

UNISON Labour Link

**Submission to Labour Party
Partnership into Power 2012**

Britain in the World



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Submission to Labour Party Partnership into Power Consultation: Britain in the World

UNISON is the largest public services union in the UK with 1.4 million members including over 1 million women. We represent more than 850,000 staff delivering local government services and 450,000 healthcare staff employed in the NHS and local government, and by private contractors, the voluntary sector and general practitioners. UNISON is the largest education union representing staff in early years and schools, as well as higher and further education.

Key points

UNISON strongly urges the Labour Party to support the growing campaign for a Financial Transactions Tax – without imposing pre-conditions about which other countries should support its introduction

UNISON urges the Labour Party to base its development programme on economic and social justice, not charity

UNISON urges the Labour Party to work to outlaw tax havens

UNISON urges the Labour Party to campaign for the ratification of the ILO domestic workers convention (ILO C189) and the proper worldwide implementation of basic ILO conventions on the freedom of association and collective bargaining (ILO C87 & C98).

UNISON urges the Labour Party to support the campaign to make access to clean water regarded as a human right

UNISON urges the Labour Party to reject all EU free trade agreements where the countries involved are guilty of ongoing human and trade union rights violations

Robin Hood Tax

UNISON supports the call for a Robin Hood tax – a small tax on the huge flow of international financial transactions. A tiny tax on the financial sector can generate £20 billion annually in the UK alone. Currently, the main proposals are:

A Financial Transaction Tax (FTT)

A tiny tax of about 0.05% on transactions like stocks, bonds, foreign currency and derivatives. Could raise £250 billion a year globally. Well-tested, cheap to

implement and hard to avoid. In fact, there are already lots of different transaction taxes implemented by many countries, including in the UK. They all work on the same principle: taxing every transaction a very small amount. Importantly, transaction taxes are also good in that they would reduce the amount of the most risky transactions, the gambling which helped to trigger the financial crisis.

A Bank Levy

Basically a flat-rate levy imposed on large financial institutions. Under huge pressure from their voters and from campaigners, a number of countries, including the UK, France and Germany have introduced a bank levy. But at the rates they have used, these levies have raised not nearly enough and the revenue is not going to where it needs to go, the poor and the planet. The levy introduced by the UK government in January 2011 misses the mark. It will only raise £2.5 billion annually, and doesn't ring fence a penny to help the people hit hardest by the financial crisis. It is also largely offset by the Government's decision to reduce corporation tax meaning the actual amount of revenue collected will be markedly lower than £2.5 billion.

The Financial Activities Tax (FAT)

Broadly equivalent to a VAT-style tax on the financial sector. It could raise £3.9 billion a year in the UK alone – and up to \$93 billion across the OECD countries. The UK government has said it is open to implementing a FAT tax, but only together with a group of other countries, for example at EU level.

The EU's future – Social Europe or Austerity Europe

UNISON's support for the UK's membership of the European Union is conditional on there being a social dimension. However, in recent years Social Europe has come under attack and the rightwing majorities in the European Commission, amongst national governments and even in the European Parliament are now pushing through policies promoting austerity and entrenching a neo-liberal model for the EU. The coalition government's policies are entirely consistent with this approach.

A key trade union concern is the need for a horizontal directive (European legislation that covers all aspects of a specific policy area) covering the Internal Market that protects employment rights. In particular, preventing collective bargaining and collective agreements from being undermined by internal market legislation and a revision of, or more likely, a recast of the Posted Workers Directive which governs the terms of conditions of workers sent by their employer to work in another EU country. The European Court has ruled that only legal minimums (eg legal minimum wages) can be enforced and not better conditions covered by a collective agreement.

This is aimed at addressing the consequences of the European Court of Justice Rulings on Ruffert, Viking and Laval. The European Commission has recently presented its proposals (the so-called Monti II package) but these

have been “yellow carded” by 12 national parliaments who argue that they interfere in national competences and the European Commission is required to review the draft package. The original Commission proposals caused major concern to the ETUC as they would have sought to regulate the right to strike in trans-national disputes.

A key issue for UK unions will be the wording on what we can enforce given that collective agreements are not legally enforceable. We would be looking for something that recognises ‘the going rate for the job’.

Another key concern for UNISON will be the question of the revision of the Working Time Directive which is currently being discussed by the Social Partners as part of the European Social dialogue process. We need to defend the gains made by the European Court of Justice ruling on the definition of ‘on-call’ working. The European Commission and employers want to roll back these gains and there are concerns that the Commission may try and offer a deal that links an end to the individual opt-out from the 48 hour week with such a roll back.

The European Commission is currently considering a revision of the Public Procurement Directive. The Commission currently has a narrow interpretation of what can be linked to the subject-matter ‘of a contract under the existing EU rules’. For example, the recent EC Guide Buying Social states that the labour conditions of workers building a school cannot be part of the subject-matter. EU procurement rules should promote good quality employment and the provision of quality services, goods and works in Europe and abroad. When public authorities buy sustainable products and services this contributes to the EU objectives of sustainable development and the EU 2020 strategy. Value for money/best value in public contracting is not achieved by going for lowest price. It is achieved only when wider social, ethical and environmental benefits are given clear weight in public procurement decisions. Currently this is not the case.

Decent Work

UNISON is determined that Labour should integrate the Decent Work Agenda (as defined in UN/ILO conventions) into poverty alleviation programmes by including core labour standards in trade agreements; tackling labour abuses in the work place; using decent work standards to address poverty; and recognising and promoting the role of trade unions.

Public Services

Evidence shows that strong public services are an essential component in helping developing countries to prosper – especially in the area of healthcare. It is also increasingly clear that the private sector is incapable of delivering those services on an effective and fair basis.

International Financial Institutions (World Bank, IMF etc) continue to have an ideological opposition to the public provision of essential services which is

severely harming developing countries. The next Labour Government should work to change the nature of these organisations.

Labour should support Public/Public Partnerships (where one part of the public sector contracts a service to another part) which are increasingly seen as an effective means of building public services.

Migration

The south to north migration of essential workers – especially in the health sector – is having a devastating impact on the delivery of public services in the developing world. Labour should bring forward a global agreement on the international recruitment of health workers and reduce the need to import health workers into the UK.

Trade Union Rights

In a number of countries with which Britain has close relations – Colombia, Chile, Philippines, for instance – trade union rights are under severe threat and trade unionists continue to be killed, intimidated, 'disappeared' and forced from their jobs and homes, simply for being active in a trade union. In many instances these actions are carried out with the actual or tacit support of the government authorities. In a number of other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, trade unionism is effectively banned and activists are regularly imprisoned.

Palestine/Israel

UNISON is increasingly concerned about the deteriorating situation in the middle east and in particular the effect of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian people. It is our view that stronger action is needed to get the Israeli government to respect international law and to move towards a just peace agreement.

Cuba

The isolation imposed on Cuba by the illegal US blockade of the island is increasingly seen as pointless and anachronistic.

Given the so-called special relationship with the United States, a future Labour Government should use its influence with the US administration to put an end to the blockade and normalise relations with Cuba

Nuclear Weapons

UNISON believes that since any replacement of Trident would be a new weapons system which would be more 'useable' this would be contrary to the intention of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and make the world yet more dangerous. Britain would almost certainly be dependent on the USA for the technology and therefore it would tie us, yet again, to the USA, which is using military dominance to impose its 'new world order'. UNISON opposes nuclear weapons; and specifically opposes any nuclear replacement of Trident on

these grounds and because they divert billions of pounds public investment away from public services.