

10,000 march to end child poverty

Keep the Promise makes history as the biggest ever event to end UK child poverty



THE GOVERNMENT received a resounding message from 10,000 people at the Keep the Promise rally in Trafalgar Square on 4 October.

The day began with a march through Westminster, which at times felt more like a carnival as a samba band led a colourful and lively parade past the

Houses of Parliament and through Whitehall. The thousands of marchers arrived in the square to be greeted by children's entertainers and stalls run by ECP member organisations with games and activities. Short films about children facing poverty, including Newsround's award winning *The Wrong*

Trainers, reminded the crowd why they were there before the rally began.

Television presenter Chris Parker led the lively onstage action with performances from a steel band of young performers, and singer Sophie Ellis-Bextor. A group of young people presented a *continued on page 2*

CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF

Tel 020 7837 7979

www.cpag.org.uk

Editor
Tim Nichols

Production Editor
Nicola Johnston

Contributors
John Dickie

Typeset by
Boldface
020 7833 8868

Printed by
Wernham Printers Ltd
020 8805 8026

Next edition
January 2009



Outside the House: Conference reports

MPs were only just returning to the House as the *Newsletter* went to press, so it is their activities outside of the House at party conferences that merit most attention.

But before we get to the annual political jamborees, we can announce that **MP of the Year nominee** for this issue is **Dai Davies, MP for Blaenau Gwent**. Dai is nominated for his tremendous efforts as the only MP to bring two whole coaches full of people from his constituency to the **Keep the Promise rally**. Dai said: 'In some of our communities in Blaenau Gwent, one out of every two children is living in crushing poverty. This, in one of the richest countries in the world, is a scandal. I will not stop until we see an end to this terrible scourge on our society.' Thank you Dai and keep up the great work!

Liberal Democrat conference: In Bournemouth CPAG held a joint fringe with **Centre Forum** and **PCS** on **60 years of the Welfare State: celebrating its success and securing its future**. The main speaker was the Lib Dem Shadow Secretary for Work and Pensions, **Jenny Willott MP**. Jenny laid down the Lib Dems continued support for a strong welfare state, but outlined the reforms that the Party believes are necessary for the 21st century. **Kate Green** welcomed the Party's commitment to eradicating child poverty, but warned of the dangers to families of applying ever more conditions to benefit entitlement, especially when unemployment is rising. Elsewhere in the conference lively activists berated the panel at a fringe on social mobility for not focussing on inequality as the core problem.

Labour conference: Stop two on the festival circuit was in Manchester with the Labour Party, where CPAG held a joint fringe with the **NUT** on the theme: **Charging at the school gates: school costs and poor families**. An impassioned plea backed with a wealth of strong evidence for the Party to put **universal free school meals** in the next manifesto was given by **Sharon Hodgson MP**. Equally impassioned was parent campaigner **Jackie Schneider, from Merton Parents**, who supported free school meals too and highlighted the unfairness of expensive school trips. A welcome surprise in Gordon Brown's leader's speech was the promise to **enshrine child poverty targets in legislation** (see p3).

Conservative conference: We wearily rolled into the final stop of our conference tour at Birmingham, but were soon revived by the excellent attendance at the **End Child Poverty reception**. Family, schools and welfare reform all featured heavily in the main conference programme and the **Centre for Social Justice** helped ensure there was much discussion around poverty in the fringe events. CPAG's **Kate Green** and **Tim Nichols** hitched lifts with fellow passengers **Teresa May** and **Michael Gove** to see the party's **Social Action Project** at the Welsh House Farm Estate in Edgbaston where they are supporting a youth worker on various projects with young people. **Mark Harper MP** spoke at a joint CPAG and **Inclusion** fringe on **Local Communities and Child Poverty**, where **Kate Green** promoted the **Child Poverty Toolkit** CPAG has helped develop for local government.

continued from page 1

film giving their views of why the child poverty promise must be kept. Moving speeches were made by ECP's chair, **Martin Narey**, and **Jasmine Whitbread** from **Save the Children** and **Brendan Barber** from the **TUC**.

Leading politicians from all the main parties were there to witness the day, including **James Purnell**, **Ed Balls** and **Ed Milliband** from the Government; Lib Dem leader **Nick Clegg** with his work and pensions spokesperson **Jenny Willott**; and the Conservative work and pensions spokesperson, **Chris Grayling**. As strong impression was left on them all by the crowded square of thousands of people demanding action to keep the child poverty promise.

The climax of the rally was 'Listen up Downing Street!' when **Chris Parker** led the crowd, who had brought whistles and noisemakers of all kinds, in making the loudest noise possible and shouting "keep the promise". A cheer went up when it was reported back that the noise had been heard in 10 Downing Street.

Earlier in the day, with thousands expected at the rally, the Prime Minister made last minute changes to his schedule and invited a delegation from the Campaign to End Child Poverty to meet with him. CPAG's **Kate Green** and other members of the Campaign, including Director **Hilary Fisher** and Chair, **Martin Narey**, entered 10 Downing Street on behalf of the thousands of people journeying to the start of the march.

Hilary Fisher said: 'The Prime Minister told us that he is committed to ending child poverty for the long haul, but it is clear that the more we can do as campaigners to hold him to that promise, the better results we will get for the 3.9 million UK children living in poverty.'

CPAG played a key role in organising the event alongside our partners in the Campaign to End Child Poverty. Our supporters marched together under the CPAG banner and staff ran a stall in the square to promote our **2skint4school** campaign.

Kate Green, said: 'It was a tremendously exciting day. It was both fun and inspiring, with a real sense that we've moved up a gear. We are no longer simply a campaign, but a national movement to end child poverty – and we're growing in strength all the time. I cannot thank enough the people who came from all over the UK to make this important and impassioned statement.'

The **Keep the Promise** campaign by **End Child Poverty** is continuing right up to the Budget in 2009 with a focus on securing the **£3 billion** investment that would ensure the promise to halve child poverty by 2010 is kept. Please be a part of it by signing up in support at:
www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/promise



Child poverty targets to be enshrined in legislation

In the Prime Minister's speech to the Labour party conference, he made a new announcement that the Government intends to enshrine the targets to end child poverty in legislation.

It is likely that the Welfare Reform Bill that is expected to follow a Green Paper on welfare reform will be used to implement the commitment. The Green Paper, the first for Work and Pensions Secretary James Purnell, contained a chapter devoted to the Government's commitments to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020. Purnell has frequently stated the ongoing commitment of the Government and his department to the targets, as well as attacking the Conservative opposition for their failure to fully back them.

Currently the Conservative Party is committed to the 2020 target as an 'aspiration' rather than a pledge, stating concern about the lack of progress made by the current Government and uncertainty over the amount of progress that will have been made by the time of the next election. However, at the Conservative Party conference Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, Chris Grayling, did not rule out support for enshrining the target in legislation and suggested his party would be interested to see the precise proposals that Government brings before Parliament.

CPAG is a strong supporter of enshrining the targets in legislation, but believes that the way in which this is done will be crucial. The target to eradicate fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010 is already enshrined in legislation, but this has not prevented the numbers of fuel poor vulnerable households rocketing up with the high rises in fuel bills, leaving the Government facing legal action from Friends of the Earth and Help the Aged. A lesson from this may be the need for the target to be linked to an accountability framework that ensures government strategy reacts swiftly to unexpected challenges to progress.

Chief Executive, Kate Green, said: 'Any legislation would have to leave it absolutely clear that the target is at 60 per cent of median income. We could not have a situation in which a future government was left the wriggle room to simply redefine poverty out of existence.'



Help us make a difference

CPAG is the leading charity campaigning for the abolition of child poverty in the UK and for a better deal for low-income families and children. We aim to:

- raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention;
- bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty; *and*
- enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

Your donation will help us to fight the injustice of poverty.

Please make a donation

- Send us a **cheque**, **postal order** or **Charities Aid Foundation** voucher made payable to 'Child Poverty Action Group'.
- By **credit card** online at www.cpag.org.uk.
- Set up a **standing order** through your bank to make a regular gift.
- Make a will and leave us a **legacy**.
- Set up **Give As You Earn** (payroll giving) with your employer.

Add value. Gift Aid It!

Donations to CPAG qualify for tax relief – fill out a Gift Aid declaration form.

For more information visit www.cpag.org.uk/support email staff@cpag.org.uk or write to:

CPAG
94 White Lion Street
London N1 9PF

CPAG joins forces on Fuel Poverty Charter

CPAG is part of a coalition of 12 organisations that has launched the Fuel Poverty Charter. The charter is in response to recently announced fuel bill rises of £300 per household this winter that are expected to push the number of households in fuel poverty over 5 million.

Other organisations include Friends of the Earth, Barnardos and Help the Aged. Together we are warning that 20,000 people already die from the cold in the winter, with many more becoming ill and going into debt. While the winter deaths are predominantly older people, poor families will be increasingly hit by ill health from inadequately heated homes, or debt if they use fuel they can't afford to keep their families warm.

The charter includes calls for:

- re-establishment of the scrapped Public Service Agreements on fuel poverty targets;
- direct help for poor families to bring their homes up to improved minimum energy efficiency standards;
- crisis payments for low income and vulnerable households;
- benefit take up advice as part of fuel poverty support programmes;
- consideration of a windfall tax on energy companies to finance crisis payment and energy efficiency measures; *and*
- new requirements on energy companies to provide social tariffs.

The charter will be an important campaigning tool for CPAG and our partners as the fuel bill rises begin to hit families and we approach the Pre-Budget Report.

If you want to know how families can receive all the help available now with fuel costs, CPAG has recently published the 14th edition of the *Fuel Rights Handbook*.



Free school meals for every child in P1 to P3

Following years of campaigning by the Scottish Free School Meals Campaign, in which CPAG in Scotland has taken a lead role, the Scottish Government has confirmed that free school meals will be rolled out to all children in Primary 1 to 3 from 2010.

Announcing the move Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Education, said that 'This Government has made it a priority to help children in their early years and this initiative does just that, providing every child with a free school meal in their first years at primary school.'

The move came after the publication of a successful evaluation of free school meal pilots in five local authorities. The evaluation found the universal approach to free school meals increased uptake significantly from 53 per cent to 75 per cent overall – a massive 22 per cent increase. Significantly take up also increased amongst those already entitled to free school meals – up on average by 4.4 per cent, but with increases of up to 8.5 per cent in some areas.

Organisations working alongside CPAG in the Campaign for Free School Meals welcomed the move. According to

Marion Davis of One Parent Families Scotland, 'This is excellent news. Free school meals make a vital contribution to boosting children's health, concentration and readiness to learn. The roll out of this brilliant initiative will prove a real benefit to families across Scotland.'

Peter Kelly, Director of the Poverty Alliance, added that 'As expected, the pilot schemes have shown the benefits that a universal approach to school meals can have. However, the real benefits should be felt in the years to come, benefits not just for the health of children, but improvements in educational outcomes. In the difficult economic conditions that many families now face this extra help is very much needed.'

However, the announcement has not been without contention. Despite having explicitly agreed the roll out of free school meals as part of a funding settlement and underpinning Concordat signed by local authorities and Scottish Government last year, some local authorities have now suggested that they do not have the funding to deliver.

But according to John Dickie, Head of CPAG in Scotland, it is important that both local councils and Ministers stick to the agreement. 'It is vital that local authorities, as well as Ministers, stick to the commitments they have explicitly made. It would be a tragedy if the education, health and well being of our children were to fall foul of a dispute between national and local government. For their sake, and the sake of hard pressed families across Scotland, the promise of free school meals for every child in the early years of primary school must be kept.'

Scotland says End Child Poverty

CPAG in Scotland joined other members of the Campaign to End Child Poverty including Save the Children, Barnardos, Poverty Alliance and One Parent Families Scotland in taking the call to Keep the Promise to the Scottish Parliament, before joining the 4 October rally in London. After presenting giant blocks carrying messages gathered by Save the Children from across the country a parliamentary reception, hosted by Aileen Campbell MSP, was addressed by Stewart Maxwell, the Minister for Communities and Duncan McNeil MSP (Convener of the Parliaments Local Government and Communities Committee), as well as CPAG's John Dickie. The event brought together young people, parents, MSPs, trade unions, churches, local government, front line agencies and campaigners in an impressive spectrum of support for more action at

both Holyrood and Westminster to turn child poverty promises into real change for families across the country.



John Dickie joins from left Robin Harper MSP (Co-convener of the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Children and Young People), Douglas Hamilton (Save the Children), Sally MacKenzie (Poverty Alliance) and Marion Davis (One Parent Families Scotland) in taking End Child Poverty messages to the Scottish Parliament.