



Churches Update

March 2016

GOVERNMENT DEFEATED ON SUNDAY TRADING

Labour MPs form coalition with churches, unions and shopworkers to defeat controversial plans

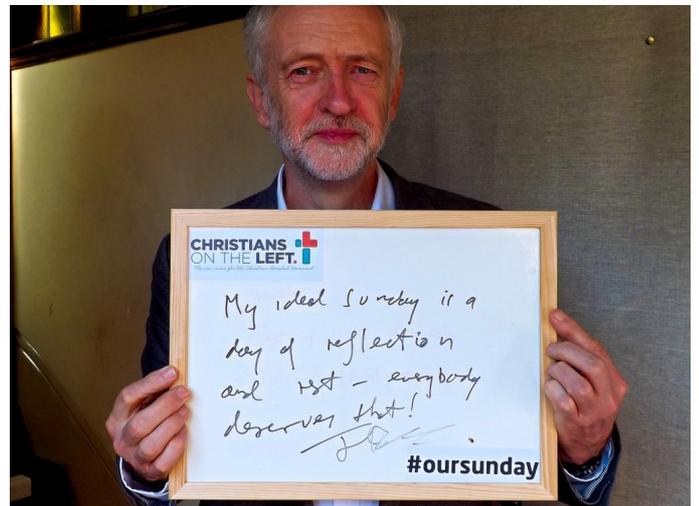
Labour MPs have blocked plans to let shops in England and Wales open longer on Sundays. MPs voted 317 to 286 for removing the amendment from the Enterprise Bill – a majority of 31.

The government planned to devolve Sunday trading rules to local areas, such as cities run by elected mayors or local authorities, despite a poll in February last year showing that a large majority of the public support the existing Sunday trading rules.

Labour joined a coalition of Christian groups, trade unions, shopworkers and opposition MPs to ensure the plans - which were not in the Conservative manifesto - were defeated.

Speaking during the debate, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Angela Eagle, said: "Labour has been consistent in echoing the voices of churches, small businesses, shopworkers and their families in support of the current arrangements. It works well and means that retailers can trade, customers can shop, and shopworkers can spend time with their families."

In the run up to the vote, senior figures from the Church of England, Roman Catholic church, Church in Wales, United Reformed Church, Methodist and Salvation Army signed an open letter denouncing the Government's planned relaxation.



Jeremy Corbyn at the Labour Party Conference earlier this year

The letter said: "We are concerned that the further deregulation of Sunday trading laws is likely to disrupt the rhythms of community life that are so integral to common good. In a world of increasing commodification the space for shared time and activities, central to human flourishing, is becoming increasingly rare. Needlessly extending Sunday opening hours will only exacerbate this trend."

Speaking to *Churches Update*, Jeremy Corbyn, thanked churches for their support: "This is a huge victory and I am grateful to Christians - from all denominations - who supported the campaign."

Inside:

- Labour criticises Ofsted inspection plans
- Jeremy Corbyn visits refugee camps
- Government u-turn over PIP
- Labour's Faith Envoy, Stephen Timms MP

LABOUR CRITICISES OFSTED INSPECTION PLANS

MPs raise concerns about proposals in the 'Out-of-school education settings' consultation

Labour MPs have used a debate in Parliament to raise their concerns about the government's plans to register 'out-of-school' settings. The proposals, which form part of the government's Counter-Extremism strategy, were described by one MP as a "mess".

Under the plans, the government will task Ofsted to carry out inspections on 'out-of-school education settings' that provide "intensive tuition" for more than six to eight hours a week.

During the debate, Labour MP, Catherine McKinnell said: "...My constituents are concerned about the additional burden not only on volunteers, who do incredible work up and down the country, but on Ofsted. They are also concerned about whether Ofsted has the capacity and the resources to implement the proposals."

Christian organisations have raised similar

worries. Simon McCrossan, Head of Public Policy at the Evangelical Alliance, told Premier Radio that: "...the proposals are potentially so wide that they would capture the registration, inspection and regulation of large swathes of church life."

The government will be publishing its response to the consultation later this year.

"There is real concern in faith communities that the Government are using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. They are tying up many voluntary organisations and faith groups in more red tape. The government are doing something. They already have the powers to act, but they have a track record of being slow to use them."



Nick Dakin MP, Shadow Schools Minister

JEREMY CORBYN VISITS REFUGEE CAMPS

Jeremy Corbyn has called the government to be "reasonable" and to consider granting entry clearance for refugees with connections to the UK.

"We cannot just ignore the fact that there are a large number of people in a very serious, deeply depressed state and they need our help," he said.

"I'm not saying all 9,000 should come in, but start with those that have a British connection and a British passport - that's an obvious one.

And the Home Office can let up a bit and be reasonable in those cases."

Jeremy's comments followed his visit to the refugee camps to see the humanitarian crises there first-hand. Whilst there, Jeremy told journalists: "We have got people here...with no proper education, no access to doctors, no access to dentists, limited access to food - in very cold, very wet conditions. These conditions are a disgrace anywhere. We as human beings have to reach out to fellow human beings."

ABRAHAMS: "RELIEF" AT GOVERNMENT U-TURN

Labour's Shadow Minister for Disabled People, Debbie Abrahams (right) has welcomed an announcement by the government that they will not be going ahead with their changes to Personal Independence Payments (PIP).

The u-turn, announced just days after the Budget followed publication of a report by the Labour Party which revealed that George Osborne's cuts to disability benefits will cause 200,000 disabled people to lose almost £3,000 a year.

In his Budget, George Osborne announced that cuts would be made to the PIP in an effort to save the Treasury £1.2 billion, whilst offering tax cuts to higher earners. The Former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith subsequently resigned saying the cuts to PIP were "...a compromise too far".



Speaking in an interview to LBC, Debbie said: *"I am relieved the government now recognise Labour's long-held concerns about what these cruel cuts would have had."*

"Under the Tories, disabled people have already borne among the biggest brunt of the cuts, losing over £24bn in support."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Concerns over new savings scheme

Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty, has warned that most of the poorest people in the country will miss out on a new government savings scheme announced in the Budget because they can't afford it. Niall said: *"I think the challenge is that so many people now are struggling to make ends meet on a week to week basis that how many people will actually be able to take up the scheme."*

Shadow Work & Pensions Secretary, Owen Smith, dismissed the savings scheme claiming that benefits cuts will mean families have little money to put aside. *"This is like stealing someone's car and offering them a lift to the bus stop,"* he said.

Government passes tax-credit cuts

Labour's Shadow Treasury Minister, Rebecca Long-Bailey, has slammed the government after it was revealed they had sneaked through cuts to tax-credits totalling nearly £250 million a year from 800,000 working families across Britain.

The government pushed through cuts to the income rise disregard from April 2016 in a Commons Committee.

Speaking afterwards, Rebecca said: *"The cuts will have a huge impact on low paid workers, especially those on zero hours contracts and in other forms of insecure work, who are struggling to make ends meet."*



DON'T CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

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

Easter is a time to celebrate new life. Labour's leadership election last year was accompanied by a surge in

party membership, which has now nearly doubled since May, to around 400,000.

Christians on the Left, which I chair, has grown too, as more and more Christians realise the importance of being politically engaged.

The media sometimes give the impression that the churches are in decline. The reality in communities up and down the country is very different. In his recent book *"London: A Spiritual History"*, Edoardo Albert points out that, *"seemingly without anyone noticing"*, church attendance in London rose by 100,000 to 720,000 from 2005 to 2012, that the number of churches is rising fast, and that church growth includes large numbers of twenty-something Londoners.

And all those church attenders are not merely

sitting in their pews. Across the UK, churches are stepping into difficult situations in their communities, providing care to those in need. Here is a dynamic potential force for change. Motivated by their faith, churches' enthusiasm to bring hope to their communities is make a lasting difference – for example through foodbanks, debt and money advice, counselling services, marriage preparation and youth work.

The Bible is unequivocal about the call to care for those without a voice. When the churches see their neighbours in need, they recognise their calling to respond. Taking the logical next step, they can be a crucial voice in the fight against poverty in Britain, and against discrimination.

As politicians, we can take inspiration from the churches' commitment – rooted in the events of the first Easter – to practical action for the common good. I am in no doubt that we can look forward to more of it in the year ahead.

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, 1 Brewers Green, London, SW1H 0RH. 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.