



Churches Update

April 2017

LABOUR CONCERNS AT USE OF FOODBANKS

Labour Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary blames punitive Government sanctions

Debbie Abrahams, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, has cited figures of those projected to use foodbanks this Easter as "deeply distressing".

Last year, Britain's largest foodbank operator, *The Trussell Trust*, handed out 40,622 food parcels, including 15,315 to children in the two weeks leading up to Easter. It is estimated that the figure will be even bigger this year.

Figures show that between last April and September, foodbank use rose slightly by an average of 0.03%. Volunteers are expecting a fresh surge of families needing food to see them through the Easter period.

Speaking about the figures, Debbie said: *"It is deeply distressing that 140,000 meals will need to be handed out by food banks this Easter to cover gaps in state support. We have seen a shocking rise of food bank use among families, many of whom will be locked out of social security support by Tory cuts and sanctions."*

"While the Government refuse to accept the facts, I've announced that Labour would scrap their punitive sanctions regime."



The Trussell Trust's network director, Adrian Curtis, echoed Debbie's comments. He said: *"This Easter holiday, Trussell Trust food banks will be working hard to provide emergency food, run holiday clubs, and above all give that crucial hope to families who are struggling to make ends meet during the holidays when the absence of free school meals can tip a family into crisis."*

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LABOUR LAUNCHES NEW FAITH INITIATIVE

Party seeks to further engagement with faith groups - both nationally, and locally

A new project which seeks to advance the discussion and engagement of faith communities in the UK will be launching on Monday 1 May.

The Faith in Labour initiative will become a hub for civil and strategic dialogue between the Labour Party and Britain's faith communities. Key figures from the worlds of religion and Labour Party will be exploring the trials, tribulations and contributions of faith to a range of challenges facing the Social Democratic left in the UK, and the wider world. The launch will take place at the Oasis Centre in Waterloo.

The Summit will start with Mayor of Bristol Marvin Rees exploring how Labour Mayors can lead the way on faith engagement. The

FAITH IN LABOUR

former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, will speak in the afternoon about the future of religion and social democracy.

As well as these contributions there will be sessions on international development and aid, the future of work, gender equality and tackling antisemitism, islamophobia and hate crime. Speakers will include Steve Chalke, Shabana Mahmood MP, Laura Marks OBE, Jasvir Singh OBE, Onjali Rauf, Jonny Reynolds MP and many others.

Agenda for the day

10.30 a.m: Welcome: Stephen Timms MP.

10.45 a.m: How can Labour Mayors lead the way on faith engagement? With Mayor of Bristol Marvin Rees.

12 noon: Breakout sessions on local government; international development; and how to get involved in Labour politics.

2p.m: Breakout sessions on the future of work; tackling antisemitism; and overcoming barriers to gender equality in public life.

3.15 p.m: Religion and the Future of Social Democracy. With Dr Rowan Williams Sughra Ahmed (Islamic Society of Britain).

4.30 p.m: Close.

To book your free ticket, please visit bit.ly/faithinlabour

WEAR: "FAITH CAN HELP REJUVENATE LABOUR"

Michael Wear, the former faith adviser to President Barack Obama and author of *Reclaiming Hope* spoke to a group of Labour MPs on a recent visit to the UK.

Speaking in the House of Commons, Wear told the group that the dramatic turn in global politics could provide fresh opportunities for Christians.

And when asked about the Labour Party, Michael spoke encouragingly about the role faith groups can play in its renewal: *"The opportunity for faith on the left is in the recognition that a pluralistic society requires rather than is hampered by people of faith being able to fully live out their faith in public. The*



ability for the Christian to be fully Christian. This is something that in my country Republicans do not get in general. This is something that typical Labour values should be able to lean towards in the way that Conservatives are perhaps less likely to do so."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Calls to unite after Westminster attack

Chair of Christians on the Left, Jonathan Reynolds MP, has called on Christians to lead in uniting those scared by the attack on Westminster last month.

Speaking to Christian Today, Jonathan said: *"I think Christians have a particular understanding of what it is to have a message of love and tolerance and bringing communities together. In many parts of the world where there has been conflicts it is Christians and Christian beliefs and Christian communities that are instrumental in bridging that divide and bringing people together."*

"Set Them Free" campaign

The Labour Party has set out its concerns about the imprisonment in Sudan of Revd Hassan Abduraheem, Mr Petr Jasek and Mr Abdumonem Abdumawla. They were imprisoned by the Sudanese Government after they reportedly helped raise money to treat a badly burned young man.

The Government has pledged to continue to raise the case as part of the UK's ongoing human rights dialogue. The Labour Party has now sought additional assurances on the group's behalf and called on the Government to use Britain's influence to have the three men freed.

Q & A WITH JEREMY CORBYN

Labour leader speaks with Christians on the Left at meeting of Socialist Societies

Christians on the Left was recently invited as part of the **Socialist Societies** to a meeting with **Jeremy Corbyn**. Speaking to **Heather Staff** afterwards, **Jeremy** spoke warmly about the contributions of church groups. Excerpts of his message are below:

On the historic link between the Labour Party and the Church: *"Many Christians see Labour as a natural political home and many of the Labour movement's founders, from Keir Hardie to the late-Victorian South Wales miners' leader William Mabon, were Christian Socialists."*

On how he is working with Archbishops of Canterbury and York about challenging the Government: *"I talked briefly with the Archbishop of Canterbury after a service we both attended a few weeks ago. He gave a powerful message about the [importance of] standing up against evil and injustice. Both the Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of York have extremely important messages for our society today."*

On some of the tasks facing the Government: *"[...we have] food banks -*



which were described by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education at the time as a lifestyle choice - and mass levels of homeless in this country...[and] the Government will find themselves on the wrong side of history in relation to the huge refugee crisis in last 5 years."

On how he will continue to work with faith groups whilst he is leader: *"Labour has numerous organised faith groups who my team and I meet with regularly, and I meet regularly with faith communities in my constituency. All strategies that increase the engagement of Labour with members of religious faith are vital. Labour will be a better party and have a stronger voice if we take this seriously."*

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. Visit <http://www.labour.org.uk/pages/faith-groups>.