

Churches Update

News from the Labour Party

w: labour.org.uk/faith Issue 5, 2009



Remaking the Global Economy

Gordon Brown calls for “global new deal” to benefit the poor

The world is in the midst of an unprecedented economic slowdown. What began in the US housing market has quickly spread to engulf every major economy in the world. Gordon Brown has urged world leaders to work together to protect the world's most vulnerable people through this global crisis.

In March, the Prime Minister flew to America to discuss the world's response to the economic crisis with the new US President, Barack Obama. He also became only the fifth British Prime Minister in history to address a joint session of both Houses of Congress.

The Prime Minister acknowledged the impact of the economic slowdown on ordinary people across the planet. *“For me this global recession is not to be measured just in statistics, or in graphs, or on a balance sheet”*, he told the American politicians. *“Instead I see one individual with one set of dreams and fears, and then another, and then another”*.

“We have learned through this world downturn that markets should be free but never value-free, that the risks people take should never be separated from the responsibilities they meet.”

Alluding to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, he said: *“I keep returning to something I first learned in my father's church as a child. In these most modern of crises I am drawn to the most ancient of truths; wherever there is hardship, wherever there is suffering, we cannot, we will not, we will never pass by on the other side”*.

The Prime Minister reminded his audience that the international community must have a particular concern for the world's poorest people during the downturn. It was a theme he returned to the following week when addressing a conference on world poverty, during which he thanked churches and others for their contribution to the fight for global justice.



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Speaking at the conference in London, the Prime Minister outlined his vision of a “global new deal” to make the economy work for the many and not for the few. *“I want new measures that will be targeted to help the very poorest, helping to keep girls in school, helping to keep food on the table, keep poverty from the door”*, he said.

He continued: *“while others may be tempted to shy away from their development responsibilities, we in Britain will continue to meet them and we will keep our promises on aid”*.

In February, Gordon Brown also travelled to the Vatican to discuss the economic crisis with Pope Benedict XVI. In an unusual move, the Prime Minister wrote an article for the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. In it, he commended the Roman Catholic Church for the positive role it has played in standing up for the interests of the poor.

The Prime Minister wrote: *“So the moral case for action could not be stronger”*. He continued: *“It is time that we see developing countries as being part of the global solutions that we need. And it is vital that those global solutions cater for developing countries”*.

Prime Minister applauds Hope08



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In December, Gordon Brown hosted a Christmas carol service at 10 Downing Street to celebrate the achievements of Hope08. Hope08 was a year-long initiative which saw hundreds of churches across the UK put on projects to serve their local communities.

The music was provided by The Salvation Army, following a personal invitation from Gordon Brown to

Lieutenant-Colonel Bill Cochrane, the Chief Secretary of The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The service was opened in prayer by The Revd Nicky Gumbel, the developer of the Alpha course. Labour MP Dawn Butler also spoke, describing the celebration as an opportunity to *“put Christ back into Christmas”*.

The Prime Minister said: *“People of faith have been at the heart of just about every social movement that has transformed society in this country, from the abolition of slavery through to Make Poverty History. I applaud all those involved in Hope08”*.

The service was attended by a number of senior politicians and church leaders. Also present were some of those who had put on local projects for Hope08 which are set to continue into 2009. Steve Clifford, the chair of Hope08 and now General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, praised the event as *“absolutely fantastic”*, adding: *“I had no idea that Hope08 would have such a high profile as it did”*.

Building a politics based on hope

A message from Stephen Timms MP, Labour’s Vice Chair for Faith Groups

In January, in a speech to the Institute for Public Policy Research, I argued that we need to develop a politics that is based on hope, and that churches and other faith groups can help us to achieve this. The theme was taken up the following week by my colleague Hazel Blears, as reported opposite.

The challenges facing us as a society are clear and serious. A very difficult economic situation has taken its toll on every major economy in the world. The need for tough and sustained action to combat climate change is becoming ever more urgent. Anti-social behaviour and even gang violence pose serious problems in many local communities.

In the face of such challenges it would be easy to lapse into cynicism or despair. But it is the job of politicians to be hopeful and to help develop solutions to these problems. At the very core of the Labour Party’s ethos is a belief that by working together we can make society better, and a commitment to work for positive change.

The Bible has a lot to say about “hope”. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes about the *“hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay”*. This hope should motivate us to act now.

The Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright, puts it well: *“People who believe in the resurrection, in God making a whole new world in which everything will be set right at last, are unstoppably motivated to work for that new world in the present”*.

So this isn’t a *“close your eyes and hope things will get better”* kind of hope. It’s a call to *“roll your sleeves up”*, to not accept the world as it is but to work for something better.

And that is exactly what many Christians are doing right across the UK. In my own constituency in East London I recently joined a group of Street Pastors. I was with them for an hour, but they were out all night. They put it like this: *“Street Pastors takes practical hope to the pavement”*.

I was pleased last year to be a patron of Hope08. The initiative saw similar projects set up around the UK, bringing real hope to local communities. Politicians can learn a lot from work like this. I believe that if we do, we can succeed in building a new kind of politics: one not riddled with cynicism, but grounded firmly on hope.



Hazel Blears praises local church projects

Hazel Blears, Labour's Communities Secretary, has commended the role played by churches in their neighbourhoods during the difficult economic climate. In a speech to the Evangelical Alliance, Hazel said that the Government will continue to listen to churches and to do what it can to support them as they serve their communities.

Hazel said: *"Even in the darkest times, faith endures. It gives hope. Jesus knew exactly the kind of challenges people are facing today. Times were tough for the people he lived with and whether it was in his parables or who he met, practical matters of work, money and food were never far from his thoughts and actions"*.

She continued: *"I think that quality is one of the reasons why faith-based charities have such a vital role to play as we face today's economic challenges"*.

She told her audience that the Government will continue to take decisive action to combat difficult economic circumstances. But she added that local charities also have an important part to play, including those motivated by faith, and promised that the Government will continue to support their work.



Hazel praised the contribution made by church groups in serving their local communities. She commended Salford Central United Reformed Church from her own constituency, which has provided locals with services ranging from a drop-in centre to youth sports teams.

She concluded her speech with the words: *"Faith gives hope in the future. There is a difficult path ahead. But get through it we will: and all the communities you work in, and all the people you help, will be that much stronger for having you at their shoulder"*.

News in brief

New website for Christians on the left

The Christian Socialist Movement has launched its new website, which is set to become a "one stop shop" for Christians interested in social justice and politics of the left. The site includes a selection of fascinating articles, as well as information about what CSM is doing around the UK, regular news updates, prayer points, and information about an exciting new section of CSM for young people. www.thecsm.org.uk

Jim Wallis meets with Labour MPs



In November, around 40 Labour MPs and advisors met with Jim Wallis, the leader of the Washington-based Sojourners network. Jim is the author of several books, including his best-selling *God's Politics*, which features a foreword by Gordon Brown.

The meeting, which was organised by the Christian Socialist Movement and hosted by Labour MP Andy Reed, took place in the Prime Minister's House of Commons office. Jim shared his perspectives on the recent US Presidential election, and discussed what Labour can learn from it.

Realising the potential for church buildings

In March, the Government published a guidance document for churches and other faith groups entitled "Churches and Faith Buildings: Realising the Potential". The initiative arose out of discussions between the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, and the Prime Minister. The document is intended to help churches to identify the funding sources available to make their buildings fit for delivering public services. It also outlines the steps the Government is taking to ensure that faith groups are equipped to participate fully in the provision of public services both nationally and locally.

Tony Blair addresses US prayer meeting

Former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair joined President Barack Obama in February at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington DC. In his speech, Tony joked about the different attitudes politicians have towards religion in the UK and the USA. He warned that the positive role of religion is under threat from an "unholy alliance" of religious extremism and aggressive secularism. *"For billions of people"*, he explained, *"faith motivates, galvanises, compels and inspires"*. Tony welcomed President Obama to his new role, adding: *"should it ever be tested, I hope your faith can sustain you"*.

Protecting vulnerable women from exploitation

Labour's Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, has unveiled tough new measures to protect vulnerable women in the UK. The Government is committed to doing everything possible to stamp out the exploitation of women through prostitution and trafficking.

In November last year, the Government announced the results of its six-month review into combating the demand for prostitution. The review evaluated a number of possible responses, as well as learning from the experiences of other countries including Holland and Sweden.

Under the existing law, it is illegal to cause, incite or control prostitution for gain, or to traffic people for the purpose of sexual exploitation. However, there is currently no specific offence of procuring sex with someone who has been trafficked or exploited. A new offence will make sex buyers liable for prosecution—even if they did not know that the prostitute had been trafficked or was controlled by a pimp.

The new measures will also equip the police with new powers to close premises associated with sexual exploitation and to act against those buying sex in public places. For example, it will be possible for police to prosecute kerb crawlers in the first instance, increasing the deterrent to those who consider paying on the street for sex.

Labour's Minister for Women and Equality, Harriet Harman, commented: *"Women are being trafficked for sexual exploitation into this modern day slavery. We have cracked down on the traffickers, but we also need to cut off the demand which fuels this evil trade. That is why we will criminalise and hold responsible the men who buy sex from these vulnerable women"*.

A message from Jacqui Smith



Labour's Home Secretary

In 2007 we celebrated the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade. Churches were right then to point out that slavery continues right up to the present day, and that many of today's victims are vulnerable women who have been exploited through trafficking and prostitution.

The scourge of sexual exploitation should outrage us all. It is a vile crime that allows a few to profit from the misery and degradation of others. This Labour Government will continue to do everything possible to protect those vulnerable women and bring those who exploit them to justice.

In December, the Home Secretary announced that the British Government has ratified the Council of Europe Convention Against Trafficking in Human Beings. The move will strengthen our ability to catch those responsible for trafficking and to support their victims. The ratification is part of the UK Trafficking Action Plan, which also includes plans to double funding for the UK Human Trafficking Centre to £1.7m in 2009.

Responding to the news, Rachel Davies, of Christian charity CARE, said: *"This law will help tackle one of the root causes of commercial sexual exploitation—demand. Together with the Convention, it will ensure that vulnerable people are better protected and that the UK becomes a more hostile environment for those wishing to exploit and control others"*.

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 (Vice Chair for Faith Groups), c/o The Labour Party, 39 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0HA. Alternatively, email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.

To join the Labour Party visit www.labour.org.uk/join or telephone us on 08705 900 200.