

May 2009

## Don't let Tories ditch Minimum Wage

**A Tory attempt to abolish the Minimum Wage has been beaten off by the Wage Concern campaign set up by Labour MPs and unions - but the Bill is due to be heard again in the Commons.**

### Wage Concern

The Employment Opportunities Bill backed by Tory Christopher Chope and ten other senior Conservative MPs was withdrawn at the last minute because of pressure from Wage Concern, but they intend to table it again on 12 June.

Labour's unlikely New Media

'CyberWarrior' John Prescott launched the Wage Concern online campaign along with UNISON and shopworkers' union Usdaw.

Prescott has vowed to continue the campaign until Chope's bill is defeated, and the future of the Minimum Wage is guaranteed.

### Unscrupulous bosses

UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis said: "I am delighted that Christopher Chope and his Tory cabal failed in their attempt to turn the clock back to the days of poverty pay where workers are exploited by

unscrupulous bosses.

"UNISON fought long and hard to establish the statutory national minimum wage, in the teeth of opposition and unfounded scaremongering about massive job losses. We will continue to resist any attempt to dilute or abolish it."

[www.wageconcern.com](http://www.wageconcern.com)

- From October the Minimum Wage is due to rise by 7p to £5.80 an hour from October; by 6p to £4.83 for 18 to 21-year-olds and by 4p to £3.57 for 16 and 17-year-olds

## Euro Labour champions of workers' rights

**Scottish Labour's European election campaign is firmly focused on the fight for jobs for Scotland.**

Speaking at the launch of the campaign, Labour MEP David Martin said: "The pressing issue is the economy, and Labour MEPs are determined to play our part in creating a fairer Scotland where we get back on track and fight for jobs."

Martin is the leading candidate on the Labour list for the European elections on Thursday 4 June.

"Tackling the financial crisis is top of the European Socialist agenda that has been agreed with the UK Labour Party and its 33 equivalent

parties throughout the EU," Martin said.

Other items on this agenda include the New Social Europe, climate change and gender equality.

Martin and his Scottish Labour MEP colleague Catherine Stihler have a good track record in campaigning for workers' rights in Europe. They were among the Socialist Group of MEPs which voted in the European Parliament in December to end the UK opt-out from the Working Time Directive.

The Labour European Manifesto, Working Together for a Better Future, argues that the party has a strong record in Scotland, in the UK



Euro launch: Mary Lockhart, Kirsty Connell, David Martin, Gordon Brown, Paul McAleavey, Catherine Stihler, Nasim Khan

and in Europe of fighting for measures to improve life for working people.

"Our decision to sign up to the EU Social Chapter has given new rights and benefits to Scottish workers and their families," it states, "including the right to take five weeks paid holiday, more maternity

leave and extra parental leave."

- **Scottish Labour Party list for the European Elections on 4 June:**

**David Martin, Catherine Stihler, Mary Lockhart, Paul McAleavey, Kirsty Connell, Nasim Khan**

## A new leader

Scottish Conference in Dundee saw the Labour Party back on the front foot against the SNP, following the stunning victory in Glenrothes in November and the dropping of the SNP flagship policy of Local Income Tax in February.

New Scottish Labour leader Iain Gray impressed on his debut with a strong, serious speech in which he pledged to “learn the lessons, to regroup, recover and reinvigorate our Scottish Labour passion.”

There was some knockabout stuff too, when Gray described SNP leader Alex Salmond as “impossibly smug, impossibly naff... just frankly impossible.”

## Fighting council cuts

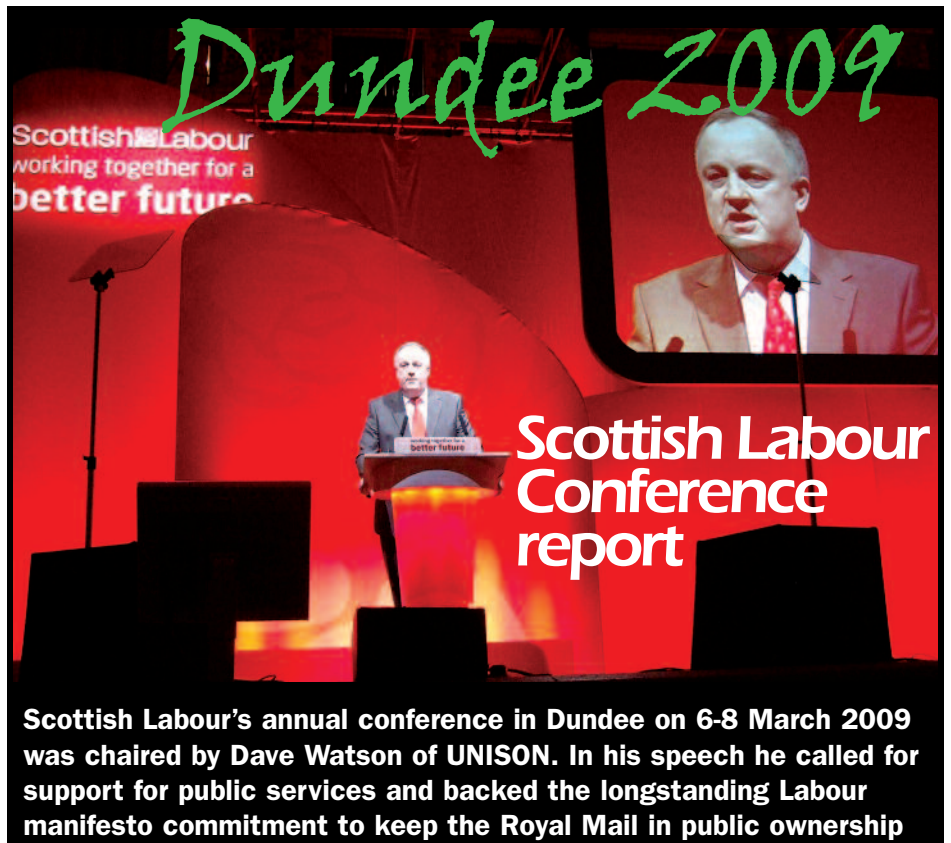
The SNP’s concordat with local government has become a straitjacket which is causing cuts in local services to those who need them most, UNISON Scottish



Matt Smith

Secretary Matt Smith told the Conference.

UNISON’s motion on local



**Scottish Labour’s annual conference in Dundee on 6-8 March 2009 was chaired by Dave Watson of UNISON. In his speech he called for support for public services and backed the longstanding Labour manifesto commitment to keep the Royal Mail in public ownership**

government cuts argued that the financial settlement for Scotland’s councils will lead to real cuts in public services this year with even more damaging threats for next year.

Speaking in support of the motion, Smith said: “Today in the midst of this financial crisis many are looking to local government to make a difference: to be an economic generator; to look after those who are suffering; and to be the voice of local communities. Yet at this time we find that councils are themselves facing crisis.

“At a time when its services are more than ever required, local government is starved of funds and opportunities to increase its income

because of the council tax freeze and cuts in business rates.”

Smith said: “Of course we welcome the SNP’s abandonment of the local income tax. But in seeking to pave the way for that policy the Scottish Government set unwelcome and unworkable financial parameters. Now the concordat has become a straitjacket.”

Smith called on the Scottish Labour Party to restate the value of local government and campaign to improve local services, to recognise and fairly reward local government workers, and to recognise that “a financial crisis is no time to reduce services to those who need them most.”

## Labour Link on the fringe

**Labour Link was busy on the Conference fringe once more as UNISON jointly organised three successful meetings.**

Dave Watson spoke at a meeting on climate change co-hosted by Oxfam Scotland and WWF. Other speakers were Richard Dixon (WWF), John Park MSP, Des McNulty MSP and Judith Robertson (Oxfam).

Labour Link’s Gordon MacKay chaired the fringe on Health

Inequalities which was jointly organised with the Socialist Health Association. SHA chair Dr David Conway spoke along with lawyer Mike Dailly and Cathy Jamieson MSP.

The Socialist Educational Association and the Campaign for Socialism were joint sponsors with Labour Link of a fringe meeting on the economic crisis, chaired by Katrina Murray. Public finance and accountancy expert Professor Prem Sikka spoke along with Katy Clark MP and Bill Butler MSP.



Dave Watson

## The real pensions divide

Moving UNISON's emergency motion on 'Sir Fred Goodwin and pensions', Scottish Labour Link chair Gordon MacKay called on the government to end the fat cat bonus culture and rewards for failure; and to act to ensure fair and decent pensions for all workers in retirement.

"The real pensions divide is not between public sector and private sector workers as the Tories and their allies claim," MacKay said. "It is between ordinary workers whose modest pensions are under attack and high flying directors, who like Sir Fred Goodwin, believe they are entitled to ever increasing pension settlements based on inflated salaries and bonuses at their own discretion.

"The reality is that local government workers can expect on average a pension of around £3,800 per year, one half of one percent of the Goodwin figure."



Morag Houston

## PFI profiteers slammed

UNISON delegate Morag Houston slammed the private contractors that run car parking at Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary. They looked set to make around an extra £170,000 by recalibrating machines for the changed VAT rate.

She was backing a motion giving support to the private member's bill proposed by Paul Martin MSP, which would make charging for car parking illegal throughout Scotland's NHS, including in PFI funded facilities.

● **Other UNISON delegates who spoke at the 2009 Scottish Labour Conference included Katrina Murray, Matthew Crighton, Billy Stewart and Alan Cowan.**



## NHS parking demo

UNISON delegates and activists at Scottish Labour's Conference in Dundee joined in a demonstration against car parking charges in Scotland's Health Service at Ninewells Hospital. Ninewells is one of three Scottish hospitals that still charge for car parking, because it is run under a PFI contract.

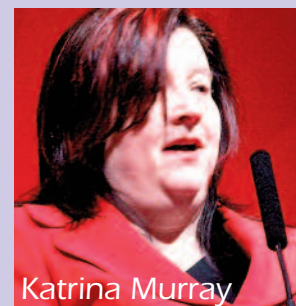
The demo was designed to build support for Labour MSP Paul Martin's bill in the Scottish Parliament, which would outlaw charging for parking anywhere in the NHS in Scotland

Paul Martin, MSP for Glasgow Springburn said: "My bill will make it illegal for a health board to levy parking charges on patients, visitors or staff - or anyone who has to visit a site for whatever reason."

Katrina Murray, Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Dundee East and UNISON activist said:

"People in Tayside have long been opposed to forking out for car parking at Ninewells. Although Ninewells is a city hospital with good public transport links, the area it serves is huge in geographical terms stretching from North Fife through Angus to Highland Perthshire.

"Public transport in these localities is often scant or even



Katrina Murray

non-existent, so a car and somewhere to park it is definitely needed to attend clinics, visit, or to get admitted, and - for the people who make the health service happen - actually get to work. Profit simply should not come into it."

## Team Labour in Dundee

Dundee Labour representatives came out to support the demo.

Marlyn Glen, North East Scotland Labour MSP said: "Paul Martin's bill will remove the current two-tier system of parking at NHS hospitals that discriminates against NHS patients, NHS staff and NHS visitors at Ninewells."

Jim McGovern, Labour MP for Dundee West said: "Since parking charges have been abolished throughout Scotland, with the exception of Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh, the debate is now quite simply one of fairness."

● **Paul Martin has strengthened his bill during consultation. The revised NHS Car Parking Bill will be launched on 15 June.**

## Stop Trident renewal

Labour Link Scotland is calling for full Parliamentary scrutiny and debate of the next stage in the Trident renewal process, as part of a campaign to stop the new nuclear weapon system being implemented and to decommission all existing Trident weapons.



The Scottish motion to the UK Labour Link Forum in Manchester on 3-4 July, argues that the current economic circumstances mean Trident renewal would be “an even greater waste of resources which should be used to sustain and protect vital public services and our economic future.”

The next stage of the Trident renewal process, Initial Gate, in September has been timed during a Parliamentary recess, which may mean no scrutiny or debate.

The motion calls for:

- full Parliamentary scrutiny and debate during Initial Gate;
- a campaign against Trident renewal along with other unions, CND and Scottish CND, and the Campaign Against the Arms Trade;
- continued opposition to the replacement of Trident, and;
- decommissioning of the existing Trident weapons system.

## Get in touch, get involved

Do you know who your local Labour Link Officer is? Or where and when meetings take place? Do you want regular email bulletins with information about campaigns and other activities? **If you want get more involved or to sign up for the e-bulletin, email Malcolm Burns [m.burns@unison.co.uk](mailto:m.burns@unison.co.uk) or call 0141 342 2811.**

# UNISON praised for Health Board votes

**UNISON has been singled out for praise because of its role in promoting direct elections to Health boards in Scotland.**

The Scottish Government measure which allows elections to Health Boards for the first time was passed by Parliament in March.

The successful Bill follows on from an earlier Private Member's Bill promoted by Labour MSP Bill Butler with the active support of UNISON.

Labour Health spokeswoman Cathy Jamieson said in the debate that it was Labour Party policy to support the introduction of pilots for directly elected Health Boards.

“I pay particular tribute to UNISON Scotland,” she remarked, “which has pressed that case through our policy-making processes.”

Bill Butler MSP for Glasgow Anniesland) said “I believe that the bill will, as UNISON correctly pointed out in its evidence to the committee, lead to a sea change in the culture of NHS Boards. I believe



Cathy Jamieson MSP



Bill Butler MSP

that will be a very good thing.

“We have all had enough of top-down bureaucratic decision making, which too often merely echoes vested interests. That is a bad thing.”

## Elections to Health Boards in Scotland

- The Health Boards (Membership and Elections) (Scotland) Bill received Royal Assent on 22 April.
- Elections will be piloted in two areas, yet to be identified, and the system will be rolled out across Scotland's 14 Health Boards.
- A majority of members in all Boards will be directly elected, though some appointees will remain.
- The system of election will be Single Transferable Vote, and the voting age for Health Boards will be 16.

You can find UNISON Scotland Briefings and Responses on health board elections and other campaigns at [www.unison-scotland.org.uk](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk)

### ● Join Labour for just £1 a month

As a UNISON member you can join the Labour Party at a special rate of just £1 per month.

Download the UNISON Labour application form here:

[www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B3330.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B3330.pdf)

or call the Labour membership hotline on 08705 900 200