

## National Delegate and National Local Government Conferences, Brighton 2009

<http://cms.unison.co.uk/Decisions.asp?ConferenceID=229&OrderBy=AgendaID>

The link above goes to the decisions made at National Delegate Conference(NDC). Somerset County were involved in quite a number of the motions/amendments and composite motions ([Motion 31 - Public Services](#), [Motion 43 - New Challenges for the NHS](#), [Motion 47 - Academies](#), [Composite A - Organising](#), [Composite C - Mileage Allowances](#), [Composite G - Shared Services](#), [Composite I - Economic Crisis and Public Services](#)).

Obviously we could not get involved in everything. There were other worthwhile issues debated, in particular the BNP and the Rise of the Far Right and Black Activists Tackling Racism at Work. Quite rightly there was much passionate debate on these issues and how UNISON intends to take these matters forward.

The other big issues included the Crisis in Housing, Fuel Poverty, Independent Safeguarding Authority, Climate Change and Palestine and Gaza.

All the matters above are important because some are International (since the trade union movement operates in solidarity across national boundaries) but also within countries to try and effect positive change for working people. There are links between local, regional, national and international matters. Climate change. It would be difficult to resolve meaningful change if only one country decided to act whilst others ignored the rather important fact we all reside on the same planet (well, at the moment anyway!!)

In an unusual and unexpected speech the General Secretary called on UNISON Labour Link to withdraw funding for Constituency Development Plans for local Labour Parties and, implied in future to only back those MPs who support UNISON's policies. These words received a very warm welcome from the vast majority of delegates. Of course, time will tell if this is turned into reality. Nevertheless many thought it a step in the right direction. Only 30% of public sector workers in a recent poll stated they would vote Labour which is probably why the speech was made.

There were also hotly debated rule amendments. One on setting up sectors constitutionally; this rule amendment fell because the right of branches to call special delegate conferences had been omitted (carelessly or deliberately? Take your pick!). In local government in the past we were able to call for special conferences on Pensions and Single Status. This, no doubt will be debated next year!

The other rule change that fell was about the issue of expelling members who are BNP members. It is worth noting that they can be expelled under existing rules. Many delegates thought the wording of the rule amendment was too ambiguous and that it could be used to expel UNISON members who belong to other political parties. Hopefully a more focused rule change will be submitted next year.

[The Local Government Service Group Conference](#) took place immediately prior to the NDC. This conference covers workplace matters in our service group. The matter of privatisation of Social Work, Personalised Services, Shared Services and the future of the Local Government Pension Scheme were debated as was the ability to discuss Local Government Pay.

Overall both conferences were interesting but there were some matters that delegates were less than happy about. Many felt that too much time was spent on presentations (videos and awards etc). Conferences are the sovereign bodies of UNISON but too much of the scheduled agenda items are not debated. As a democratic member led union we should be discussing as many motions as possible.

Also many noted that having question and answer sessions on the Conference floor were not a democratic way to change UNISON policies (which it does not) but rather an attempt to bring the workshop/focus group ethos, so beloved of Tony Blair and New Labour, into the union. Lets ensure that it does not. We are a democratic TRADE UNION responsible to the membership.

**Nigel Behan** (personal capacity)

p.s. The official and unofficial fringe meetings are well worth attending. Sometimes you can get a very different angle on trade union matters and a deeper understanding of where the power lies in Britain and the world. But that is for another time....!