

# Churches Update

## News from the Labour Party

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### Labour leader welcomes launch of Christians on the Left

**Ed Miliband praises the energy of Christians seeking social justice at launch in Parliament**

Labour leader, Ed Miliband, has welcomed the launch of Christians on the Left—the new name for the Christian Socialist Movement. Speaking to *Churches Update*, Ed said: “The new name reflects the new energy and creativity that Christians are bringing to the Labour Party.”

Ed’s comments came after the official launch of Christians on the Left in the House of Commons. He said he looked forward to working with members to build “a more just society.”

The Labour MP for Dagenham, Jon Cruddas (pictured right), was one of a number of Labour MPs to attend the launch. Jon, who is leading Labour’s policy review, spoke of the long tradition of Christian influence in the Party, far beyond the old adage of the party owing more to Methodism than to Marxism. Other speakers included former church leader and now MP for Luton North, Gavin Shuker, worship leader Vicky Beeching, and Labour’s Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Harlow, Suzy Stride.

Those who attended the launch were encouraged to complete the sentence: “I’m a Christian on the Left because...”. They were asked to share their reasons using the twitter hashtag #imachristianontheleft.



The event was chaired by the Labour Party Faith Envoy Stephen Timms MP. Speaking afterwards he said: “We want to help people in churches to work through the political implications of their remarkable acts of service.”

Other Labour MPs have welcomed the name change. Former Cabinet Minister Ben Bradshaw MP commented: “Christians on the Left is not just shaping policy, they are fleshing it out in their lives. They are working to bring hope in some of the toughest neighbourhoods of our nation. They are not content to simply throw stones from the sidelines. They are getting on the pitch.”



#### A message from Ed Miliband

“I am delighted to welcome the launch of Christians on the Left and I want to take this opportunity to thank churches and Christian

agencies across our country for the tireless work you do to serve all parts of our society.

“You do incredibly important work here at home. In the face of the worst cost of living crisis in a generation you have responded with dedication and compassion.

“You have demonstrated the best of Christian values; selflessly helping people who go to foodbanks;

supporting the homeless; championing a Living Wage and empowering the most isolated and vulnerable in our communities. You also make such a difference in the work you do fighting for social justice around the world: for development; against climate change; on all the important issues that matter.

“I’m very proud of our organisation Christians on the Left. I look forward to working alongside them to fulfil our shared goals: - a steadfast commitment to tackling social injustice, a belief in the power of people working together, and to creating a compassionate society.

“I hope you will get involved with Christians on the Left and join us in our fight to change our country.”

## Sentamu: “Take action to help the ‘new poor’”

The Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, has called on churches to demonstrate “love-in-action” to tackle what he called “the new poverty”.

Speaking in his Presidential address to the General Synod, Dr Sentamu said the increasing poverty “...in a land of plenty” was a “blight”. He continued “...We are a developed economy and a first-world country, so how can it be that in this day and age we are seeing malnutrition, food poverty and energy poverty at such levels in our country?”

Dr Sentamu also highlighted the impact of some of the Tory-led coalition’s policies: “The impact of welfare reforms is now beginning to bite, with reductions in housing benefits for so-called under-occupation of social housing, the cap on benefits for workless householders and single parents, and the gradual replacement of the Disability Living Allowance with a Personal Independence Payment.”



Photograph: Nottingham Trent University

Speaking to Churches Update, Labour’s Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, Rachel Reeves MP, said: “The Archbishop of York is absolutely right to highlight the impact of the government’s welfare policies. We need a credible plan to tackle the cost of living crisis and deal with the deficit in a fairer way to secure a strong recovery that benefits ordinary families.”

## Welfare woes

### A message from Stephen Timms MP, Labour’s Faith Envoy

Universal Credit, the government’s flagship welfare policy is failing. What’s more, the number of voices outlining their concerns about the roll out of the policy is snowballing. And rightly so.

A recent report by the Public Accounts Committee called the management of Universal Credit “alarmingly weak”. It also found that its implementation was “extraordinarily poor” and warned that it runs the risk of writing off much of the £425 million of public money already spent. The Committee’s Chair, Margaret Hodge MP, went as far as to call it an “unmitigated disaster of extraordinary proportions”. It is a damning verdict.

Margaret’s comments have been echoed by church leaders in the areas where Universal Credit is being piloted. As people rooted in the communities where Universal Credit is first being introduced, they have a unique perspective on its impact on people’s lives. It makes for painful reading. For example, the Reverend Stephen Parish has voiced his concerns that in the three months since the Universal Credit trial began, a local housing association has seen a twenty three per cent increase in tenants falling into rent arrears.

The Archdeacon of Warrington, the Venerable Peter Bradley, has already observed that delays in administering payments were the main reason why people were visiting Foodbanks in his area.

As a Shadow Welfare Minister, I am concerned about the growing culture of penalising the poor which has developed under this government.



Speaking on this very issue, the Archdeacon of Rochdale, the Venerable Cherry Vann recently dismissed as “myth” the allegation that benefit claimants are unwilling to work saying that this only applies to “a very small minority.”

Earlier this year, an alliance of eleven church leaders wrote to the Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, condemning his use of benefit statistics. The letter accused him, and the Conservative Party Chairman Grant Shapps, of “polluting” the debate around poverty by repeatedly using misleading and sometimes wholly inaccurate information. The Universal Credit trials lead me to believe the government has not listened to their concerns.

I welcome the interventions by church leaders. Their comments demonstrate the Christian value of compassion—a value which is at the heart of the Labour Party. I am grateful that Labour and the churches can stand together for those in need.

I hope Iain Duncan Smith and David Cameron will start to listen before it is too late.

## Labour calls for ban on payday lending adverts

Ed Miliband has said that adverts for payday loans should be banned during children's TV programmes.

Writing in the Sun on Sunday newspaper, Ed criticised payday lenders who "target" children through advertising. He compared advertising by payday lenders to that of junk food and gambling, which are both banned during TV programmes aimed at children.

Ed's comments were supported by the founder of the MoneySavingExpert.com website, Martin Lewis. He said a survey of parents conducted by the website suggested that thirty percent of children under ten are repeating advertising slogans from payday loans companies.

Speaking about Ed's column, Martin said: *"We've been calling for a ban on payday loans on children's TV. The risk is they effectively groom a new generation of children, normalising, legitimising and mainstreaming this dangerous type of niche borrowing... To hear the Leader of the Opposition pick up the cudgel is a joy."*

Labour's tough stance on payday loan companies has previously been backed by church groups, including

### A message from Ed Miliband Leader of the Labour Party



"As a father of two young boys, I know how influenced they can be by what they see and I don't want payday lenders taking advantage of the cost of living crisis and targeting children in this country."

"I think it's wrong, it's not what should be happening and that's why a Labour government would stop them advertising during children's TV, because it's bad for young people, it's bad for families and it's bad for communities."

the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Most Rev Justin Welby. Earlier this year he vowed to put payday lenders out of business by using the Church to build up Britain's network of credit unions.

The payday loan industry has more than doubled in size over the last four years, with some loan companies charging interest rates of over 5,800 percent.

## News in brief

### Page 3 debate in Scottish Parliament

Labour MSP, Jackie Baillie, has led a debate calling on the Sun to stop putting topless models on page 3. The campaign is supported by a number of Labour MSPs. Speaking in the debate, Jackie said: *"Page 3 is a throwback to the 1970s. It is a relic of the male-dominated, smoke-filled press room that rightly belongs in the past. It belongs to a long-gone era, and it is well past its sell-by date... Let us together consign page 3 to the dustbin of history, where it rightly belongs."*

### CSM at the Labour Party Conference

The Christian Socialist Movement organised a full programme at this year's Party Conference in Brighton. Over two hundred people attended the annual church service and heard Pete Greig of 24/7 Prayer. Ed Miliband also addressed the congregation.

### Faith groups raise concerns about 'Lobbying Bill'

An alliance of thirteen different faith-based charities and religious organisations have written to David Cameron about the 'Lobbying Bill'. The letter outlined their concerns that the Bill does not adequately safeguard the activities of religious organisations. The letter also criticised the short timescale for considering the Bill and asked the government to consult more widely on the effects it may have on faith groups.

### Labour leader commits to abolish the bedroom tax

Ed Miliband has pledged to abolish the "vicious and iniquitous bedroom tax" if the Party is returned to power at the next election. Ed announced the policy in his conference speech: *"The bedroom tax is a symbol of an out-of-touch, uncaring Tory government that stands up for the privileged few."* His comments were echoed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby who said that the benefits shake-up was likely to mean a rise in debts to housing associations.

### Cameron failing on the natural environment

Commenting on the *Nature Check 2013* report, Maria Eagle MP, Labour's Shadow Environment Secretary, said: *"This devastating report demonstrates the hollowness of David Cameron's pledge to lead the greenest government ever."*

### Yvette Cooper: "Go Home vans were a gimmick"

Only eleven people have left the country as a direct result of Theresa May's "go home or face arrest" van advertisements, the scheme's official evaluation report has revealed. Responding to the figures, Labour's Shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, said: *"This evaluation proves these divisive ad vans were a complete gimmick which should never have been approved by the Home Secretary in the first place."*



## Labour signals commitment to living wage

### Party unveils plans to deliver a living wage of at least £7.65 per hour

The Labour Party has announced plans to offer incentives to businesses who pay employees the living wage.

Under Labour's 'Make Work Pay' scheme, employers who pay their staff the living wage will receive a tax rebate of up to £1,000 for each worker that receives a pay rise for twelve months. Speaking after the announcement, Labour's Shadow Business Secretary, Chuka Umunna (pictured right) said: *"This is the biggest change that a potential government is hoping to make in respect of wages after the National Minimum Wage was introduced. In addition to ensuring that the lowest paid members of the economy, a lot of this is going to squeezed middle."*

The living wage is currently set at £7.65 an hour (£8.80 in London) and is calculated to reflect the true cost of living in Britain today, providing for a basic but acceptable standard of living. The figure is set independently and reviewed annually.

Church leaders have for a long time backed the call for a living wage. At the Church of England's General Synod last year, delegates voted in favour of the idea of a living wage, and affirmed the Christian values inherent in the concept.

Speaking on Radio 4's Thought for the Day, the Revd Lucy Winkett said: *"The Bible has much to say about the dignity of work, about diligence in working, and not creating dependency in vulnerable groups."* She added: *"...because of their common belief in the dignity of every human being, it is striking that faith groups from every world faith have been strong supporters of this Living Wage campaign, trying to make what are not always straightforward economic decisions for the*



*sake of what we believe."*

The campaign for a living wage started thirteen years ago and is championed by the civil society organisation London Citizens. It grew out of churches in East London who recognised the impact that low pay was having on members of their community. Since then 45,000 people have been lifted out of working poverty. However, it is estimated that around five million workers are still paid below the living wage in Britain.

Labour Leader Ed Miliband made the call for a living wage a core part of his leadership campaign. After the announcement, he said: *"The living wage works for everyone – the people who get decent pay, the employers who get a more committed workforce and the government that saves money on tax credits"*.

The Living Wage Foundation welcomed the move saying: *"With working poverty on the rise, paying a living wage is becoming a must for every responsible employer."*

## 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.