



Churches Update

Conference edition

LABOUR MP SEEKS TO END HOLIDAY HUNGER

Government urged to back Bill to stop children going hungry in school holidays

The Labour MP for Birkenhead, Frank Field, has tabled a Bill in Parliament which aims to end so-called 'holiday hunger'.

The Bill, which is supported by church leaders, calls on the government to give all councils the duty and resources to provide food and activities during the school holidays for children who would otherwise go hungry. Frank has urged ministers to fund the estimated £41m cost of providing free summer meals and activity clubs through the government's new 'sugar tax' levy.

Earlier this month 22 signatories from a wide range of organisations signed a letter published in *The Daily Telegraph*, arguing that the government should safeguard children's nutrition for the full 52 weeks a year, rather than only the 39 weeks in which they are at school.

Figures from the Trussell Trust food bank network show a significant rise in the number of food parcels being provided to children over the summer months, with 67,506 three-day emergency food supplies distributed in July and August 2016, compared with 63,094 in the previous months – an increase of more than 4,000. Just under half of those children were of primary school age, the charity's research showed.



Frank said he hoped the backing of more than 100 MPs would give the government the impetus to back the bill.

Writing in the Huffington Post, Frank said: "...If the prime minister were to pick up this bill and run with it...she would tackle overnight one of the great injustices afflicting children in this country – a widening of inequalities at school caused by a lack of food during the holidays...likewise she would immediately be cutting off one of the main supply routes to food banks."

One of the signatories, Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty said: "Holiday hunger threatens children across the country, and means the holidays are a time of hardship rather than enjoyment. The breadth of support for Government action is heartening, and we hope MPs from all parties will help to make the new legislation law."

TAWNEY DIALOGUE HELD IN WESTMINSTER

Annual Christians on the Left lecture discusses implications of leaving the European Union

Christians on the Left has held its annual Tawney Dialogue with contributions from Labour MP, Hilary Benn, and anti-debt campaigner, Anne Pettifor. They joined Andy Flanagan in discussing how fairness and social justice can be pursued in Britain after the country leaves the European Union.

Hilary, who is the Chair of the Select Committee for Leaving the European Union, reflected on what needed to be done to bring together communities which voted leave and remain. Picking up on the Archbishop of Canterbury's theme of 'good disagreement' Hilary said, *"Brexit is an example of us not disagreeing well. If we are to unite our divided country we have to answer the central question... 'How can we reconcile the need for cooperation for economic betterment with the innate thirst for self-determination?'"*

In response, Anne Pettifor, Director of PRIME, called for an end to blaming people who voted leave for the uncertainty, and instead suggested the real problems were caused by *"economists...and their friends in the world's*



financial elites."

The Director of Christians on the Left, Andy Flanagan, echoed Hilary's comments saying that Brexit has shown the existence of a *"cultural chasm"* and that this could only be bridged by expanding the number of Christians and churches engaging with local and national politics.

The annual Tawney Dialogue brings together Christians in the Labour Party to hear from politicians and thinkers on the left of British politics.

NEWLY ELECTED MPS WELCOMED TO PARLIAMENT

Stephen Beer, the political communications officer for Christians on the Left, has welcomed new Christian Labour MPs who won seats at the election earlier this year. Victories included that of Marsha de Cordova who unseated the Conservatives in Battersea.

Stephen said that their success could be linked to church membership, which helped to ground them among the electorate.

"They have been campaigning vigorously and really connecting with their communities... churchpeople understand, because there is a church in every community in this country."

"This is one of the things Christians on the Left have been talking about for a long time — connecting people in the Church to a political party and actually campaigning for policies that can change our society for the better."

ANDY FLANNAGAN TO STAND DOWN

Christians on the Left Director says the time has come to *"pass on the baton"*

Andy Flannagan has announced that he is to step down as Director of Christians on the Left.

In an email to members following New Wine, Andy said that it had been a privilege to lead Christians on the Left. He noted that the organisation had made the journey from extra-curricular church activity to more mainstream endeavours, such as making the case for a financial transaction tax, a policy which is now supported by the Labour frontbench.

Jonny Reynolds, Chair of Christians on the Left, praised Andy for what he had achieved during his time in charge. Speaking to Churches Update, he said: *"Thanks to Andy's efforts, Christians on the Left is now enjoying a higher profile in the church*



and getting to places it simply never got to before. He will be sorely missed."

Although he will be leaving Christians on the Left, Andy has assured members that he will still be *"...helping the cause wherever and whenever I can"* through his work with Christians in Politics.

CONFERENCE DIARY 2017

Sunday 24 September

9.15 a.m: Labour Conference Church Service
One Church, Florence Road, Brighton, BN1 6DL.

12.45 p.m: Why is a national budget not like a household budget? Includes practical workshop sessions and training to understand and communicate political ideas.
One Church, Florence Road, Brighton, BN1 6DL.

Monday 25 September

12.45 p.m: Pro-Choice, Pro-Life or Pro Conversation? (with Rachael Maskell MP and Mary Glendon MP)
St Paul's Church, West Street, Brighton, BN1 2RQ. In partnership with Labour Dignity.

4.00 p.m: Annual Faiths Reception

Tweed Room, Hall 7, Hilton Hotel.

Tuesday 26 September

8.00 a.m: Christians on the Left Prayer breakfast

St Paul's Church, West Street, Brighton, BN1 2RQ. In partnership with Methodist Relief and Development.

7.30 p.m: The Middle East: What hope for the next generation? (with Stephen Timms MP, Kate Green MP and Stephen Doughty MP)
St Paul's Church, West Street, Brighton, BN1 2RQ . In partnership with Open Doors.



ANDY FLANNAGAN

A message from Stephen Timms MP

I was delighted when my friend Andy Flannagan became Director of the then the Christian Socialist Movement nine years ago.

Under Andy's leadership, we have seen a name change and increased membership. Driven by Andy's unique brand of enthusiasm, the organisation is now an important voice for Christians on the left of politics. It has been crucial in building support within the churches for progressive policies and in helping to shape the values of the Labour Party.

I recall some of the conversations I had with Andy around the time of the name change. We felt the re-branding was necessary to win over a new generation of Christians. Andy was keen that CSM - soon to be Christians on the Left - would be a home to the growing number of young people whose starting point is faith in Christ, and who are dismayed by injustice and by the increasing poverty they see around them. His vision was realised.



As leader of Christians on the Left, Andy has encouraged those who believe in the Gospel to become more active in their communities. He has run training courses and leadership programmes to help them in their political journeys.

Andy has committed heart and soul to our movement over the past nine years, and given us a renewed vision of how Christians in the Labour Party can change Britain for the better. Thank you, Andy, for all you have given, and all the best for the future.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

More than ever, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in the churches. We realise that many will not commit to supporting any particular political party, and we respect that. But we are interested to hear what you have to say. 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. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Faith Envoy), c/o The Labour Party,, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QT; or email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.
- 3. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leader if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so others can read about what Labour is doing.