

Churches Update

News from the Labour Party

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Labour warns over relaxing Sunday trading laws

Shadow Business Secretary, Chuka Umunna, urges government to Keep Sundays Special

Labour MP Chuka Umunna, pictured right, has attacked the government after senior Conservatives openly suggested that Sunday trading hours should be permanently extended.

A temporary extension to Sunday trading hours in England and Wales was introduced by the Government for the duration of the Olympic and Paralympic games earlier this year. However, No 10 has confirmed that ministers are looking at making the change permanent. Eric Pickles, the Communities Secretary, said that an extension should be “looked at.”

Speaking to Churches Update, Chuka said: “Any extension to Sunday trading hours on a permanent basis will break up the consensus that was carefully put together after proper consultation over a long period of time of businesses, unions, churches and other organisations.” Recognising the importance of Sundays to families and churches across the country, he said: “It will also mean the end of Sundays being special and put pressure on families with 24 hour working across all of the retail sector seven days a week. I hope the current restrictions will stay in place to protect families, employees, small businesses and



the rights of people of faith, and to maintain at least some distinctiveness for Sunday.”

Chuka’s comments received support from Justin King, Chief Executive of Sainsbury’s who warned a permanent extension to Sunday trading hours was “not a magic answer to economic regeneration.” King was writing in a letter to the Sunday Telegraph, in which the Church of England and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and the Association of Convenience Stores also expressed concern about the step. A consultation last year also concluded that most people do not want longer trading hours on a Sunday.

Churches help tackle the unemployment crisis

Shadow Employment Minister praises the work of churches in helping jobless into work

The Labour Party Faith Envoy and Shadow Employment Minister Stephen Timms MP has praised the network of church-based job clubs around the UK who provide support to those seeking employment. Stephen’s comments came after he attended the first anniversary of a job club at Glenorchy United Reformed Church in Exmouth, Devon. He earlier visited a Job Club at Axminster Methodist Church.

Data recently released by the Office of National Statistics showed that the headline rate of unemployment had risen to 8.1% since the Tory-led government came to power. Stephen was keen to

commend the work of churches in helping to combat the unemployment crisis: “It is against the backdrop of severe unemployment that I warmly welcome the commitment of churches – here and around the country – to help meet the challenge of getting people back into work. Of course, that commitment isn’t new. It was William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, who set up Britain’s first employment exchange.”

“Church congregations can offer networks of mentors and contacts which can make a huge difference. We are not talking about simple acts of charity, but about committed and personal support.”

Jim Dobbin MP : “RE must be a priority”

Labour MP, Jim Dobbin, has called on the Government for RE to be treated as a “priority” subject. Last year, the government excluded RE from the English Baccalaureate, despite concerns from the Education Select Committee, teaching unions and religious groups.

Speaking to *Churches Update*, Jim, pictured right, said: “It is crucial that young people are taught religious education as a priority subject in our schools.” Jim’s comments came after the launch of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Religious Education. The Group, which is supported by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, will provide a medium through which MPs can focus on safeguarding the provision of RE in schools.

Speaking at the launch, John Keast, Chair of the REC, cited a YouGov poll which showed that 63 percent of 18–24 year olds agreed that RE was relevant and should be taught in schools. Hannah, a student present at the launch, agreed saying: “RE is eternally relevant. It focuses on questions that humans have asked each other and themselves for as long as there’s been language, and those



questions are never going to go away.”

Jim, who last year co-sponsored an EDM calling on the government to include RE as a core subject in the English Baccalaureate, agreed with Hannah: “The literature, music, arts, architecture and history are all elements of our faith story that help us to understand and appreciate our faiths and culture. We would be selling our children short if we failed to maintain this vital subject within the mainstream curriculum.”

For more information about the APPG, please visit: <http://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org>.

News in brief

Stephen Timms appointed Chair of CSM

Stephen Timms MP has taken over as Chair of the Christian Socialist Movement. He succeeds his colleague Alun Michael MP who decided to step down after 5 years at the helm. Speaking after his appointment was announced, Stephen said: “I am absolutely delighted to be taking up the position of Chair of CSM. I’d like to thank Alun Michael for his enormous contribution to CSM over the last five years, and for his support of my Chairmanship. CSM has an important role as a voice for Christians on the left of politics, and in shaping the attitudes and values of the Labour Party.”

Blair: “Christians should speak up and speak out”

Tony Blair has insisted that Christians should not be afraid to speak in public about faith. The former Prime minister told an audience in Westminster that “It is important that we are prepared to speak up and speak out from the position of faith and say we are not afraid to say this is what we believe and why we believe it.” Tony was appearing alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, to discuss the role of religion in public life. The event was the latest in the series of high-profile Westminster Faith Debates in London, organised by the former Labour MP, Charles Clarke.

Ed Miliband criticises plans for more casinos

Leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband MP, has criticised a report by the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, which advocated further liberalisation of gambling laws. Following its publication, Ed said: “I was sceptical about supercasinos originally and I’m sceptical about introducing lots more casinos as a route to economic development. There are far better ways to encourage economic growth such as the introduction of a British investment bank which would ensure money is constructively diverted to areas which need it most.”

Transforming Capitalism

The Christian Socialist Movement has held its annual Tawney Dialogue, this year entitled “Transforming Capitalism: putting relationships back into economics.” On the panel were Labour’s Shadow Chief Secretary, Rachel Reeves MP, Former Treasury Minister, Lord Myners, and Revd Dr John Hughes, Chaplain of Jesus College, Cambridge. Rachel told the audience: “The need for a better capitalism goes to something deeper than the technical economic arguments... It’s also a moral argument about the kind of lives we lead, and the kind of society we want to be a part of—the relationships that are the real fabric of our economy.”

Labour MPs welcome u-turn on “church tax”

Labour MPs have welcomed an announcement by the Chancellor, George Osborne, that the government will offer a £30m fund for alterations and repairs to the Church of England’s 12,500 listed buildings. The package is designed to offset a change in tax duty that would have seen churches pay a VAT rate of 20% on church alterations.

A number of Labour MP’s wrote to the Chancellor after the Budget, in May lobbying him to keep renovations on listed buildings, such as churches, exempt from VAT. More than 18,000 people signed a Downing Street petition against the changes which the Church of England estimated would cost parishes £20 million a year collectively. An Early Day Motion, which urged the Government to reconsider the “counter-productive policy” was tabled by the Labour MP David Anderson and received strong support from his colleagues.

Church groups had been quick to criticise the Chancellor after it was revealed that the VAT raise would affect projects that had already begun. One

such example was Wakefield Cathedral who would have had to have found an extra £20,000 to complete work that had already been started

Speaking after the announcement, Labour’s Deputy Leader, Harriet Harman, right, said: “*This Government’s u-turn is a victory for the campaign by churches and local communities against a wrong-headed proposal in George Osborne’s shambolic Budget.*”



Harriet is keen to push the government further: “*The changes won’t help the National Trust, all the museums, galleries, theatres, libraries and community centres that are in listed buildings, and which are important for heritage, tourism and local communities.*”

Anne Sloman, Chair of the Church Buildings Council said, “*We are grateful to parishes up and down the land who have lobbied so hard since the Budget to bring this point home to the government.*”

Conference 2012 diary

Sunday 30 September

► **10.45 a.m: The Conference Church Service**
“Good News to the Poor—the Jesus Agenda” featuring Joel Edwards from the Micah Challenge and music from Andy Flannagan.
 St Ann’s Church, St Ann Street, Manchester, M2 7LF

► **12 noon: CSM’s Conference Reception**
 St Ann’s Courtyard (directly following the service)

► **6:00 p.m: Dragon’s Policy Den**
An Opportunity for young people and students to present their policy ideas to a panel including David Lammy MP and Sharon Hodgson MP
 The Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, M1 6DD

Monday 1 October

► **1.00 p.m: Human rights and religious liberty—partners not opponents?**
Speakers include Kerry McCarthy MP, Fawzi Khalil and Stephen Rand (Advocacy Director, Open Doors)
 Friends’ Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, M2 5NS

► **5.45 p.m: Annual Faith Reception**
Celebrating the role that faith plays for many of our members and communities. Hosted by Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP with Rt Hon Jim Murphy MP and Faith in Leadership
 The Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, M1 6DD

► **7.45 p.m: Make Food Poverty History**
 Speakers include
Mary Creagh MP, Chris Mould (Director, Foodbank Network) and Lindsay Boswell (CEO, Fareshare)
 The Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, M1 6DD

► **10.00 p.m: Andy Flannagan in concert—Drowning in the Shallow**
CSM Director Andy Flannagan plays from his new album “Drowning in the Shallow” which entered the iTunes singer-songwriter chart at number 6.
 The Deansgate Bar, 321 Deansgate, M3 4LQ

Tuesday 2 October

► **8.00 a.m: Can Growth be Green?**
CSM’S prayer breakfast with Gavin Shuker MP and David Hanson MP
 Friends’ Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, M2 5NS

► **7.30 pm: Put your money where your mouth is—Do our lifestyles match our policies?**
 Co-operative Party, 7:30pm
Speakers include Stella Creasy MP, Phil Holdsworth (Christians Against Poverty), Stephen Beer (CSM) and Karin Christiansen (The Cooperative Party)
 Friends’ Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, M2 5NS



Mary Creagh MP praises work of foodbanks

Mary Creagh is the Member of Parliament for Wakefield, She is currently the Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Here, speaking to Churches Update Mary talks about her work with Foodbanks.

“In Wakefield, we have nearly 10,000 people who are on the dole. There is a cost of living crisis spreading across our towns and cities. Britain is the seventh richest nation in the world, yet children are going to bed hungry at night because their parents can't afford to put food on the table.

“In recent months, I have visited food banks run by charities like the Trussell Trust and FareShare across the country. Last year the Trussell Trust fed 130,000 people, more than double the year before, and opened two new foodbanks every week. Another leading food charity, FareShare, feeds 35,000 people a day by recycling food “waste” from supermarkets and the food industry to charities working with the vulnerable.

“I have spoken to volunteers who distribute food to people in crisis, in Essex, Lancashire, Bradford, Birmingham, Weymouth and London. In many of these places, the common factor are the local church volunteers working together to help families in need. On every visit, the message is clear: the situation is getting worse.

“Nowadays food banks are not just for the homeless, or people with drug and alcohol problems. The biggest demand is from families facing benefits delays, struggling with debt, unemployment and reduced working hours. One mum at a food bank in Bradford described shouting at her children when they asked her for a bit of jam for their bread at tea-time:



Mary at a local Foodbank with Labour leader, Ed Miliband MP

‘I realised then that I needed to get help’ she said, ‘but I sobbed my heart out when I came home with the bags from the foodbank.’

“In October I will be joining thousands of other volunteers taking part in the Million Meals appeal. We will be outside supermarket branches across the country to speak to shoppers and encourage them to make a donation from their weekly shop. Real change is about policy and action: campaigning for the right policies but also being involved in community action. You can volunteer to help with the Million Meals appeal as well at www.fareshare.org.uk.

“The reality of mums like the lady I met, unable to feed their children, shows how bad the squeeze on living standards has got under this Government. David Cameron says ‘we’re all in this together’ yet his Budget will leave families £511 a year worse off, while cutting taxes for millionaires. Britain’s families deserve better than this.”

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 (Faith Envoy), c/o The Labour Party, 1 Brewers Green, London, SW1H 0RH. Alternatively, email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.

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