

No child must be left behind

Report of Hearings held by Labour's Socialist Societies,
calling for the focus of the next manifesto to be ensuring
fair opportunities for all children.

Submitted to Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP
2 June 2008

INTRODUCTION

As Labour's Socialist Societies, we are in a unique position. We are affiliated to the Party but with deep roots in sectors and communities outside. We are a link with the many volunteers, activists and professionals that Labour needs to be our champions. This includes the health and education sectors, environmental, housing and equality campaigners, faith and interest communities including Christians, Jewish and Irish as well as the LGBT communities of Britain. Our roles are two-fold. We represent these sectors and communities within the Party and advocate for the best possible policies, based on our knowledge and experience. We also represent Labour within these communities, promoting a Labour perspective and encouraging support for our Party.

From this position, we have strong views about what should be in the manifesto that our Party will present to the electorate to try to win a fourth term in government. The Societies are working to influence that manifesto in a number of ways, through our National Policy Forum representatives and directly from each Society to those working on relevant sections of the manifesto.

PARLIAMENTARY HEARINGS

On 26 March 2008, we came together in a different way. We wished to look at some of the issues that link our Societies, some of the concerns we share about how to improve Britain. The linking theme which we decided to focus on was to ask how Labour can ensure fair opportunities for all children. The Government's commitment to end child poverty by 2020 is one we wholeheartedly endorse, but this paper goes wider than that and is about more than simply poverty (important though that is). It is about life chances, and ensuring these are more equally shared. The Societies responded to this opportunity with thoughtful written submissions. We invited a small number of MPs with good links to the Societies to join a panel to investigate links between these submissions.

We decided to use this opportunity to prepare a joint report to the manifesto process. A report of the session is attached. However from the hearings we have extracted eight key recommendations to those working on the next manifesto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensuring opportunities for all children would be a powerful and coherent theme for the next manifesto, core to Labour's mission and values but looking to the future in a way that can inspire activists, professionals and voters. A fair society must be one in which the life

chances of a child are not determined by the income of its parents, discrimination against different social groups or circumstances of geography. This theme, backed by meaningful policy commitments, would show that Labour is the party that has already transformed Britain but has much more to do in a fourth term of government. It emphasises the work that Labour has done since 1997, but sets an ambitious vision of change which only Labour could bring to the next government. It acknowledges that, despite the impressive action which Labour has taken on many aspects of poverty and inequality, we have deeper ambitions to transform British society. Labour is also deeply concerned with child poverty internationally, and the Societies fully support the government's initiatives in this area. Although our comments here focus on the UK, the same concerns for a fair start in life should guide our international development and foreign policies.

2. The manifesto should have a "fairness contract" which would be implemented in government. Commitments should include a cabinet committee on life chances, looking across government departments to ensure that policies are coordinated and coherent to meet this ambition. A review of all government policies should be carried out for their impact on children and life chances. Early years, education and health should be working together seamlessly to support the transformation of children's opportunities through life.
3. Labour's pledge to end child poverty was part of inspiring voters in 1997 but was not high-profile in 2005. Much more emphasis is needed as well as policy commitments so that government can achieve its core social justice goal by 2020. Increasing incomes plays the central role, and we should commit to a higher minimum wage and benefits to support children whose parents are not in work, including ensuring full take-up of tax credits. Evidence submitted by Labour Housing Group called for the long-term alignment or integration of housing benefit with tax credits; the latter have a much better take-up rate for low-income families. As the Fabians recommended, a life chances/equality commission should audit opportunity and inequality and produce a Stern-style report on 'the economic and social costs of not ending child poverty'. Increasing childcare provision is needed, a "progressive universalism strategy" to direct resources sufficiently for low income families to be able to take up the benefit.
4. Whilst all Societies would support greater and faster action to end child poverty, inequalities and social exclusion should be understood to be wider than class and wealth. One example of using inequality of opportunity as a linking theme were the arguments of SERA, which set out the linking of inequalities with environmental concerns. They showed that not only do climate change and environment damage

impact more on children from lower income backgrounds, who feel the effects of fuel shortages, natural disasters, rising food prices. They also pointed out that, unless planned properly, action to address climate change risks compounding inequalities as green taxes will hit these same families much harder. They showed that projects for renewable energy and greater energy efficiency could be targeted at poor communities first, as should attempts to support public transport usage and reclaiming the streets.

5. The Labour Housing Group has shown that, as housing standards are linked with income, action is needed to address housing as a way of ensuring no child is being denied opportunities and life chances by their living situation. Poor quality, health-harming homes, overcrowding, lack of facilities and opportunities condemn many children to missing out on opportunities. The challenge of ensuring action to tackle overcrowding and poor quality housing especially amongst the poorest owners and those in the private rented sector and to ensure decent affordable homes are built including in the social rented sector to target families unable to consider buying or private renting, must be a major part of Labour's broad mission to provide opportunities for all children.
6. Education is crucial to the opportunities that a child can be given, and has the potential to overcome inequalities by offering a universal provision. The SEA look to the new manifesto to put tackling inequalities in provision and outcome at the heart of Labour's plans. They believe that we should show a willingness to investigate our policies for their impact on inequalities and not be satisfied until access to high quality schools and universities is no longer determined by social class, background or geography. This must include ending selection at 11 and the integration of vocational and academic qualifications into one system of equal status. The Fabians call for specific action to narrow the class attainment gap, including intensive 'catch-up' support in primary schools, stopping schools from being their own admissions authorities and consideration of ways to reduce the negative impact of private education, such as shared resources, reviewing charitable status and considering VAT on school fees to create an educational disadvantage fund.
7. Poor health is both an outcome of inequalities and a contributor to social exclusion. In common with many people, the SHA wishes to see a genuine commitment to public health replace the media obsession with healthcare. To ensure that all children are getting a fair start in life, the health of mothers and infants needs to be improved, with more support to pregnant women, including ensuring employers support parents. The health and well-being of children should be intrinsic throughout integrated childcare, early years and education systems, supporting the

gains of SureStart. The Fabians also called for the Prime Minister to spearhead a national strategy to reduce low birth-weight.

8. Unlike many other factors that deny life chances, sexual orientation is one which can divide children from the families and communities in which they are growing up. Despite Labour's impressive achievements in legal equality, social exclusion of many LGBT young people, especially bullying in the school system, has a devastating impact on the lives of many young people. The education system continues to be part of the problem but hopefully the solution. The same was felt for domestic violence, a unglamorous cause with little political profile but which remains endemic and has devastating impacts on life chances of children from these homes.

Since 1997, we are extremely proud of what Labour has achieved to reduce inequalities. We have no doubts that the significant progress made would be reversed should Labour lose office. Our party was formed to reduce inequalities and transform life chances of children born without the advantages of class and wealth. We want the next manifesto to say clearly that that work is not finished and remains Labour's main motivation in seeking power again.

We are ready to work within and outside the Party to make this happen, bringing together the kind of progressive consensus that Labour needs to win and to govern.

REPORT ON THE PARLIAMENTARY HEARINGS SESSION 26 MARCH 2008, HOUSE OF COMMONS

A concern which links all the Labour Party affiliated Socialist Societies is inequality and most of the policy development undertaken is underpinned by this theme.

A number of Societies came together to put proposals to a panel of MPs on the question:

How should the next manifesto ensure fair opportunities for all children?

The purpose of the event was to test proposals by submitting them to scrutiny by those with responsibility for the legislation needed to put the proposals into effect. Informed by MPs comments, the proposals will combine into a submission to the Party for inclusion in the next manifesto.

The MPs on the panel were **Doug Naysmith, Kelvin Hopkins, Alun Michael, Margaret Moran** and **Alison Sebeck**. The panel was chaired by **Dianne Hayter**, Socialist Societies representative on the National Executive Committee and currently Chair of the NEC.

The Chair highlighted the important role played by Societies whose members combine specialist experience with their roots within communities. They are therefore well placed to develop policies based on practical, professional experience and to sell the Party's message to a wide group of colleagues within and beyond the Party. Each Society had prepared written summaries of their proposals, key points from which were presented to the panel.

The hearings were divided into three sessions, as follows

SESSION 1

Presenters: **Louise Bamfield**, Fabian Society, Senior Research Fellow and lead researcher on the Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty; **Melanie Smallman**, Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA), National Co-ordinator of SERA and previously a Councillor in Hammersmith and Fulham with executive responsibility for education; **Marianne Hood**, Labour Housing Group, Vice-Chair of LHG and Chair of the Communities and London Government Advisory Panel for the Beacon Scheme.

Louise Bamfield referred to the acquisitive nature of Western societies, and the importance of social class in the UK which hampers social mobility. We have to counter this by ensuring that we have measures in place to 'child-poverty-proof' policies and practices through a life chances/equality

commission, and a Cabinet committee. Fairness and equality must be a core narrative which would enable us to challenge other Parties' consequence-free rhetoric.

Equalisation of life chances must begin before birth, capitalising on Labour's commitment to pay child benefit in pregnancy and a new maternity grant, by adopting a national strategy to reduce low birth-weight. Louise talked about shifting resources from illness services to health, adopting a children's health and well-being manifesto, and placing school nurses in every school, funded by redistributing resources from the acute sector.

Melanie Smallman set out SERA's belief that tackling environmental problems is key to delivering opportunity and fairness. Low income families are at greatest risk from pollution, traffic and high fuel costs. We have to move on from a policy of protecting the poor from the worst excesses of environmental damage to one of damage prevention. We will create a fairer world if we don't just pose environmental solutions to environmental problems, but propose environmental solutions for people problems.

Marianne Hood emphasised that housing was inextricably linked with other policies. It was central to community cohesion and the economy. Poor housing can blight children's lives. Unsafe and unhealthy conditions, overcrowding and hard to heat homes will impact on ability to do homework, under achievement at school and mental well-being. To address these issues we must have much more investment both to improve existing homes and to build more. There should be consistency of choice and standards across all tenures, and measures to give owning and renting equal status could be progressed through the Rented Homes Bill, which places renting on a consumer-oriented footing. Families in the private rented sector must be protected from retaliatory eviction so that they can exercise their housing rights. Other practical measures referred to included building on Home Information Packs to provide financial incentives for home owners to maintain their homes, Home Access Packages to increase access to decent homes/home ownership and addressing the tax credit system to address unemployed tenants' fears that if they get a job they can't afford their home.

PANEL SCRUTINY

There was concern about the Fabians proposals to switch resources from treating ill-health to areas of public health and evidence of the advantages of this approach were called for. Perhaps the Fabian proposals were simplistic as health inequalities are affected by a range of factors. On issues around employment there is a dilemma. How do we empower people to get back into work and make this pay, if we up-rate benefits for those not in work?

The Fabians responded that, for the child poverty targets to be reached based on the current level of benefits, 100% of lone parents would need to be in work. Clearly this is not realistic and we need to provide a proper level of support for those who can't work.

There should be a complete overhaul of the system and clarity over Housing Benefits and tax credits. There is better take up of tax credits so the focus should be on that. We should also include measures to protect poor home owners, for example, tying insurance against loss of income into the lending arrangements, living lenders a greater responsibility for those in financial difficulties.

SERA stressed that environmental policies are developed by environmentalists rather than politicians so we have policies to help the environment not to help people.

We are the bottom of the league in renewable energy. There should be community ownership of energy - the Tory and Liberal Democrats Councils frequently block applications for wind farms for unjustifiable reasons.

SESSION 2

Presenters: **Patrick Vernon**, Socialist Health Association, ex-Director of Brent Health Action Zone and Director for MIND, and as a Councillor in Hackney is currently Play champion for the borough; **Sean O'Sullivan**, Socialist Health Association, Senior Policy Analyst of the Royal College of Midwives; **Sheila Doré**, Socialist Education Association, Vice-Chair of SEA and a teacher in North East London.

Sean O'Sullivan sees the main challenge as encouraging access to health services by women from disadvantages groups, emphasising the need for choice. There should be early intervention in pregnancy through more accessible ante-natal services to reduce the incidence of later problems, with all women attending at 12 weeks. There must be more midwives and health visitors. Breast feeding must be encouraged.

Patrick Vernon added that we should approach child health in a holistic way, starting with longer paid maternity and paternity leave. The health service needs a different approach to engage with young people. We should impact assess the effect of child health across all policies. We should find new ways to link health services with local government, housing, public health and the tax and benefit system.

Sheila Doré asserted the principle that resources should be allocated according to need. This includes tackling overcrowding in households and expanding affordable child care. We should attract more people into child care by

improving its status and pay. Low income carers looking after low income children reinforces the cycle of deprivation. We focus on league tables in children's education but we are at the bottom of the league in child happiness. Self-harming and gang violence are symptoms of children and young people alienated by a system that doesn't respect them. Equality should be based on research, finding out what makes children happy and what helps them learn. Research should also unpack what is happening in academies. There was also concern that fear of fees and getting into debt deters children from applying to Universities. Maternity services should be community based. Sure Start children centres are attractive as they can be used to access more than one service.

PANEL SCRUTINY

How can access to maternity care be improved? An example was given of an ante-natal service geared to 15 year olds which has won an award for good practice. We should learn from models like this. More generally, maternity services should be community based, provided by social agencies, not just NHS trusts.

One in four women suffer violence at some stage in their lives but this has not been mentioned. Shouldn't this be tackled through education? There should be a family worker in every child centre. How would a one stop shop approach be commissioned and funded? We should look at involving the women themselves in helping to run such centres. If we employed more midwives/health visitors they could help with education about violence.

Regarding child happiness, there has only been one piece of research - we should be cautious about its findings. We need to focus on the children who fail and are unhappy. How does giving women choice contribute to tackling inequality? Better choice should lead to better outcomes for children. The current emphasis on 'safety' leads to more 'medicalised' services.

SESSION 3

Presenters: **Andrew Bradstock**, Christian Socialist Movement, Director of CSM, previously university lecturer in Politics and Theology and author of several books on the relationship between faith and politics; **Katie Hanson**, Labour Campaign for Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Rights (LGBT Labour), Co-Chair of LGBT Labour has a background in access and inclusion policy and has served as a school governor, trustee of Education for Choice, and is a councillor in Hackney; **Jim Moher**, Labour Party Irish Societies, a councillor in Brent and author of *Stepping on White Corns*.

Andrew Bradstock emphasised the theme of relationships. He referred to the breakdown in communities and loss of respect. Children are presented with

unrealistic ambitions based on the celebrity culture. We need measures that affirm less glamorous lifestyles by paying a fair wage. The Party has done much to reduce crime, but the root cause of crime is detachment from the community and lack of role models. We should look to restorative justice to deal with young offenders without consigning them to prison. We should encourage more male teachers in primary schools. We need more investment in youth services and a peer-based approach; more initiatives to break the gang culture. We should re-think ASBOs which don't work well for young people. Poverty and inequality are the biggest barriers to economic mobility - we have to tackle the huge gap between rich and poor. We should establish a Commission of Inequality and learn from Scandinavian countries.

Katie Hanson acknowledged that the Labour Government has delivered almost everything LGBT Labour has campaigned for. Despite this, homophobia has not gone away. We must protect children and teachers from homophobic bullying in schools, something that would never be tolerated in the workplace. Homophobic attitudes are still apparent among those responsible for children in care. Sex and relationships education should be a mandatory part of the school curriculum, the present discretionary arrangements mean some schools are reluctant to teach relationships for fear of parents withdrawing their children.

Jim Moher believes that our policy approach should encompass all children, accepting that resources must be targeted where they are most needed. He pointed out that the history of the Irish community in the UK saw an immigrant community which relied more on self-help and community structures than support from government, something that can be seen with more recently-arrived communities.. In North London, where the Irish form one of a large diversity of ethnic groups, the Government should be given due credit for the resources it has put into schools and the excellent initiatives that have resulted from the national priority allocated to education.

PANEL SCRUTINY

The focus on relationships was welcome, specifically in terms of the school curriculum. The Government has placed great importance on community cohesion but initiatives to date don't seem to be working. What should we do? Christian churches should be encouraged to work with other faith communities. There were reservations about faith schools. Faith groups have a lot in common and the Government can learn from what churches are doing. It would be more inclusive to talk in terms of faiths and 'beliefs'. Local Councils have the potential to do more to promote cohesion.

The Chair concluded by highlighting the common themes that ran through the presentations, the importance of work, the importance of community, and the role of local government. Many had stressed the need for child protection to

start early, with pregnancy. Running through the sessions were the themes of relationships and value for communities.

All participants and others who attended to listed to the discussion were thanked for their attendance.

NOTES

1. Written submissions are available from each Society and can be downloaded from the (URL not for circulation) [Socialist Societies webspace](#).
2. The thirteen Socialist Societies affiliated to the Labour Party are: Christian Socialist Movement, The Fabian Society, Jewish Labour Movement , Labour Campaign for Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Transgender Rights, Labour Housing Group, Labour Party Disabled Members' Group, Labour Party Irish Society, Labour Students, National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs, Scientists for Labour, Socialist Education Association, Socialist Environment and Resources Association, Socialist Health Association and Society of Labour Lawyers.
3. Although formerly known as the Black Socialist Society, the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Labour has a different status to the Socialist Societies, for example, it has its own representatives on the NEC and the National Policy Forum. Therefore BME Labour were not part of this Hearing which was designed to raise the profile and concerns of the affiliated Socialist Societies,