

Pendle CLP delegates report of

Labour Party Conference 2009 - Brighton

Councillor Asjad Mahmood



Prime Minister's Speech

Electoral reform: A referendum on whether to change the first-past-the-post electoral system will be called if Labour wins the general election. Gordon Brown said that he wished to introduce the so-called alternative vote system, which allows voters to rank candidates. Only once a candidate receives a majority of votes are they elected.

Cancer Care: Patients suspected of having cancer by their GP will be guaranteed a diagnostic test within a week. Any patient who fails to receive test results within a week will be automatically entitled to be seen elsewhere, either in a different NHS unit or a private hospital. About £1 billion will be spent on new scanners and other diagnostic equipment to ensure that the NHS has the capacity to fulfil the pledge. The move is expected to save up to 10,000 more lives a year in England.

Anti-social behaviour: New "action squads" of police will be sent into troubled housing estates in an effort to cut down on anti-social behaviour. Residents will be guaranteed a response to inquiries to the police within 48 hours.

Child Care: Tax breaks for middle-class parents will be abolished to pay for free child care for a quarter of a million two-year-olds from low-income families. The pledge is to deliver 10 hours of free nursery care per week for a third of toddlers within five years will set back higher earners by nearly £1,200 a year.

ID Cards: Tony Blair's national identity card scheme has been shelved for at least five years. The Prime Minister confirmed that the plans would be effectively killed off, with no compulsory ID cards until after 2015 at the earliest.

House of Lords: The House of Lords will be replaced with a largely-elected second chamber. The last remaining hereditary peers will be removed within the next year and

the public will be given the opportunity to vote for members of the House of Lords.

Single mothers: Teenage single mothers will be placed in shared hostels to be monitored by social workers. Instead of being given council houses and flats, young mothers will be put in "a network of supervised homes".

Post office: Post offices will take on the role of high street banks in a move designed to breathe



new life into the dying network. The country's 12,000 post offices would provide financial services geared towards residential customers and small businesses.

Alistair Darling has called for greater banking transparency and will pledge legislation to tackle "the reckless culture that puts short-term profits over long-term success", with an end to automatic bonuses and the introduction of claw-back measures.

Lord Mandelson announced that the car scrappage scheme will be extended to cover another 100,000 vehicles. He also made a commitment to manufacturing jobs, and admitted that the party had not got everything right.

People with university degrees and skills earn more, climb higher and create more value. We want closer links between businesses and universities so that good ideas don't stop at the research lab or the library door. Lord Mandelson said the government has committed £750m to new manufacturing in Britain, investing in low carbon cars and aircraft, new digital platforms, plastic electronics, life sciences, industrial biotechnology, wind turbine development and wave power.

Drinking in streets and parks will be banned in a fightback against 'Binge Britain'. Town halls will be given new powers to strip late-opening pubs of their licences. Nottingham intends to be the first city to implement the ban.

Andy Burnham announced plans to scrap in-patient parking fees. The health secretary said patients will be provided with a permit for the length of their stay, which visitors could use to park for free. Burnham said that the change would be introduced over the next three years "as we can afford it". "When people are coming in to hospital, the last thing they want to worry about is keeping the car parking ticket up-to-date,".

Ben Bradshaw spoke of successful government initiatives including free theatre tickets for under-

26s and free museum entry. And he cited that the government's free swimming for under 16's programme saw four and a half million extra swim sessions in its first three months. He pledged that as long as he was in the job he would protect the culture budget and remind his colleagues that for every £1 the government invests in the sector it gets £5 back in terms of economic activity.

Ed Balls said that greater responsibility will fall on the parents of poorly disciplined children, who will have to sign an agreement promising to support teachers and the school if their child misbehaves. Failure to uphold the promise could result in court charges under the new strategy, devised following a three-year investigation into behaviour problems in schools by the government.

Supreme Court: The court now is housed at Middlesex Guildhall in Parliament Square, replacing the law lords who were part of the House of Lords. It will act as the last court of appeal in all matters apart from criminal cases in Scotland, where the highest court will remain the High Court of Justiciary. The new court is no longer connected to Parliament as lawmakers and the judges charged with overseeing their legislation have been separated. The refurbishment of Middlesex Guildhall cost £59m, with the new court opening six years after it was first announced.

Douglas Alexander International development offered support to earthquake victims. He pledged to help those affected by the tsunami and earthquakes which have hit islands in the Pacific Ocean. He UK was prepared to offer support to the people of Indonesia, Samoa and Tonga.

David Miliband has praised the work of British troops fighting in Afghanistan and insisted that their presence in the war-torn country is necessary. Miliband said the Afghan army has increased from 60,000 to 90,000 and is set to expand rapidly throughout next year. The foreign secretary also confronted Iran on the issue of its

nuclear weapon development. DM said Iran does have rights to civilian nuclear power, and we are happy for you to exercise them, but not if the price is plunging the Middle East into a nuclear arms race that is a danger to the whole world.

Our motion on the NHS was passed in the Public Services contemporary issues ballot. Manufacturing, Employment Rights, School Meals and Housing also got through.

Emergency motions on East Coast Main Line (ECML) and Royal Mail Pension deficit and humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka were put forward and passed by the conference. The ECML franchise should be retained as a public company and run on a not-for-profit basis rather than re-let to the private sector. The government had intended to accept the £8bn deficit as part of its plans to part-privatise Royal Mail. But the legislation was put on hold in July after a backlash from Labour MPs. But the conference called for the government to take on the pension deficit and “resolve this matter immediately”. The conference welcomed recent decision of the EU to reconsider Sri Lanka’s favoured trading status and the conference agreed such status should be withdrawn until the Sri Lankan government allows aid charities and journalists to freely enter the country.

Marge Carey and Stephen Twigg were elected to the conference arrangement committee. On the election for National Constitutional Committee Division 3-CLPS, I voted for Judith Blake who was successful on being elected to the NEC board.

One member one vote (OMOV) rule change: Labour members have gained more control over the party’s policy-making process. A move proposed by 11 constituency parties, and backed by the conference, means all Labour members will have the right to vote on who sits on the National Policy Forum. Supporters of the change argue that democracy and accountability will be increased. The National Executive Committee

had urged a rejection of the changes, promising to examine them in a wider review of internal democracy next year. But a conference vote revealed significant support in favour of the change.