government offers.

It was good to hear Ed mention the role of unions positively in delivering the minimum wage, challenging in-work poverty. This is what we do day-in, day-out”.

Dave Prentis, Unison general secretary

“Ed Miliband showed he understands what people are going through. He offered firm commitments to help hard-pressed families. He gave a vision for the many, not the few”.

Democracy, Standing Orders and Harry Donaldson



Harry Donaldson

Every morning at conference the proceedings start with the standing orders report from the chair of the standing orders committee. This report is then approved by a vote of conference delegates; this is normally a formality. This is the committee that manages all conference business and order of business, what motions can be debated and most importantly if they in order or not.

Today however, things turned out to be very different. Harry gave his report as usual; the committee had ruled a motion by Islington and the TSSA union regarding re-nationalising the railways out of order.

This was met with Islington delegates rushing to the podium with points of order objecting to the ruling. Following five minutes of chaos, the vote was taken and for the first time for many years the vote was lost.

Keith Vas, who was chairing the session, didn't know what to do. Finally conference resumed with the promise that Harry would return with a new report. Eventually, Harry came back with a decision that the motion was now in order and this was accepted by conference. It was agreed that the debate would take place on Wednesday as an emergency motion debate.

Wednesday highlights



Tosh McDonald



Mick Carney

Wednesday's conference proceedings began with, the now allowed, debate on an emergency motion condemning First Capital Connect over a safety incident. The debate centred on the question of whether East Coast Rail should stay in the public sector and if a Labour government should "run our railways in the interests of passengers by retaining and extending this successful model of public ownership to each franchise as it expires".

Mick Carney, president of the TSSA transport union said “a future Labour government should renationalise the railways. That has been party policy since 2004” he said. Tosh McDonald, the vice president of Aslef, backed his case. “We should not be afraid to talk about the ideology of public ownership, delegates will vote on the motion later this morning”. The vote was carried to renationalise the railways.

Yvette Coopers’ speech



Yvette Cooper

Cooper launched a strong attack on the Home Office's decision to use vans to advertise its "go home" campaign aimed at illegal immigrants. Labour would "not join an arms race of rhetoric on immigration" and "never use immigration to play divide and rule", she said.

“Here’s what we won’t do. Unlike the Tories, we won’t do checks at London tube stations, asking British people to prove their immigration status, targeted at people for the colour of their skin.

Unlike the Tories, we won’t do Ad vans sent to the areas with the highest black and minority ethnic British communities. Borrowing the language of the 1970s National Front.

And Conference, just consider, those Ad Vans were driving past the homes and offices of families whose parents and grandparents had to endure those same slogans scrawled high in graffiti forty years ago. Whose children now run local businesses, work in hospitals and schools, serve their country in our armed forces.

Conference it really comes to something when even Nigel Farage says you’ve gone too far.

Those ad vans weren’t about illegal immigration. I say enough of these divisive gimmicks they are an utter disgrace”.

She said Labour would stop the police using community resolution measures in cases involving domestic violence.

“Serious and violent crimes are going for community resolution instead of going to court. That’s when the police take someone round to see the victim to say sorry and make amends.

That can make sense for a bit of graffiti, or digging up someone’s flower bed. But for thirty thousand serious or violent offences - including domestic abuse? All they have to do is say sorry and the police will say that’s alright then?

Sorry. That’s not alright at all.

In domestic violence part of the problem is that abusers apologise, make amends, and then get violent all over again. There is no way the police should be taking abusers back to their victims and sanctioning a cycle of apology and abuse.

Conference, that’s why a Labour Government will legislate to stop the police using community resolutions for crimes like domestic and sexual violence”.

She accused Theresa May, the home secretary, of refusing to take responsibility for Home Office problems.

“But where is Theresa May when the terror suspect goes missing? Or the border controls collapse? Quick to claim credit when things go right, strangely absent when things go wrong.

Fewer criminals caught? - Blame the police. Fewer police on the streets? - Blame the crime commissioners. Few votes for crime commissioners? - Blame the public. Fewer foreign criminals deported? - Blame the civil servants. - Blame Labour - Blame Europe. Or most frequently of all, - Blame Nick Clegg.

Yes, Theresa May blames her failure on communications data, counter terror, Europe and immigration all on a fight with Nick Clegg.

Conference this is the man who rolled over on tuition fees, top rate of tax, Syria, the bedroom tax.

The man couldn't fight his way out of a plastic bag. No wonder he wants to tax them”.

Andy Burnham's speech



Andy Burnham

Andy Burnham, the shadow health secretary, got a very enthusiastic reception when he spoke and at the end there was a standing ovation.

Here are the main points from the speech.

Burnham said Labour would roll back the introduction of market forces into the NHS.

“For too long, market forces have been allowed to advance into the NHS.

Well no more. We will make a clear break with that.

If we carry on down this path, the market will devour everything precious about the NHS - those values the country celebrated at London 2012.

I am not neutral about who provides NHS services.

I will never see the NHS as an empty blue-and-white brand to be used by any qualified provider.

I believe in the public NHS and what it represents.

I know that people who work in it give more of themselves because it's based on people not profits.

If politicians can't see that, they'll never understand the true value of the NHS and they'll never understand NHS staff.

NHS values are Labour values - and now we apply them afresh to the 21st century”.

He criticised the Tories for awarding NHS contracts to party donors.

“Huge private health firms, run by people who have donated £1.5 million to the Tories, winning £1.5 billion in NHS contracts.

Who gave this prime minister permission to sell the NHS to his friends”?

He condemned the existence of low-pay and zero-hours contracts in the care sector.

Conference, I have never been clearer about anything in my life than this: we will never, ever get the care we aspire to for our own parents, or indeed anyone’s parents, from a malnourished, minimum-wage social care system dishing out care in 15 minute slots where there’s barely time to make a cup of tea let alone exchange a meaningful word, where over 300,000 care workers in England are on zero-hours contracts.

Britain, surely, is better than this.

How can anyone who doesn’t have the security of knowing what they will earn one week to the next, pass on a sense of security to those they care for?

Looking after someone else’s mum or dad is the highest calling a person can answer.

But society says it’s the lowest

Wrong, wrong, wrong on every level”.

As well as attacking the Conservatives, he was particularly critical of the Lib Dems.

“Cameron’s Health Lottery - the most audacious attack ever on NHS values.

And coming to your community soon - courtesy of Mr Clegg.

These two, Cameron and Clegg, have brought the NHS to the brink with a re-organisation no-one wanted and no-one voted for.

I heard last week the Lib Dems promising more memory clinics.

I think they should have opened the first at their own conference.

They were struggling, weren't they, to remember what they've inflicted on people?

What do NHS privatisation, tuition fees and the bedroom tax have in common?

None in any manifesto and all brought in with Lib Dem votes”.

He said there would be a pro-NHS protest at the Conservative party conference on Sunday 29th September.

Doreen Lawrence's speech



Doreen Lawrence

Doreen Lawrence said the last 20 years have brought about a great change for her.

She was not used to public speaking. In the past her voice was only heard in her own home.

Now she has been working on the Stephen Lawrence Trust. That has shown her the need to provide more opportunities to young people.

There are millions of young people unemployed. But for ethnic minorities is much worse. The unemployment rate for young black Africans or Caribbeans is almost 50%.

She said, when she heard that Ed Miliband wanted to speak to her in the spring; she did not know what it was about.

She spoke to him a few days later. He told her he was putting her name forward for the House of Lords. She was flattered.

People have been asking how she would like to be referred to. It will take her a long time to get used to being called Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon. The speech was well received.

Ed Miliband's Q&A

He wanted to say a few words before he took questions. “You have been telling me you need policies to sell on the doorstep”, Well, now you have them: strengthening the minimum wage, extending childcare, promoting skills, creating a green economy, building homes, giving small businesses a tax break, repealing the bedroom tax, reforming the energy market and freezing electricity prices”. Miliband also challenged David Cameron to agree to have a TV debate.

“It should have the same format as last time”, he said (meaning no UKIP). “There should be three debates”.

The Q&A is a low key affair and passed quickly.

Harriet Harman's Speech



Harriet Harman

Harriet Harman's speech was full of jokes. Here are some of them.

On Ed Miliband:

“But Ed is about a new kind of politics. And that shines through in everything he does... like when he got egged. You can really see the change.

When John Prescott got egged, he was massively angry and threw a punch. When Ed Miliband got egged, his immediately thought was 'Oh God - I really hope this is free range...' That's just the kind of guy he is”.

On Nick Clegg:

“But it's just not fair to say that Clegg has got no principles at all. He has got one principle - one that means a lot to him...That is, regardless of who's in government, Nick Clegg must be deputy prime minister. He wants to go on and on and on....

No wonder Vince Cable looks so miserable - you almost have to feel sorry for him”.

On Ukip's Godfrey Bloom:

“What can you say about the human car crash that is Godfrey Bloom? A man so unreconstructed, he makes Jeremy Clarkson look like a Fabian. But Godfrey, all is not lost.

You've got some time on your hands now - so we've arranged a special emergency session for you...

At the "Harriet Harperson Institute of Political Correctness".

And Godfrey, the good news is that I, myself, will be there to give you some advanced 'one to one' training.

And we'll start with you whisking that Dyson round the back of my fridge”.

This finale went down very well with delegates. Conference ended with the traditional singing of the “Red Flag”.

Conclusions and comments

1) The policy genie is out of the bottle: Policies are like Pringles - once you pop you just can't stop. After years of complaints from malcontents (like me) that the party had no policies to take out onto the doorstep, we now have a glut of them. A million new homes; the energy freeze; wraparound childcare; 100,000 new apprenticeships etc. Now that we have policies, those within the party who have been trying to keep things under wraps and play 'steady as she goes' have been somewhat shoved aside. Cruddas is already talking about further policies in the coming months saying “as we told you yesterday - I think

we're finally passed the point of what we would do if we were in government today and into the realm of what we would do in government". Thank god.

2) Miliband can pick an enemy. Miliband has taken the fight to the energy companies and those developers who sit on land rather than using it. Unsurprisingly, they don't like it 'up em'. Yet the British public, it turns out, view the energy companies in a very dim light indeed, according to recent YouGov polling. Unsurprisingly then, the party's focus group on the energy freeze policy was off the charts. Miliband needs to ignore the blackmailing tactics of the energy companies (Blackouts? what will they threaten next, a three day week?) And the nay-saying of those who say this is a retrograde step (that means you Lord Mandelson). Energy prices are a key part of the cost of living crisis - and the companies involved behave like predators, not producers, to coin a phrase. The question is - who are Ed Miliband's next powerful enemies, who he can chalk up next to Murdoch and the energy companies before 2015?

3) Wednesday is dead - move the leader's speech. Wednesday used to still be a decent day at Labour conference, whilst Thursday was the graveyard shift; attended only by the die hards and the conference completists. Now that Thursday morning has been (mercifully) removed from the conference agenda, Wednesday has become the new Thursday. Conference hall wasn't particularly full and Brighton as a whole felt pretty empty yesterday. Most people seemed to have gone home on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning. There's a way to remedy this though - move the leader's speech to Wednesday afternoon and send everyone home from conference straight after. End on a high, rather than spluttering to the end. (Although a special mention here should go to Monique from Labour HQ, who provided a tremendous closing rendition of the red flag).

4) The party's organisational discipline has improved. It has been a good conference for General Secretary Iain McNicol, with a renewed focus from Miliband on movement building and community organising. But perhaps the party's most impressive feat was the energy freeze campaign.

Not the campaign itself (although I think it has been done well) but that rolling out a print/digital/comms/policy/PPB campaign, means over 100 party staffers (minimum) have to know about it and keep it under wraps. The full detail of the energy freeze didn't leak until Miliband said it on Tuesday - that's thanks to many people who worked hard, prepared a campaign and kept it to themselves. A particular nod should go to the expanded digital team. The increased resources and staffing that the party has given them showed through in the scale and quality of what they did at conference.

5) Labour conference is getting more interesting. Ed Miliband was splashed on 8 of the 9 national newspapers in the wake of his conference speech. Whether the coverage was positive or negative, he has the attention of the media and the country and perhaps - as early polls suggest- a conference bounce for the party. Conference itself was a bit more interesting than in recent years too, not just because of the policy announcements but because of the fringes. Labour List had a great conference (sorry for the plug) with around 500 people attending our new conference rally. Lord Ashcroft attended a Fabian fringe to talk about Labour's chances of winning the next election.

Whilst conference was at times a little too quiet and brisk (or professional, to be more positive) it did feel like a more serious operation this year.

6) Labour is seriously worried about Ukip. At Ukip's conference last week Paul Nuttall, its deputy leader, said Labour voters were "easy pickings" for his party. Labour figures were listening and they seem to be taking him seriously. Perhaps for the first time at a Labour conference, speakers in the foreign affairs debate were focusing their attack on Ukip instead of treating them as an afterthought.

7) Votes on conference floor don't matter - that must change. Votes at conference have become an even greater farce now than they already were. Conference can call for an end to the public sector pay freeze, keeping the post office public and taking the railways into public ownership and the impact on Labour's actual policies is negligible. The party respond to conference votes calling for new policies by pointing out that the NPF decides policy; but that's often toothless too.

What we're left with is votes upon which energy is expended for limited benefit. Much heat but little light. The unions currently have 50% of the votes in these debates on conference floor but at the moment that's 50% of diddley squat. It might be worth them taking a smaller percentage of something worth having in future years; a debate around that could well be part of the Collins Review, which brings us to...

8) There is no enthusiasm in the party for Miliband's plans to reform the link with the unions. Ed Miliband defended them in his conference speech but the party only allocated 20 minutes for them to be debated on Sunday. The unions have treated them with derision and hardly anyone has spoken out in support of them. Miliband seems to have no appetite for challenging his party in the conference arena. Rather than asking delegates to vote against the rail and Royal Mail renationalisation motions, Labour HQ has just been shrugging its shoulders and saying it will ignore the votes. Although Labour is supposed to be endorsing the reform plans at a special conference next spring, there must be a possibility that there will be a fudge or some other climb-down.

Steve Jennings MCIPD

Senior Organiser/Political Officer



Leader's speech finale