

# **Labour Party Conference**

**September 30 – October 4 2012**

**Manchester**

**Briefing for UNISON representatives**





## Background

Labour Party Conference this year takes place just a few weeks ahead of the national demonstration in London: 'A Future that Works'. One of our key organisational aims is to raise awareness of the demonstration and enlist support from Labour politicians and delegates.

We will be highlighting the continuing onslaught on public services, in the NHS, in local government, in education, in police services. We continue to promote our Million Voices for Public Services campaign, and will particularly draw attention to the unnecessary and damaging reorganisation in the NHS.

The Refounding Labour changes which were agreed at Conference last year postponed reform of the National Policy Forum until this year. The appointment of Jon Cruddas to oversee the policy review and election of Angela Eagle as NPF Chair were welcomed by UNISON, and we anticipate that reforms to the NPF will be brought to Conference for approval.

This briefing pack provides a short summary highlighting UNISON's key concerns in each policy area, with some suggested questions. UNISON's recent submissions to Labour's policy consultations are attached and give more detail. If you need further information during the week, please refer to the Million Voices briefing packs which have been widely distributed and are available on the UNISON web-site, or seek advice from UNISON staff in attendance.

## **Draft UNISON Contemporary Motion**

### **Promoting an Alternative to the Coalition Government's Austerity Programme**

Conference believes savage budget cuts, public service job losses and privatisation will seriously damage the prospects for economic recovery. As the August 21<sup>st</sup> ONS report showed, such policies are counterproductive to the Government's own deficit reduction targets.

Conference believes that public investment, high quality services and public sector employment are central to a balanced and sustainable economy in which everyone has a stake.

Conference condemns the prolonged pay freezes that mean public sector workers have had their real terms pay cut dramatically and notes that most of the lowest paid have not received the £250 rise that Osborne promised. Conference believes that depressing workers' living standards in a recession is self-defeating and contributes to economic stagnation.

Conference rejects Government proposals for regional pay and moves away from national agreements and Agenda for Change towards local pay bargaining that would lead to the poorest regions and workers losing out and agrees regional pay is counter-productive, inefficient and unfair.

Conference welcomes Labour's promotion of a "living wage" to secure adequate living standards without dependence on benefits.

Conference calls on the Labour Party to:

campaign for an economic alternative, defend public services, reject the privatisation agenda and promote genuine alternatives to marketisation,

endorse progressive taxation and effective measures against tax avoidance and evasion

promote fair pay and living wage campaigns, decent employment and the benefits of national pay agreements, defending these where they come under attack

use the TUC 20 October demonstrations to expose the economic consequences of the Coalition's disastrous austerity strategy.

## Prosperity and Work

### Economy

UNISON rejects the notion that the Labour Party should mimic Coalition spending plans. The share of national income devoted to public services is currently being cut back to the level of the 1990's from 26% to 20%. Further spending cuts will only reduce the quality and availability of public services that Labour spent 13 years in government reforming for the better. Instead, implementing major reforms to tackle tax avoidance and evasion could generate between £35bn and £70bn extra for the Exchequer.

### Public Services

UNISON believes that the continuing freeze on public sector pay is not only unfair on public sector workers who are facing cuts in real incomes, but is bad for the economy.

In terms of wider changes to public services, UNISON is calling for:

- An end to PFI that puts costs and profit above quality of services and jobs
- A public investment model that is less expensive and can be easily managed to accommodate changing needs, and can deliver better quality services as well as better value for money. Such a model will have many benefits including, less expensive borrowing, greater simplicity, more flexibility, better design of projects and no more excessive private profits. A model that is subject to greater public scrutiny, accountability and financial transparency
- An end to PFI credits which acts as a disincentive to use other procurement models
- A change to the accounting rules which allow most PFI projects to be "off balance sheet"
- Removal of facilities management services (soft services) from existing PFI/PPP schemes
- An end to the two-tier workforce across public services
- Monitoring of PFI schemes and their impact on service quality and jobs
- Private bodies providing public services to be subjected to the FOI Act
- A transparent, accessible and robust record management system on all forms of procurement to allow for projects to be accurately assessed and monitored to see if they provide value for money

### Questions

Will Labour recognise that real-terms cuts to public sector pay do more harm than good to the economy?

What will Labour's approach in government be to securing investment in public services?

## Health

UNISON's priorities for a new vision for Labour on health:

- An emphasis on real clinical or lifestyle choices rather than consumerism and market-making.
- Promoting and defending Labour success stories, such as NHS Direct, Agenda for Change and NICE.
- Restating that the NHS should be the preferred provider of services.
- Investigating and promoting the benefits of "insourcing" (bringing outsourced services back in-house to boost patient care and save money).
- A commitment to halt the privatisation of hospital management through Hinchingsbrooke-style franchising arrangements.
- Early engagement around reconfigurations – building up the clinical case for change, but involving staff, patients and the public far earlier in the process to build consensus.
- Personalisation that emphasises person-centred care rather than budget-dependent care (ie. personalisation without personal budgets).
- Where social enterprises are used, ensure they are genuinely "social" and bottom-up enterprises with staff support and engagement, rather than top-down initiatives.
- A strong commitment to safe staffing levels.
- Integrated care that focuses on a genuine desire to join-up health and social care services to benefit patients and service users, rather than the government's fig leaf for privatisation and the platitudes of much of the health commentariat.
- Related to this, go further by investigating the options for bringing the National Health Service together with a National Care Service.

### Questions

It is welcome that Labour have committed to repealing the Health and Social Care Act, but what do the Party intend to replace it with?

Will Labour commit to blocking any further private franchising of hospitals, as with Hinchingsbrooke Hospital being taken over by Circle, and will the Party commit to doing all it can to reverse such takeovers?

Is Labour committed to defending Agenda for Change as the most sustainable and fairest pay system for the NHS, and therefore to resisting regional/local pay?

## Education and Skills

The best quality early years education is found in Sure Start and school nurseries, which regularly perform best in Ofsted inspections compared to other providers. The current private sector nursery market has failed with over a third of providers failing to make a profit. The last Labour Government began a programme of improving qualifications in the workforce, introducing the Early Years Professional Status; we are encouraged by early evidence that suggests that EYPs have an impact in those workplaces where they are correctly used. Therefore investment in Sure Start and school nurseries and/or in improving qualifications for early years professionals and ensuring that private nurseries use them will have the best effect on quality.

Governance is key in schools. Yet once more the government focuses on process. Recent government evidence shows that the size of a school governing body does not necessarily have an effect on the quality of a school. Yet the government has recommended smaller school governing bodies using a business model as a basis. UNISON believes that schools and their parents should be able to choose their preferred model, rather than being forced to accept the one size fits all business model currently being pushed.

UNISON believes that central government should set overall strategic frameworks and be able to intervene as necessary; schools should focus on the direct delivery of education; and issues such as admission codes, support services, capital allocations, school improvement and admissions should be a second tier responsibility.

This government has abolished the EMA and hiked up HE fees – this makes HE appear daunting to poorer students who do not view impending debt lightly. UNISON would prefer that both HE and FE were free at the point of access.

We are concerned about the development of a two-tier, marketised HE system, with fees at a level which will discourage participation. We also believe that whilst FE provides a valuable role in delivering some areas of HE, such as foundation degrees, academic and support services in FE such as libraries are poorly resourced compared to HE.

### Questions

UNISON worked closely with the last Government to establish the Schools Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) which has been abolished by the Coalition Government, which also withdrew all national funding for training for support staff. Will you re-commit to a national pay and conditions framework for school support staff and to their continuous professional development?

The destruction of the Connexions service by the Coalition has decimated careers advice. What will Labour do to rebuild Careers Information and Guidance services?

Research shows that Labour's free school meals pilot projects had very positive outcomes for children's health and education. Will Labour in Government extend the provision of free school meals?

## **Crime, Justice, Citizenship and Equalities**

### **Policing**

Labour's policy consultation document fails to reflect the existence of police staff: It refers only to the loss of 16,000 police officers. It should say instead that 35,000 jobs are being cut from the police workforce. Protecting frontline policing sounds good, but without the middle and back offices, the front line cannot work. The Party should commit to continue the workforce modernisation it undertook whilst in power with the introduction of PCSOs and other designated police staff posts which allowed more police officers to be deployed to the front line.

Priorities for Labour Police and Crime Commissioners:

- Oppose the Tory cuts to policing
- Support UNISON's 'Stop Police Privatisation' Campaign
- Commit to protect Neighbourhood Policing and the 16,000 strong PCSO workforce
- Progress workforce modernisation to ensure the most effective use of police resources
- Commit to ensure equality outcomes for the 60% of the police staff workforce who are female
- Ensure that the police service continues its work to become a diverse and tolerant workplace, encouraging the best talent from all sections of the community to apply
- Labour should value the Probation Service and the work carried out by public Probation Trusts

Labour should recognise the futility of expensive and ineffective short-term prison sentences and divert funding for the incarceration of low-risk offenders into community sentences overseen by a public probation service.

### **Equalities**

The watering down of the Equality Act is proceeding apace, with recent announcements that even the public sector equality duty itself is now to be subject to review, the repeal of the socio-economic duty and an end to the employment tribunal questionnaire procedures for discrimination and equal pay cases.

### **Questions**

Will Labour oppose police privatisation?

Will Labour restore the Equality Act as it intended at the first opportunity?

What are the next stages in building Labour's disability rights agenda to build on the positive aspects from the Paralympics?



## **Sustainable Communities**

### **Housing**

Key suggestions for Labour:

- A credit easing / quantitative easing scheme, whereby the Bank of England buy bonds from social housing providers and the income is used to finance new affordable homes
- Speeding up and simplifying the release of public sector land for the development of affordable homes (based on a mix of Community Land Trusts, intermediate and social rent)
- HM Treasury and all other relevant government departments recognising the significant multiplier in construction and mainstream housing provision in the UK's policies for economic growth and recovery
- Adapting the NewBuy scheme to all parts of the owner/occupier market
- Creation of a new co-operative housing tenure in law
- Support the development of mutual retirement housing, and provide greater help to older households to move into more suitable homes when they no longer require larger family homes
- Adopt the General Government Financial Deficit (GGFD) approach to accounting in line with other European countries. This would provide far greater freedom for local authorities to raise revenue and facilitate a new wave of building quality council housing
- Revisiting and updating the introduction of an 'investment allowance' to provide a revenue stream to support prudential borrowing for the construction of new public housing.

### **Local Government**

UNISON strongly believes that the current government's reform agenda will have an increasingly detrimental effect on service quality, the provision of decent jobs in our communities and the values that underpin public services.

The localism act and the open public services white paper both pave the way for more privatisation, fragmentation of services and too often create a race to the bottom in terms of service provision and the terms and conditions of public service workers.

### **Transport**

Funding and legal barriers mean Quality Bus Contracts are still very difficult for local authorities to implement. We recommend that a future Labour government take a more proactive approach to overcoming obstacles and enabling transport authorities to ensure the bus services our communities need are delivered.

We also believe that the cuts to the financial support provided to bus services need to be reversed.

## **Low Carbon Economy**

The transition to a low carbon economy has to be allied to an active industrial policy and the decent jobs agenda. Essential components of such an approach should be a state investment bank, and a comprehensive package around skills development and reform of the energy market. UNISON also supports feed in tariffs that support community scale renewable schemes. UNISON supports the reinstatement of the Warmfront scheme, a clear strategy on tackling fuel poverty, and a more systematic, community led, approach to domestic energy efficiency, which again can also help to generate employment. UNISON has previously called for energy tariff reform, to reverse the current system of paying more for initial units of power consumed. A 'reverse block tariff' could incentivise low carbon lifestyles by rewarding lower levels of consumption with a cheaper rate.

## **Questions**

Will you commit to a major house-building programme, and how will you make this happen?

There is growing concern about poor-quality landlords in the fast-growing private-rented sector. What will Labour do to protect vulnerable tenants?

Many Local Government staff remain poorly-paid and have suffered a lengthy pay-freeze. What is Labour's offer to local government workers?

How will Labour improve local bus services?

UNISON members are suffering from rapidly-rising fuel bills. How will Labour tackle fuel poverty, and what can be done to protect consumers against greedy energy companies?

## **Britain in the World**

### **Key points:**

Labour should support the campaign for a Financial Transactions Tax – without imposing pre-conditions about which other countries should support its introduction

Labour should base its development programme on economic and social justice, not charity  
UNISON urges the Labour Party to work to outlaw tax havens

Labour should campaign for the ratification of the ILO domestic workers convention and the proper worldwide implementation of basic ILO conventions on the freedom of association and collective bargaining

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.

### **European Union**

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. 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, and in particular collective bargaining and collective agreements, from being undermined by internal market legislation.

### **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. 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.

### **Questions**

Will Labour support a Financial Transactions Tax?

How will Labour promote a Social Europe within the European Union?

