

# Churches Update

## News from the Labour Party

w: labour.org.uk/faith Issue 17, 2013



## Archbishop sounds alarm over welfare changes

### Archbishop Welby criticises government for not protecting children and families

New Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has spelt out his concerns about changes to the benefit system. The Archbishop warned the proposed changes could drive children and families into poverty.

Liam Byrne MP, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, has welcomed Archbishop Welby's comments. They followed an open letter signed by twenty-three Church of England bishops which criticised plans to limit rises in working-age benefits and tax credits to 1 per cent for three years. The letter called on the government to "protect" children and families.

Speaking after the letter was published by the Sunday Telegraph, Archbishop Welby said: "Politicians have a clear choice. By protecting children from the effects of this bill, they can help fulfil their commitment to end child poverty." He continued: "When times are hard, that duty should be felt more than ever, not disappear or diminish. These changes will mean it is children and families who will pay the price for high inflation, rather than the government."

Commenting on the warnings by the Bishops and



Archbishop Welby, Liam said: "This Government's Strivers Tax is going to hit working families hard on the same day as they hand millionaires a whopping great tax cut. In fact, the Bishops are totally right that this strivers tax is going to hit one in three households - just as working people try to deal with an average pay cut of £1,200 a year since the election."

"David Cameron should be trying to help working families - not kick them when they're down. That's why Labour will strongly oppose this strivers tax in the Lords just as we did in the Commons."

## A new commitment to the world's poorest

Labour MP and Shadow International Development Secretary, Ivan Lewis, has set out a radical new agenda for international development at a meeting hosted by aid charity CAFOD.

Ivan proposed that the existing Millennium Development Goals should be replaced in 2015 by a new "Social Contract without Borders" focusing on the poorest 20% in every country and the bottom billion in fragile states. He also suggested a new specific objective on children and young people and reiterated Labour's commitment to focus on women's rights and empowerment.

During his speech, Ivan said any new framework needs to be "...values led [and] rooted in social justice." He later stressed the importance that targets

need to be focussed on reducing inequality and promoting sustainable growth with "good governance practiced by all development actors."

Speaking afterwards, Ivan said: "I am proud that Labour changed the world on international development. There is much more work to be done. Our generation can and should be the generation which ends absolute poverty, reduces inequality and safeguards the planet. The commitments we make in 2015 will determine whether we are up to the scale of the challenge."

Labour's Shadow DFID team circulate a fortnightly newsletter keeping people informed of their work in Parliament. To subscribe to the newsletter, email: shadowdfidteam@gmail.com.

## Shadow minister: “Churches can work with us”

Shadow Communities Secretary, Hilary Benn MP, has called on churches to join in campaigning against the Government's programme of public sector cuts. His comments followed remarks by the Bishop of Liverpool, The Rt Reverend James Jones, who warned the Government that some of Britain's major cities risk “atrophy and death”.

The Bishop was speaking at a meeting of council and faith leaders from Manchester, Bristol, Birmingham and Sheffield. His comments were supported by the Mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, who described how his city was being asked to make cuts equivalent to £252 per person, whilst in more affluent areas of north Dorset, that figure stood at just £2.

Speaking to Churches Update, Hilary said: “*The unfair cuts made by this government are hitting the poorest areas hardest. A report by the Audit Commission found last year that the most deprived areas have seen*



*‘substantially greater reductions in government funding’ as a share of revenue expenditure than councils in less deprived areas.*

*“In standing up for fairness, I would invite churches to work with us against these cuts which will affect those on the lowest incomes the most and stand up for our communities.”*

## Valuing the work of faithful providers

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

I chair the 'Inquiry into Faith, Society and Politics' of the think tank Demos. The first part of the project, *Faithful Citizens*, was published in April last year. It found that people of faith were natural allies of those campaigning for progressive political causes.

In January, Demos published the second part, *Faithful Providers*. It examines faith group involvement in four public service areas: employment and training, services to young people, integration and cohesion, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation. It was based on a comprehensive review of previous research, and twenty case studies of faith-based providers. The report challenges the fears some have about involving faith groups in public services.

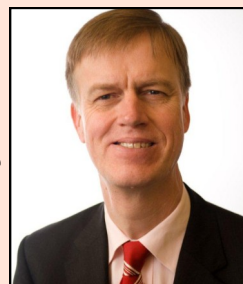
The late Christopher Hitchens, author of “*God Is Not Great: The Case Against Religion*” (Atlantic Books, 2007) was a vociferous and influential critic. Shortly before his death in 2011, Richard Dawkins interviewed him for the *New Statesman* at his home in the US. Hitchens said: “*I've never looked at some of the ground operations of these [faith-based] charities - apart from Mother Teresa - but they do involve a lot of proselytising, a lot of propaganda. They're not just giving out free stuff. They're doing work to recruit.*”

The Demos report found no evidence to support these fears. Rather, it found that faith groups were highly motivated and effective, instilling a “public

*service ethos”, and “often serve as the permanent and persistent pillars of community action within local communities.”* They were “*acutely aware of the need to be inclusive, keep religion ‘in the background’ and not abuse the power imbalance between service provider and user”.*

I hope the Demos report will encourage commissioners of public services to work with faith groups. Too often, local authorities – influenced by the Hitchens view – have been reluctant.

There are legitimate fears about the Tory-led government, with its ‘Big Society’ rhetoric, using faith providers to offload responsibilities which it should be shouldering, and to paper over its cuts. But faith-motivated service providers have a lot to offer. They are committed and passionate. They seek to reduce inequality, and to protect the most vulnerable. They can make a big contribution to achieving the social justice goals of a future Labour Government.



To view the report, visit:  
[www.demos.co.uk/publications/faithfulproviders](http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/faithfulproviders)

The previous report, *Faithful Citizens*, can be viewed at: [www.demos.co.uk/publications/faithfulcitizens](http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/faithfulcitizens)

## **Abbott: “British culture increasingly pornified”**

In a speech to the Fabian Women’s Network, Labour MP and Shadow Health Minister, Diane Abbott, warned that the “*pornification*” of British culture risks damaging future generations. Diane urged people in Britain to join a “*national conversation*” on how parents and teachers discuss sex and technology. Here, writing exclusively for Churches Update, Diane explains what changes are needed from parents, children and schools in Britain.

*“We need to start a national conversation between parents and their children about sex, pornography and technology. I think these are issues we must talk about and understand, not shy away from. Kids must not be shielded from the modern world. But we must let open-minded family values shine through in our society.”*

*“I believe that parents should be given information and support to educate their children about the issues. And we must make it easier for parents to block adult and age-restricted material across all media. And yet the government is continuing to reject this proposal to empower parents.”*



*“This pornified culture tells girls in particular that the most important quality they need is ‘sexiness’, and not cleverness, sportiness, application or ambition. We need to look at Statutory Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE). Sex education, must focus on preparing young people to form healthy, respectful, emotionally fulfilling relationships, and also deal with issues of self-esteem.”*

Diane is the Member of Parliament for Hackney. To read her speech in full, visit: [www.dianeabbott.org.uk](http://www.dianeabbott.org.uk).

## **News in brief**

### **Labour MPs react to election of Pope Francis**

Labour leader, Ed Miliband MP, has warmly welcomed the election of Pope Francis and wished him all the best as he begins his papacy. Jim Murphy MP, Labour’s Shadow Defence Secretary, added that the appointment was a “*lovely surprise*” and that Pope Francis’ “*decades of humility can help the Church through its challenges.*”

### **Labour MP leads human trafficking inquiry**

Gavin Shuker, Labour MP for Luton South, is leading a Parliamentary inquiry into whether the law on prostitution should be changed. Gavin chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade and will present the findings to the Home Secretary. Speaking after the launch, he said: “*The law fails to protect local communities from both antisocial behaviour, and women, who for a number of reasons end up selling sex to people who manipulate their vulnerability.*”

### **Labour criticises Government’s tax plans**

Ed Balls MP, Labour’s Shadow Chancellor, has criticised Government plans to cut tax credits to millions of working families. Ed said: “*David Cameron should cancel the £3 billion tax cut for the very richest, act now to kick-start our economy and help those on modest incomes who are feeling the squeeze.*”

### **MPs join delegation to Birmingham**

Labour MPs, Stephen Timms and Jim Dobbin, joined other members of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Faith and Society on a visit to Birmingham. As part of the visit, they attended a roundtable discussion with the city’s faith leaders, including the Anglican Bishop of Birmingham, David Urquhart, and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Birmingham, Archbishop Bernard Longley.

### **Labour criticises cuts to care system**

Liz Kendall MP, Labour’s Shadow Minister for Care and Older People, has criticised the Government after a report from the Care Quality Commission showed that a quarter of home care services in England are failing to meet quality and safety standards. Liz said: “*Growing numbers of vulnerable people are being denied the care they need and charged more for vital support because over £1.3 billion has been cut from local council budgets for older people’s social care under this Government.*”

### **Labour responds to homelessness figures**

Labour’s Shadow Housing Minister, Jack Dromey MP, has criticised the government after figures showed there has been a 31 per cent rise in homelessness since 2010. Jack said: “*The Government was warned its policies risked increasing homelessness and rough sleeping, but these warnings fell on deaf ears.*”



## David Lammy criticises betting industry

### Labour MP leads campaign against Fixed Odds Betting Terminals in bookmakers

David Lammy, the Labour Member of Parliament for Tottenham, has joined with Christian groups to criticise betting companies after new figures suggested they are preying on poorer communities.

Figures released by the Campaign for Fairer Gambling showed more than £5bn was gambled on high-speed, high-stakes gambling machines, known as Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) in 2012. FOBTs allow punters to make a maximum bet of £100 every 20 seconds, and offer prizes of up to £500 a go. They are the fastest and most seductive form of betting that can be legally done in local bookmakers and have been referred to as the “*crack cocaine of gambling*”.

In June 2012 a Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee published a report entitled ‘*The Gambling Act: A Bet Worth Taking?*’. It called on the Government to remove the cap on the number of FOBTs in betting shops, and grant local authorities the powers to set a limit of their own. Currently, bookmakers are limited to four machines per shop. Bookmakers often bypass the restriction by opening more branches in high streets – a practise known as “*clustering*”.

Earlier this year the Government responded to the DCMS Select Committee’s report. They decided not to lift the limit of four FOBTs per betting shop. They also chose not to reduce the high speed of play or maximum bet.

The Campaign for Fairer Gambling, which David supports, is leading the fight against FOBTs in their current form. They argue that these machines need to be changed so that the maximum bet is reduced to a couple of pounds and the time between play extended, so that the high risk, high speed element of the



machines is reduced. Christian groups have also raised concerns. Danny Webster from the Evangelical Alliance said: “*Gaming machines in betting shops cause a lot of damage to the wallets and welfare of gamblers.*”

Fairer Gambling has produced estimates – the Association of British Bookmakers have chosen not to release this information – on how much is gambled on FOBTs per constituency. In David’s constituency of Tottenham, there are thirty two betting shops in which £172 million was gambled on FOBTs.

Speaking to Churches Update, David said: “*The figures released by Fairer Gambling conclusively demonstrate that the gaming machines are targeted at some of the most deprived communities in the country. Just like the pay day loan companies, the betting industry is determined to profit from poverty.*”

He added: “*I am glad this is an issue on which the Labour Party can work with church communities.*”

## We want to hear from you

More than ever before, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from the churches. We realise that many will not support a particular political party. We are nevertheless keen to hear what you have to say. Labour recognises the immense contribution of the churches in communities 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](http://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](mailto:stephen@stephentimms.org.uk).

To join the Labour Party visit [www.labour.org.uk/join](http://www.labour.org.uk/join) or telephone us on 08705 900 200.