



Churches Update

December 2018

HEALEY: RISE IN HOMELESSNESS IS "SHAMEFUL"

Leading charity publishes report highlighting scale of homelessness crisis in the UK

Labour's Shadow Housing Minister, John Healey, has criticised the government after a report by the homelessness charity, Shelter, found that more than 130,000 children will be living in temporary accommodation over Christmas.

The study found that of that figure, nearly 10,000 of those children will wake up on Christmas Day in bed and breakfasts, hotels or hostels. In many cases their family will have been put in a single room, sharing bathrooms and kitchens with other residents.

Overall, 50,000 more children in England, Wales and Scotland are homeless compared with five years ago, a rise of 59%, Shelter says. There have been particularly sharp increases in some affluent, high housing cost Tory heartlands in south-east England.

Speaking about the report, John said *"...homelessness fell at an unprecedented rate with Labour but, after eight years of the Tories, it is shameful that 131,000 children will be without a home this Christmas."* He added *"...it's no surprise that homelessness is rising rapidly when the Conservatives have...made huge cuts to housing benefit and homelessness services."*

Shelter's director, Greg Beales, said *"...the number of children hidden away in hostels and B&Bs is enough to make anyone's heart sink. These are not*



places for children. We hear about cold, damp – even rats. Young children are sharing beds with multiple family members...and having to leave their block in the middle of the night to use the bathroom."

Last month, a report by the UN's rapporteur on extreme poverty, Philip Alston, said the ideologically driven austerity policies of recent Conservative governments were partly responsible for a rapid rise in homelessness.

Labour has set out a new national plan to end rough sleeping. The Party has pledged to make available 4,000 additional homes reserved for people with a history of rough sleeping. Jeremy Corbyn has also pledged to take action to tackle the root causes of homelessness, including safeguarding supported housing from crude cuts to housing benefit.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMS U-TURN ON FOBTs

Coalition of Labour MPs and churches welcome betting reforms amidst calls for further action

A cut in the maximum stake on fixed-odds betting terminals (FOBTs) will be brought forward to April next year after the government backed down in the face of a growing rebellion from Labour MPs and church leaders.

The chancellor, Philip Hammond, said in the budget that a reduction in FOBT stakes from £100 to £2 would not take effect until October next year, a decision that handed bookmakers a £900m windfall and triggered the resignation of the sports minister, Tracey Crouch. The government, however, has now decided that the stake reduction would now take place six months earlier.

The Labour deputy leader and Shadow Culture Minister, Tom Watson, said *"...whilst this is a personal humiliation for Jeremy Wright, this is a very good day for the many thousands of people whose families and communities are blighted by gambling addiction."*



The Bishop of St Albans, Alan Smith, echoed Tom's comments, stating *"...FOBTs are a scourge on high streets ...I am very glad the Government agrees that a £2 stake is an essential part of the solution."*

The Labour Party has said the government now needs to look at introducing a ban on credit card betting and introduce a compulsory levy on gambling operators of 1% to increase resources for the treatment of gambling addiction.

LABOUR CALLS FOR ACTION ON ASIA BIBI

The Labour Party has called on ministers to make clear that Asia Bibi and her family would be welcome in the UK.

In October the Supreme Court of Pakistan overturned Asia Bibi's death sentence for blasphemy. She was subsequently released from jail, but remains in Pakistan.

Ms Bibi's family have claimed they are being hunted by extremists going house to house with their photographs to try to track them down.

Labour MP Mike Gapes has called on the government to reassess its relationship with Pakistan following recent developments: *"...given the clear inability of the Pakistani government to stop these mobs ...from...killing Christians in Pakistan, is it not time to reassess our relations? There are big concerns if religious minorities in Pakistan are not safe,"* he said.

The UK government has declined to answer questions about whether it is considering an offer of asylum.

LOVE YOUR CLP

Christians on the Left enjoyed hosting a number of events at the Labour Party Conference held this year in Liverpool.

The Sunday morning church service was attended by a number of delegates, including MPs Wes Streeting and Marsha de Cordova.

The church service was followed by a reception which was attended by the leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. Jeremy used the opportunity to endorse Christians of the Left's new campaign "Love Your CLP".

The "Love Your CLP" is new project aimed at transforming the way that that local politics functions - in the way that people work with each other and the way decisions are made. Writing about the campaign, the Director of Christians on



the Left, Louise Davies said *"... 'Love your CLP' means actively praying for God to impact and change the atmosphere in your community. It means bringing Hope, Love, Unity and Enthusiasm to your Constituency Labour Party."*

To find out more about the campaign, watch the video above.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Dismay at the "shambles" of Universal Credit

Church of England bishops have joined the Labour Party in calling for urgent action to be taken to provide more support for people applying for Universal Credit (UC).

More than 30 bishops are backing a petition brought by the End Hunger UK campaign calling for the government to "fix" Universal Credit, including providing more help and a more flexible system for claimants applying and for those already receiving the benefit.

Labour's Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell called the system *"...a shambles"* adding *"...I think most people now are coming to the conclusion UC has got to be scrapped."*

Archbishop warns over Brexit

The Archbishop of Canterbury has warned against cuts as a result of Brexit. Speaking in the House of Lords, Justin Welby said that Parliament should be on guard about the dangers of "drifting" to a deal. He warned there would be *"...a significant danger of adverse economic effect, with a fall in government revenue,"* saying that *"...some may argue that is only going to be temporary but...for those in poverty, temporary is an eternity."*

Conservative MPs have previously criticised the Archbishop for intervening in the Brexit debate saying that he should *"...focus on his church"* instead.



RECOGNISING THE WORK IN PRISONS

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

In May, together with senior Conservative Dominic Grieve, I chaired a discussion in Parliament about the work of faith

groups in prisons.

Many of the practitioners present were quick to note that the prison population in England and Wales is growing rapidly. Whilst inmates increase in numbers, standards are declining.

A report earlier this year showed that two in five jails are deemed unsafe, with high rates of violence, self-harm and drug use.

Churches - and other faith communities - can help. A volunteer at the Chaplaincy in a London prison told me recently of a number of encouraging stories about its work. In this prison, there have been twelve baptisms this year.

A number of inmates are being pastored

through addiction recovery and mental health issues. The Chaplaincy also provides support to those leaving the prison by meeting them at the gates with clothes, travel cards and advice on probation and rehabilitation.

Chaplaincies like these are struggling with the limited resources available to them. One London prison has just three voluntary counsellors. Their work is crucial in supporting inmates and reducing re-offending.

Research has shown that the religious involvement of prisoners - through Chaplaincies - is linked to their compliance with the prison regime.

The government needs to recognise this fully. Often Chaplaincies complain they are not receiving the support they deserve.

I hope the Labour Party can work closely with Prison Chaplaincies in the future. They, and those in the justice system, deserve as much.

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, 105 Victoria Street, Westminster, London SW1E 6QT. Alternatively, 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.