

Churches Update

News from the Labour Party

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Labour backs Archbishop's concerns

Ed Miliband says Rowan Williams "right" to speak out about of Government reforms

Ed Miliband, the Leader of the Labour Party, has publicly welcomed concerns voiced by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, about a number of policies being pursued by the Tory-led Government. Ed said that the Archbishop's intervention had *"raised serious and formidable questions about the morality of the Government's reforms."*

The Archbishop's comments came in an article he wrote for the New Statesman in June, and provoked a widespread political debate. Dr Williams expressed his fears that the Conservatives' "Big Society" agenda could become a political cover for government cuts. He wrote, *"The widespread suspicion that this has been done for opportunistic or money-saving reasons allows many to dismiss what there is of a programme for 'big society' initiatives; even the term has fast become painfully stale."*

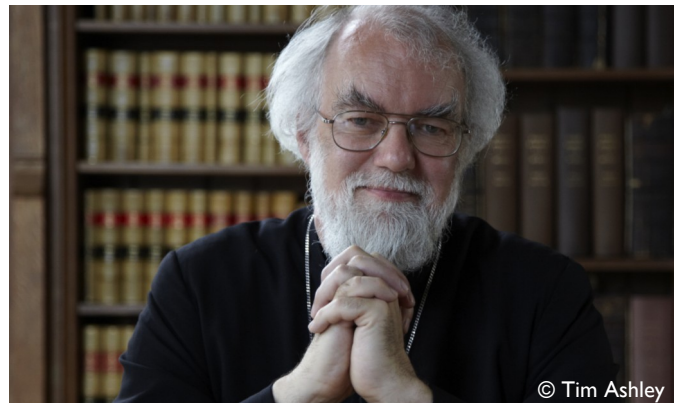
Dr Williams also identified the *"bafflement and indignation"* felt by many towards flagship government policies, such as its education reforms and its reorganisation of the National Health Service.

"Britain's churches are at the forefront of many communities, and they will be among the first to see the consequences of Government policies"
Ed Miliband

comments came as Liam Byrne MP completed a preliminary report for the party's policy review consultation—a process which received over 2,000 submissions from members of the public.

Dr Williams is not the only church leader to publicly question the policies being pursued by the Tory-led Government. In a letter to the Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, similar concerns were voiced by the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols. Nichols expressed anxiety over the Government's welfare policies and urged it to provide

However, he didn't confine his criticisms to the Coalition and challenged those opposed to the reforms to provide *"a full and robust account of what the left would do differently."* The Archbishop's



assurances that poorer families would not suffer disproportionately.

Labour's leader, Ed Miliband, rejected the argument that church leaders should stay out of politics. *"Britain's churches are at the forefront of many communities, and they will be among the first to see the consequences of government policies. Where they believe the Government has failed to stand up for the most vulnerable, it is quite right for them to speak out. The Government would be foolish to dismiss what they have said."* Ed also welcomed many of Dr Williams' specific criticisms of the Coalition: *"The Archbishop is right to question the morality and legitimacy of some of the Government's reforms, such as its badly managed top-down reorganisation of the NHS."*

Ed's comments were reinforced by Andy Burnham, Labour's Education Secretary who said: *"Dr Williams has captured the anxiety that voters are feeling, namely that this Tory-led Government are following through with ill-thought out reforms of our public services."* Meanwhile, Andy Flannagan, the Director of the Christian Socialist Movement, said: *"Dr Williams spoke from the perspective of the church, which is embedded in communities across the land and active in helping build and support those communities. When the leader of such a well-placed organisation expresses concern about the risks to the poor from government policies, the Government needs to listen."*

An important moral voice on politics

A message from Stephen Timms MP, Labour's Faith Envoy



In the opening lines of his article for the *New Statesman*, Rowan Williams commented that he hoped to “spar[k] a livelier debate”. If the following day's newspapers are anything to go by, he certainly succeeded!

Some of the criticisms made against the Archbishop were very unfair. A number of Conservative MPs were extremely unhappy that he criticised the Government at all. One Tory backbencher was even quoted as saying that the Archbishop should stop “shouting” at the Government like a noisy protester in Parliament Square. The truth is—as many of us have known for many years—the Church of England is very far from its popular caricature as “the Conservative Party at prayer”.

In fact, political interventions by Archbishops are nothing new. Rowan Williams himself criticised the previous Labour Government, of which I was a member. He was outspoken about the Iraq war and the Equality Bill. His predecessors, George Carey and Robert Runcie, were not afraid to speak out against

governments whilst they were in Lambeth Palace. Some say that the modern welfare state—perhaps Labour's greatest ever achievement—owes much to the efforts of wartime Archbishop William Temple.

Successive governments have benefitted from the interventions of the Church, supportive or otherwise, for many years. Robert Runcie's report, *'Faith in the City'* challenged the traditional thinking surrounding problems facing urban areas such as poverty, unemployment and crime. Likewise, the churches' report *'Unemployment and the Future of Work'* provided a broad based call for action to which the Government responded.

Rowan Williams' interventions—and those of the Archbishop of Westminster—have raised significant concerns about Government policy. But as leaders and people who are appointed to speak up for those who cannot speak themselves, they are doing the right thing by speaking out.

News in brief

Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Act

Parliament has passed an order to make The Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Act permanent. The Act, was originally passed in April 2010 despite opposition from some Conservatives. The law brings to an end the practice of 'Vulture Funds' where investment companies buy up the defaulted debts of the world's poorest countries. The Labour MP who brought forward the legislation, Andrew Gwynne, said: “*Vulture Funds are completely unjust and it is to the credit of this Parliament that we have finally managed to make this law permanent.*”

Vernon Coaker praises church response to riots

Labour's Shadow Policing Secretary, Vernon Coaker MP, has welcomed the contribution made by church communities in the aftermath of the riots in England. Many churches provided practical support to their communities by helping to clear the streets, or visiting the families of those directly affected. Prayer vigils were also held across the country, and on Twitter the hash tag #prayforLondon trended worldwide. Speaking to Churches Update, Vernon said: “*Churches are often rooted in the areas which they serve so it was no surprise to see many of them being so quick to react. I hope they can continue to help in the coming months as our communities are rebuilt.*”

Government urged to do more to help charities

Figures obtained through Freedom of Information releases have revealed that over 2,000 charities across the country are having their funding slashed or completely withdrawn by local authorities. Harriet Harman, Labour's Deputy Leader, has demanded that the Government complete a full review of the impact the cuts are having on the third sector. Speaking to Churches Update, Harriet said: “*This survey shows the impact on charities up and down the country of cuts which go too far and too fast. We're challenging the Government to do a review now before it's too late.*”

Ed Miliband praises CSM at 50th Birthday

Ed Miliband has congratulated the Christian Socialist Movement for playing a vital role in the Labour Party's history. His comments came as he attended the Movement's 50th anniversary in London. In Ed's address to an audience of CSM supporters, he said: “*The CSM was at the forefront of new methods of political engagement.*” Ed suggested that Labour's commitment to ethical policies is likely to give CSM an even greater role in Labour's future. The evening also included contributions from CSM Director, Andy Flannagan and Ann Pettifor, Executive director of Advocacy International. To read a full report of the evening, please visit: www.thecsm.org.uk.

Labour rallies against cuts to legal aid

The Tory-led Government has announced changes to how civil legal aid is to be given out in England and Wales. The reforms form part of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill, which was presented to Parliament earlier this year.

It is estimated that the cuts to Legal Aid, which total £350m, will mean that nearly half a million legal and welfare advice cases per year will no longer qualify for assistance. Cases affected will include those relating to welfare, employment, family breakdown and debt. The plans come against the background of substantial cuts to local authority budgets.

Charities, judges and politicians have warned that the reforms will have serious implications for justice and damage the public's access to it as many people find it difficult to obtain legal advice. There are also worries that the voluntary sector and pro bono work does not have sufficient capacity to fill the gap left by the cuts.

Gillian Guy, of Citizen's Advice, said: "These cuts will



A message from Ben Bradshaw MP

"The Government's own impact assessment has demonstrated that those who rely most heavily on Legal Aid are the very poorest and most disadvantaged within our society, yet they have still pushed forward with these cuts. Those who depend on Legal Aid do so for issues such as housing, debt and benefits disputes.

"Major advice services have warned that the Government's plans could create 'advice deserts' in the poorest parts of the country. Justice should be for all, not simply those who can afford it."

leave hundreds of thousands with nowhere to turn for help. Serious cases of family breakdown, unfair dismissal and refusal of benefits will simply get worse."

Conference 2011 diary

Sunday 25 September

► The Conference Sunday Church Service

Tearfund and World Vision, 11:30am
Liverpool Parish Church, L2 8TZ

► CSM's Conference Reception

CSM, 12:30pm
Liverpool Parish Church, L2 8TZ

► "Those who show up!"

CSM, 6:30pm
Inspiration and training for Christians exploring political engagement
Andy Flannagan, Susan Elan Jones MP
St James in the City Church, L8 1UR

Monday 26 September

► Reaping what we sow? The impact of the UK arms trade

CSM and Campaign Against Arms Trade 1:00pm
Helen Goodman MP, Symon Hill (Ekklesia), Alan Storkey (Theologian and Economist)
Friends' Meeting House, 22 School Lane, L1 3BT

► Annual Faith Reception—Launch of the Labour Faith Network

6.00pm
Hall 3B, ACC Convention Centre

Tuesday 27 September

► "Persecuted Prayer" A Prayer breakfast for the persecuted Church

CSM, Free Church Leaders, Release International Housing 8:00am
Gavin Shuker MP, Andy Dipper (CEO, Release International), Xiqu (Bob) Fu (President, China Aid Association)
Friends' Meeting House, 22 School Lane, L1 3BT

► Will religious freedom survive the Arab Spring?

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 1:00pm
Douglas Alexander MP, Stephen Timms MP, Bishop Angaelos (Coptic Orthodox Church Leader), Nazila Ghanea (Professor of Human Rights, University of Oxford)
Friends' Meeting House, 22 School Lane, L1 3BT

Wednesday 28 September

► Credo and Credit—Relational economics for the street and the City

Co-operative Party, 7:30pm
Stella Creasy MP, Ann Pettifor (Advocacy International), Stephen Beer (CSM), Michael Stephenson (General Secretary, Co-operative Party)
Friends' Meeting House, 22 School Lane, L1 3BT



Tackling overseas bribery and corruption

In April 2010, Labour's landmark Bribery Act was passed with cross-party support. Here, writing for *Churches Update*, Labour's Shadow Solicitor General, Catherine McKinnell MP, talks about her work in pushing implementation of the Act through Parliament.

The Bribery Act enables the UK to finally comply with the OECD's Anti-Bribery Convention and tackle the devastating effects of bribery and corruption on developing economies and their citizens. For the first time, a corporate offence has been created that could result in unlimited fines for UK companies found guilty of failing to prevent bribery by their employees or others acting on their behalf.

I have taken a strong interest in the implementation of this Act since being elected to Parliament in last May. I am passionate about the UK maintaining its leading role in supporting developing countries, and, as Shadow Solicitor General I was responsible for highlighting concerns about enforcement of the Act. At one stage the Government was looking to split the functions of the Serious Fraud Office (SFO), making effective implementation highly unlikely. And worse, over the past year it also looked as if the Government might abandon the legislation as a result of strong lobbying by the business community.

The Act was originally intended to come into force in October 2010. This date was twice postponed and the Government's reticence became clearer by the day. However, significant pressure from Opposition MPs and NGOs including Global Witness, Tearfund, CAFOD and Christian Aid, ensured that the Justice Secretary could not shirk the UK's responsibilities - he finally confirmed that the Act would come into force on 1st July 2011.

So far, so good? Well, no. On announcing that this Labour legislation would finally be implemented, the Government produced guidance for business on the Act. This led to concerns from development NGOs that it had been watered down, with potential loopholes created for subsidiaries, joint

ventures and companies that are registered with the London Stock Exchange but not based in the UK. Time will tell whether this guidance will actually hinder the effective implementation of the Act or whether it was merely part of an attempt to quell the fears of members of the business community.

Much more promising has been the determination of the SFO's Director, Richard Alderman, to ensure that the Act is fully and 'aggressively' implemented. However, the SFO has just come through a period of great uncertainty about its future under the Coalition which saw several key and highly-experienced staff leave in recent months. What's more, like every other part of the public sector, the SFO is facing swingeing budget cuts over the next four years which will place ever greater pressure on ever limited resources.

The campaign does not stop here. I will keep pressing Ministers to ensure that the SFO has the capacity and funding it requires to properly and vigorously implement this crucial Labour legislation, which has the potential to tackle the root causes of poverty overseas.



We want to hear from you

More than ever before, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in our churches. We realise that many of you cannot commit to supporting any particular political party. Even so, we are interested to hear what you have to say, and to help you to continue your valuable work across the country.

There are a few things you can do to help us in this work.

- 1. Tell your friends about this newsletter.** We want to be in dialogue with as many people of faith as possible. Encourage others to join our mailing list at www.labour.org.uk/faith.
- 2. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leaders if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so that others in your church can read about what Labour is doing.
- 3. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Vice Chair for Faith Groups), c/o The Labour Party, 39 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0HA. Alternatively, email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.

To join the Labour Party visit www.labour.org.uk/join or telephone us on 08705 900 200.