

Churches Update

News from the Labour Party



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Archbishop lends support to loan shark campaign

Archbishop of Canterbury tells of plans to compete with controversial pay-day lenders

Labour MP, Stella Creasy, has welcomed comments made by the Archbishop of Canterbury that the Church of England plans to provide alternatives to payday lenders.

The Most Rev Justin Welby, who has served on the Parliamentary Banking Standards Commission, has said he plans to expand the reach of credit unions as part of a long-term campaign to boost competition in the banking sector. He also outlined plans to encourage church members with relevant skills to volunteer at credit unions. Small, local lenders will also be invited to use church buildings and other community locations with the help of church members.

Stella, who has led a campaign in Parliament seeking a cap on payday loans, said she was pleased that the Archbishop had reaffirmed the Church's commitment to fight the damage legal loansharks are causing. *"The Archbishop has been an ardent campaigner and friend of the Sharkstoppers campaign in showing that there is no excuse for the Government not to act to bring an end to legal loansharking in Britain,"* she said.

Speaking about the Government's failure in dealing with the loan sharks, Labour's Treasury spokesman, Chris Leslie MP, said: *"Urgent action is needed to grip*



the regulation of the payday loan industry.

"The Government have consistently ducked clamping down on predatory pricing and extortionate interest charges – despite Labour securing an amendment in the House of Lords last year which gives regulators the ability to control costs and loan duration."

The payday industry—which is worth over £2 billion—has more than doubled over the last four years, with some loan companies charging interest rates of over 5,800 per cent.

Churches: "Government are misrepresenting poor"

Shadow Work and Pensions minister supports churches in holding Government to account

An alliance of churches representing Christians from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland has written to the Prime Minister asking for an apology from the Government for *"misrepresenting the poor"*.

In their letter, the church leaders pointed out that many senior members of the Government have given out misleading and inaccurate information about people on benefits. The letter singled out the Conservative Party Chairman, Grant Shapps, and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, for particular criticism.

The letter stated: *"We are concerned that these inaccuracies paint some of the most vulnerable in our*

society in an unfavourable light, stigmatising those who need the support of the benefits system. No political or financial imperative can be given to make this acceptable."

Speaking to Churches Update, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Minister, Liam Byrne MP, said: *"The churches involved deserve recognition for holding the Government to account for their unacceptable comments and misleading use of official statistics. It is not fair for ministers to make unjustified and sweeping statements."*

The full letter can be read at www.methodist.org.uk.

Food for thought

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

I recently took part in an email dialogue with Robert Halfon, the Conservative MP for Harlow, for *The House Magazine*. We discussed the issue of foodbanks.

The first foodbank was set up by the Trussell Trust, a church-led initiative, in 2001. It was estimated that in 2010, foodbanks were helping 30,000 households. However, since the General Election demand has rocketed. Over the past twelve months there has been a 170 per cent rise in people turning to foodbanks—the Trussell Trust estimated they fed 350,000 people last year. This year, a new foodbank is being opened every day. It's deeply troubling that so many can no longer afford to feed their families.

I am concerned—and this is a point I made to Robert—that Ministers are unwilling to admit that the rocketing demand for foodbanks is a worry. Indeed, Lord Freud told the House of Lords earlier this year that more people were using foodbanks simply because more of them existed. I fear demand will

rise still further due to changes in the benefit system, such as the bedroom tax and the benefit cap. The Government estimate that once the benefit cap is fully in place, 7,000 households in London will lose over £100 per week. This will be replicated in other cities across the country.

Government policies are increasing poverty at an alarming rate and the increased demand for foodbanks is an early warning sign. Other, more troubling, evidence will emerge. Foodbanks show that policy changes are needed.

The Foodbank movement is remarkable and is an area where church communities are taking a lead. Who would have guessed a few years ago that the churches, in 2012, would be feeding over a third of a million families? The Government should not be so dismissive of their vital work.



News in brief

Labour condemn u-turn on alcohol pricing

Labour has criticised the Government for shelving plans to introduce a minimum price for a unit of alcohol in England and Wales. Speaking after the u-turn was announced to the Commons, Labour's Shadow Home Office Minister, Diana Johnson MP, said: "After a two-year Whitehall farce over their alcohol strategy, we've ended up exactly where we started." The Home Secretary told the House of Commons last year: "We will...introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol...and will seek to introduce legislation as soon as possible."

Internet safety in schools

The Government has rejected Labour calls for specially-trained teachers to be brought in to educate children about the dangers of internet pornography. Education Minister Lord Nash said the Government "trusted" teachers to deliver the message. He also rejected plans for personal and social health education to be made part of the national curriculum.

Labour Faith Envoy speaks at New Wine

Stephen Timms, Labour's Faith Envoy, spoke at the annual New Wine conference in Shepton Mallet. He told the audience that "Faith was a great starting point for politics." He added that "...faith inspires the values needed to make politics work: responsibility, solidarity, patience, compassion, truthfulness and tolerance."

Disclosure of Tax Avoidance Schemes

Labour's Shadow Exchequer Secretary, Catherine McKinnell MP, has criticised the Government for refusing to support Labour's amendments to the Finance Bill to tackle the impact of tax avoidance on developing countries. She said: "Labour's Disclosure of Tax Avoidance Schemes...should now be extended to global transactions...The Government failed to deliver the substantial changes we needed at the G8, but this is a change that the UK can make without needing international agreement."

Religious Education "damaged" by Michael Gove

A senior bishop in the Church of England has accused the Education Secretary, Michael Gove MP, of marginalising Religious Education. Speaking to *The Times*, the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Rev John Pritchard, said he backed a curriculum centrally determined by churches, faith groups and the Government to replace locally agreed syllabuses.

Anger over u-turn on plain packaging of cigarettes

Diane Abbott MP, Labour's Shadow Public Health Minister, has condemned the Government's u-turn on plain packaging for cigarettes. "People will rightly wonder if the Government is breaking its promise, despite the medical evidence and the wishes of British families," she said.

Ed Miliband praises work of local churches

Labour leader, Ed Miliband MP, has praised the work of church organisations in his constituency acknowledging the help they have provided to hard-pressed households during the recession.

Ed's comments came after meeting with *One Heart One Voice*, a group made up of representatives from churches from across Doncaster. *One Heart One Voice* is involved in setting up foodbanks and organising money advice sessions in churches. The group also supports the work of Street Pastors who assist members of the public in the town centre on Friday and Saturday evenings.

During the meeting Ed heard about the group's work, which includes support for children and families and chaplaincy services.

Speaking afterwards, Ed said: "Churches can act both as an early warning system and as a last resort, and that is partly why they are so important. I applaud them for the part they play in helping to support people in



our communities.

The initiatives set up by the church here in Doncaster – and across the country—are run largely by volunteers with local knowledge. I have nothing but admiration for these groups who respond in these tough times with dedication and compassion. This is the best example of the values that I want see at the heart of the Labour Party."

Conference diary 2013

Sunday 22 September

► **10.30 a.m: The Conference Church Service**

"A New Exodus? - Liberation from modern day slavery with Pete Greig (24/7 Prayer), Terry Tennens (International Justice Mission) and Dave Steell (One Church Brighton)

Gloucester Place Baptist Church, BN1 4AA.

► **11.45 a.m: CSM's Conference Reception**

With Ed Miliband, Arnie Graff and Tim Livesey
Gloucester Place Baptist Church, BN1 4AA.

► **5:30 p.m: Annual Faiths Reception: What role for faith groups in One Nation?**

With Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, Jonathan Birdwell (DEMOS) and Tom Jackson (Resurgo)
Dee Room, Hilton Hotel. In partnership with DEMOS.

► **6:30 p.m: "Those who show up"**

Inspiration and training for Christians exploring political engagement with Jonathan Reynolds MP, Robert Ffello MP and Suzy Stride (PPC, Harlow)
Gloucester Place Baptist Church, BN1 4AA.

Monday 23 September

► **12.30 p.m: Ending Domestic Abuse—a silver bullet in disguise?**

With Baroness Scotland and Helen Goodman MP
St. Paul's Church, West Street, Brighton, BN1 2RE.

► **8.00 p.m: Financial Transaction Tax—Making Banks Work for Britain**

With Jon Snow (Channel 4), David Hillman (Robin Hood Tax), Will Hutton (Guardian), Arlene McCarthy MEP and Lesley Mercer (President, TUC)

St. Paul's Church, West Street, Brighton, BN1 2RE.
In partnership with Robin Hood Tax

Tuesday 24 September

► **8.00 a.m: Can capitalism ever be responsible?**

CSM'S prayer breakfast with Andy Flanagan, Stephen Doughty MP and Jim Dobbin MP.
St. Paul's Church, West Street, Brighton, BN1 2RE.
In Partnership with CAFOD and Tearfund

► **7.30 pm: Money where your mouth is—how do we keep money local?**

With Karin Christiansen (General Secretary, The Cooperative Party), Stella Creasy MP, Steve Reed OBE MP, Jonathan Reynolds MP, Catherine McKinnell MP

St. Paul's Church, West Street, Brighton, BN1 2RE.
In Partnership with The Co-operative Party

For more information please visit:
www.thecsm.org.uk or follow CSM on Twitter:
[@theCSMUK](https://twitter.com/theCSMUK)



Government criticised for “go home” campaign

Labour and churches unite against poster campaign which “feeds into” a racist agenda

Labour parliamentarians and Bishops from the Church of England and the Catholic Church have criticised a Government campaign calling on illegal immigrants to leave the UK.

The pilot scheme saw vans driven through the London boroughs of Barnet, Hounslow, Barking and Dagenham, Ealing, Brent and Redbridge. The posters carried the message: “*In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest*” and included a number which illegal immigrants could text to arrange their departure.

Labour’s Shadow Immigration Minister, Chris Bryant MP called the scheme a “*gimmick*” adding that its message was “*ill-judged and caused much offence.*” The Labour peer, Lord Lipsey, reported the posters to the Advertising Standards Authority whilst the Unite union branded the campaign “*vile*”. It has since said it would seek legal advice about the posters.

Church leaders have also been critical. The Rt Rev Nick Baines, the Bishop of Bradford, echoed Labour’s comments. Speaking during a debate on BBC Radio 4’s *Sunday Programme*, Bishop Baines argued that refugees and asylum seekers should be treated with “*Christian compassion*”.

“*Of course the country needs a proper immigration policy, any country does but you don’t solve the problem ... by running a campaign like this,*” he said. “*It is not the aggression of the language that worries me, it is what it does in categorising people and we know from history that if you categorise people you dehumanise them.*”

Asked whether this meant the Home Office was running a “*racist*” campaign, he said: “*I don’t think it’s*



racist, [but] I think it feeds into a racist agenda... There is something very nasty going on in this.”

In a statement from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, Bishop Patrick Lynch, who oversees migration for the Church, said the campaign was “*A very inappropriate way to discourage illegal immigrants from staying in the UK, not least because the message that is often received is that all immigrants and foreigners are unwelcome in the UK.*”

“*Ten years ago most illegal immigrants were actually failed asylum seekers. While much of the backlog of cases has now been dealt with, there are some families – including children who have been born here – and individuals still in this situation. It was with these people in mind that many people supported the idea of an amnesty. These cases need to be dealt with compassionately, especially when there are children involved,*” he said.

A full assessment of the campaign will not take place until later this year.

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 0845 092 22 99.