

What has any of this got to do with me?



Work in public services? **Children at school?**

Need a pension when you retire?

Ever use the health service?

If the answer to any of these questions is **YES**
then read on....

Politics ma



For many people, politics is something boring that happens on the news - men in suits arguing and shouting. It is hard to see the connection with everyday life.

But stop and think:

Your pension

Your child's education

Your hospital

Your job

atters...

All are affected by decisions made by the Government. But how do you have your say?

You can vote in elections - but as a member of UNISON you can also have influence, because UNISON is directly involved in the political system and in political campaigning on your behalf.

UNISON LABOUR LINK

Many groups, organisations and businesses try to influence Government. UNISON has unique access on your behalf, because through the UNISON Labour Link, we are at the heart of the Labour Party.

Over a century ago, trade unions found that their attempts to improve conditions for their members were constantly thwarted when employers used the Parliamentary system to change the law in their own favour. Trade Unions fought back by forming their own political party, the Labour Party, and getting MPs elected. Times have changed, but trade unions like UNISON retain a very special position in playing such a key role in a major political party.

So how does this link with Labour help UNISON?

At every level within the Labour Party, UNISON Labour Link has representation. So whether its in

K - your influence on Government

the European Parliament, at Westminster, in Edinburgh, Cardiff or in local councils, UNISON has a direct link to the people who make the decisions. Whether it is informal discussions conducted by union officers, or UNISON Labour Link representatives voting on elected party bodies, your interests are being actively pursued by your union.

What difference has it made?

When Labour was in opposition, UNISON had spent many years arguing within the Labour Party in favour of the principle of a National Minimum Wage. When Labour was elected in 1997, the National Minimum Wage was an early priority, and remains one of the Labour government's most popular achievements. Similarly, since contracting-out of public services began under the Tories, UNISON have argued strongly for protection against the development of a two-tier workforce. Through UNISON's

influence in the Labour Party, pressure has been put on the Government - now all Government departments are working to end the two-tier workforce. These are two high-profile cases, but there are many other examples where UNISON influence through Labour has produced tangible results.

So what influence will UNISON have in the future?

While Labour is in Government, UNISON will continue to have a key role. In 2004, UNISON and other unions involved with Labour negotiated a series of points around public services, pensions and rights at work which have come to be known as the Warwick Agreement. In this Parliament, many of these will be implemented. Over the next few years, a similar process will be undertaken - ensuring that your interests are promoted within a Labour Government.

How the **UNISON Labour Link** works

Your choice:

Every UNISON member has a choice - a small part of your subscription is spent either on the link to Labour, or on general political campaigning through the GPF. You indicate which you prefer on the form when you first join the union, but you can change your mind at any time. If you want to know more, please contact your Branch.

UNISON members involved at every level

UNISON branches with Labour Link members are encouraged to appoint a local Labour Link Officer and to arrange meetings of those who choose to support the Labour Link. From here, if you are an individual member of the Labour Party, you can be elected to represent your colleagues on committees at regional and national level, and within the Labour Party locally and more widely.

Democratic decisions

UNISON Labour Link has regional committees and a national committee which oversee the way your contributions are spent, and work closely with Labour political representatives. It is here that the detailed work is done - ensuring that UNISON's views are heard at all times.

Participating in Labour decision-making

UNISON Labour Link makes nominations to and has representatives on Labour's key decision-making bodies at national level, the National Executive Committee and National Policy Forum. Similarly, within the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales and at Local Government level, UNISON is well-represented. You can find out who your representatives are by contacting your Regional Political Contact officer - full details at www.unison.co.uk/labourlink

So how can we boost UNISON's influence on Government?

The UNISON Labour Link gives UNISON great opportunities to influence Government - but it can't all be done from the centre. The best way to increase UNISON's influence is to get more people involved at local level - people like you!

What does it involve?

First of all making sure that your UNISON Branch has a relationship with the local Labour parties in the area. Your Branch is entitled to send UNISON representatives to each Constituency Labour Party where the Branch have members living. It doesn't cost the Branch anything, it is paid for by Regional Labour Link. Too often no-one takes up the position, so the relationship fails.

What difference would it make?

By being actively involved, UNISON representatives can have a say in policy making, influence local councillors and the way the

constituency votes at Labour Conference. By building local support in this way, UNISON members have a major say in the Party.

And when the local Labour Party selects a Member of Parliament it makes a big difference if they choose someone sympathetic to UNISON. If the UNISON branch is affiliated, they have the chance to nominate.

I've never been involved before - it all sounds too difficult!

Why not get together with one or two others in your Branch and work together? And talk to those who are already involved! Just a few people doing a little can make a big difference - and enjoy it, as well as helping to build UNISON's influence.

