



CONFERENCE BRIEFING

A SPECIAL REPORT FROM LONDON COMMUNICATIONS AGENCY

LABOUR | LIVERPOOL | 25-29 SEPTEMBER

- **Miliband calls for a new political dawn**
- **Labour still struggle for policy**
- **Economy remains focus of debate**
- **Ken reveals populist policy on transport**

Despite being a long way from the next election, the Labour Conference in Liverpool was an opportunity for the party to reassure delegates as they began to consult on a comprehensive set of policy reviews. The sunshine helped to reinforce a new positivity though it is clear that wounds are still raw from last year's General Election defeat.

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Leader Ed Miliband has started to gain support over the past few months and his address to Conference showed that his confidence is growing as he set the party on a different course and attempted to challenge perceptions. The speech has been described by Guardian writer Seumas Milne as the 'most radical delivered by a Labour leader for a generation' – this despite the fact that it contained little or no policy detail. Some national newspapers however were not so impressed and Jim Pickard in the Financial Times questioned how a business can be diagnosed as 'good' or 'bad' as specified by Miliband.

There was lively discussion on the topic of social housing throughout the week and how the Coalition needs to start delivering in order to provide homes and stimulate economic growth. This was held in the context of the deeply complex Localism Bill and the controversially short National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

High speed rail was high on the agenda with vociferous debate coming from both supporters and objectors. It is perhaps telling that Coalition and Labour MPs are obviously in favour of the project for its potential to encourage economic growth and increased rail capacity. Similarly, rail professionals in attendance at various fringe events were adamant in their support for the scheme.

Unlike Brian Paddick in Birmingham last week, Ken Livingstone was everywhere and took the opportunity to reveal his most significant policy announcement since being named as the 2012 London Mayoral candidate. His transport fare reduction plan garnered plenty of press coverage and forced Transport for London (TfL) to join the debate to rebuff his claims of a surplus in their budget. The Mayoral candidate signalled some policy ideas during the week, although only the transport announcement seems to be set for his manifesto.

Ed Miliband has the opportunity to reshuffle his Shadow Cabinet in the coming weeks (it was previously voted on by MPs) and Streatham MP Chukka Umunna did his case for a Frontbench position no harm with a series of competent appearances at various business fringe events.

Meanwhile, a policing review to be led by former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Lord Stevens was announced by Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper and there was the second of three appearances during Conference Season from actor Hugh Grant who attended a fringe event on governing the media.

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Section One: Ed Miliband's speech

Ed Miliband began his speech at Conference in good spirits with jokes to diffuse the great weight of expectation placed on his performance by the media. The leader distanced himself from the Labour Party under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and insinuated a new approach to politics when echoing the public's disappointment in business – particularly banking – and an outspoken criticism of Rupert Murdoch.

The closest thing to a policy, which had already been leaked in the national newspapers over the previous weekend, came towards the end of the speech when he claimed that Labour would cut university fees if in power.

As was the case throughout the conference, Miliband's speech was devoid of policy announcements, which Labour claimed was understandable coming as it was some three and a half years before the next election. However, some commentators were adamant policies should have been brought to the table. The Labour leader concentrated heavily on the economic crisis, distancing his Party from responsibility for the 2008 worldwide crash.

The speech condemned the Coalition for making widespread cutbacks too quickly and therefore stifling economic growth. Miliband also said that he had broken the previously perceived number one rule of British politics by distancing himself, and the Labour Party, from Rupert Murdoch. He also reflected on the severity of the August riots but praised the civilians who administered the clean-up.

“*Only David Cameron could believe that you make ordinary families work harder by making them poorer and you make the rich work harder by making them richer.*
Ed Miliband during his Conference speech.”

Despite attacking the virtues of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, one part of Miliband's speech praised a selection of Thatcher's policies from the 1980s – particularly in allowing people the option to purchase their council houses, cutting taxes down from 60%-80% and how it was right to disallow strikes ahead of ballots.

He played to the masses with comments on how Fred Goodwin should not have been given a knighthood and spent much of the speech discussing the importance of making and selling real services and products. He spoke in favour of an effective welfare system but was careful not to make excuses for people who take advantage of it.

As was reflected in the week's events, he talked of the interlinked role between a reformed welfare system and social housing – pointing to the housing shortage. He also touched on the NHS by referencing a now abandoned election promise given by Prime Minister Cameron that hospital services would not be closed.

Overall, the speech prompted mixed reviews, but did find some support in the unlikely form of the Daily Mail which reported him to have 'spelt out some home truths' and welcomed his call for people at both ends of the socio-economic scale to take responsibility for the financial crisis.

The Times said that he is a candidate for those who believe that what you take out of society should be closely related to what you put in though the Telegraph was less than impressed with what it described as an 'alarmingly authoritarian edge'.

The CBI concentrated on Miliband's economic theme and openly criticised the Labour leader for characterising some businesses as asset-strippers.

Section Two: Housing and Planning

It is significant that social housing formed such a large part of fringe events over the week now that Labour find themselves back in opposition. It soon became clear from the Shadow Communities and Local Government (DCLG) team that a Housing Policy Review is currently being looked over by Ed Miliband and that its publication is imminent.

In her main speech to conference, Shadow Secretary of State for DCLG Caroline Flint highlighted that fewer houses were built last year than any year since the 1920s, specifically referencing how 200,000 planned new homes were cancelled. She said that council housing waiting lists had soared with only half a million mortgages being provided – apparently half the number provided during each year of Labour’s first decade in power. Flint questioned the Coalition’s idea of localism and thought that planning reforms had already ‘caused confusion and alarm’.

Greenwich and Woolwich MP and former Housing Minister Nick Raynsford expressed the importance of housing being linked with social policy. He was critical of the Government in cutting up to 60% of capital investment in the spend on new houses. Westminster North’s MP Karen Buck explained how families in her local authority are not leaving social accommodation because they cannot afford to privately rent or purchase their own property, resulting in a shortage of housing stock for those in need.

“ *Housing benefit...previously stood between many people and the abyss of homelessness. Shadow Work and Pensions Minister Karen Buck of Westminster North at one of the many debates on housing.*

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At a fringe event, Caroline Flint admitted that the Party did not do enough for housing whilst in Government and that it is an area that struggles to get political recognition. The former Secretary of State said that, when in power, they encouraged local authorities to release land for social housing development. She also stated that Regional Spatial Strategies were not perfect but at least broached the debate that land was needed for boroughs to provide housing through the setting of targets.

Current Shadow Housing Minister Alison Sebeck was active during Conference week and used a session on Sunday to outline what she termed the ‘chaos’ directly resulting from the planning changes proposed in the Localism Bill and NPPF. She described her disappointment at current DCLG minister Andrew Stunell who she said made promises regarding social housing that have since not been delivered by government. Sebeck claimed that it is possible to provide social housing in the context of sustainable development – a term that has been bandied around a great deal since the publication of the Localism Bill but one which politicians of all persuasions find hard to define.

Although housing formed the main debate in Liverpool, the Localism Bill also reared its controversial head. Hugh Ellis, of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), said that neighbourhood planning provision is needed, but feared that the complexity and cost of a Neighbourhood Plan will mean only a minority of groups can afford to participate.

Jack Dromey, a Shadow DCLG minister, said – a little sarcastically – that planning lawyers would be the greatest beneficiaries of the introduction of the new Localism Bill. He went on to state that it would not be too difficult for retailers to manipulate local development plans.

“ *More holes than a sieve. Lewisham East MP Heidi Alexander on the Localism Bill.*

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In fringe events throughout the week questions arose around the recently published NPPF, which some claim has been condensed to the detriment of its necessarily complex nature. Sebeck told delegates that the Coalition has a muddled planning policy that is conflicted between the need for localism and a requirement for economic growth.

Section Three: Transport

Not to be left out, Maria Eagle, Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, announced that her Shadow Transport team is also currently undertaking a policy review whilst admitting that the Labour government did not go far enough in making a real difference to the sector.

“ Norman Baker: *the Give Way Minister in a Give Way party: that's the Liberal Democrats in this Tory-led Government.*
Maria Eagle in her main Conference speech as Secretary of State for Transport.

Aviation was considered a hot topic at many of the fringe events and Ed Anderson, chair of the Airport Operators Association (AOA), and Luke Pollard, head of public affairs at ABTA, agreed that aviation is a central economic driver.

Meanwhile, Professor David Begg was adamant that increased aviation capacity is needed, stating that we either need to build a third runway at Heathrow or a completely new hub airport.

As with the Liberal Democrat Conference last week, high speed rail formed much of the transport debate. In fact, the pro and anti high speed rail campaign stands were pitched within view of each other and members of both groups were present (and vocal) at numerous transport fringe events.

It was striking that most of the arguments for High Speed Two (HS2) were based on a need for extra capacity rather than a need for high speed rail.

Andrew Gwynne MP used one event to express concern over the January 2012 increase in rail fares of RPI +3% and said that a 'reliable and affordable transport system is essential for the economy'. The Shadow Transport Minister emphasised the need for connectivity between HS1 and HS2 – a point echoed by Labour's candidate for Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone.

Elsewhere Eagle stated that the fare rises rightly highlighted the need for reduced costs in building HS2. In comments mirroring the leader's speech, Eagle said that passengers should not be burdened with the cost of high speed rail when rail companies pay large dividends to shareholders but rely on public finance to turn a profit. She said that the UK's rail sector is currently 'not fit for purpose'. Trade union members of the panel also attacked privatisation.

One big announcement of the week centred around the London Underground and saw former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone pledge to cut public transport ticket prices by 5% if he is re-elected in May next year. Livingstone claimed that the money for his cuts will come from a £728m operating surplus in Transport for London's (TfL) budget. Back in London, TfL's Deputy Chair Daniel Moylan rebuffed these claims and condemned the move as harming London's future investment in infrastructure.

Section Four: London Mayoral Candidate

Ken Livingstone was the guest at a London First breakfast on the Monday. The former Mayor of London spoke candidly and offered more policy ideas over the session than his Party did during the entire week.

On transport, along with his fares announcement (see section three), Livingstone said that he would use London's £1bn allocation of infrastructure finance – announced last week at the Liberal Democrat conference – to extend the DLR to Barking Reach which would in turn bring more housing to that area. He spoke of a Crossrail 2 and 3 with the latter running from Surrey to Stansted which, in his opinion, is the only option for increasing aviation capacity.

“ *Boris Johnson stands for a privileged minority.
Ken Livingstone continued his arguments from the 2008 Mayoral race during his speech at Conference.* ”

As expected, Livingstone announced his intention to re-establish the links to foreign investment from the emerging nations abandoned early in the current Mayor Boris Johnson's term. Livingstone signalled that, should he win next year's election, the Chinese and Indian offices would be reopened and added a Brazilian counterpart to his ambitions.

The upcoming battle between Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone was referenced in Tessa Jowell's Sunday Conference speech before she introduced her party's candidate. The former Minister for London defined the 2012 election as a battle between competence and celebrity. Jowell said that competence would keep transport fares down, helpfully foreshadowing the Livingstone fares policy announced the following lunchtime. Jowell also referenced the entire London Assembly Labour Party currently at City Hall and talked of the investment in transport, Olympic legacy and neighbourhood policing as successes during Ken's time as Mayor.

Livingstone used his speech to insinuate that London had stepped back from its role of 'leading the world' (in an economic sense) since he lost the 2008 Mayoral election. He spoke of increased unemployment, above average cuts to local authority finances, high transport fares and the rising cost of living. He also implied that Boris Johnson was to blame for the August riots and continually tried to link the current Mayor with the national Conservative Party – a connection Boris himself is keen to distance himself from.

The Labour candidate attacked Boris over his support for the proposal to cut the top rate level of tax; having a second job at the Telegraph and the amount of City Hall staff earning over £100k per annum. Overall, Livingstone's speech referenced the current Mayor by name a staggering 24 times compared to using 'London' or 'Londoners' on only 19 occasions.

Unlike at the Liberal Democrat Conference, there was a fringe event on the Mayoral election with Tottenham MP David Lammy and Newham's directly elected Mayor Sir Robin Wales as well as Peter Kellner from pollster YouGov. Ben Rogers of the Centre for London felt that Ken Livingstone needs to reinvent himself to win back the Mayoralty. Sir Robin thought it wise for Livingstone to work with business to encourage growth in London and set a new narrative for his campaign focussing on more positive policies. Lammy – understandably given his constituency loyalties – highlighted the need for local investment in Tottenham following the August riots. Kellner noted that, at the moment, one in five Labour voters preferred Boris Johnson when thinking of their voting intention.

“ *They tend to think Ken has lost touch with Londoners, and that Boris is decisive and sticks to what he believes in.
YouGov's Peter Kellner on the upcoming opinion for the 2012 Mayoral election* ”

Later in the week, rumours surfaced that Ed Miliband wanted to replace Ken Livingstone as Mayoral candidate with Alan Johnson. However, Livingstone strenuously denied this. The claims revolved around polling which suggested that the incumbent Boris Johnson will hold onto the London Mayoralty despite Labour showing a general 20 point lead in the region. This polling was referenced by YouGov's Peter Kellner during a fringe event, but has not yet been published.

Section Five: London 2012

Shadow Minister for the Olympics, Tessa Jowell used her Conference speech on the Sunday to discuss how London 2012 is a celebration for the whole of the UK and specifically referenced areas that played a role in the building of Olympic venues.

Sir Robin Wales spoke about London 'moving east' and how the Royal Docks should play a large role in ensuring London's future economic growth. Days after the Newham Mayor said that there had never been a better time to invest in the area, Google's announced that they had taken a lease on offices near Old Street for start-ups.

In an identically titled London 2012 fringe event to that of the Liberal Democrats last week, and the Conservatives next week, Jonathan Edwards and Lord Coe were joined in Liverpool by Tessa Jowell. Edwards reiterated his comments from last week in Birmingham that he had never been involved in something that had achieved so much, yet still had much to do.

Jowell highlighted the cross-party effort to ensure that London 2012 is as successful as possible. She went on to state that, in a week where Labour was looking to make political capital from the Coalition, there was not a single criticism she had of them regarding the Olympics. Jowell went on to emphasise the importance of an Olympics legacy lasting for up to 25 years beyond 2012 – both she and Coe felt an increase in sports participation would be the toughest element of this.

Brent North MP Barry Gardiner, who was amongst the audience, pushed the panel on the legacy points. Jowell credited Ken Livingstone for his role in bringing legacy to the forefront in the original bid.

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60 years of regeneration in just six.

Tessa Jowell in her speech to Conference referencing the impact of the Olympics on east London

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Section Six: Health

Shadow Secretary of State for Health John Healey used his Conference speech to highlight Labour's pride in the creation of the National Health Service (NHS) and its investment and reform through 13 years of government. However, he emphasised how the NHS was not built by government but was built by the people, for the people. Healey spoke at length of the Prime Minister's broken pre-General Election promises and how reorganisation was likely to damage healthcare in the UK.

As expected, he expressed serious concern over the possibility of hospital privatisation and guaranteed that the NHS would remain public under Labour.

Shadow Health Minister Liz Kendall highlighted a Commonwealth Fund study that detailed how patient satisfaction rates were at their highest at the tail end of the Labour Government. She said that improving healthcare despite massive efficiency savings was the biggest challenge facing the NHS. Kendall cited London's stroke services as an example of how realigning services will save money and produce better outcomes. At the same fringe event, President of the Royal College of Surgeons, Norman Williams, said it was necessary to further educate politicians on how the closure of hospital services can lead to better clinical results – he highlighted Chase Farm Hospital as a specific example of this.

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