



News from Westminster

20th November 2008 Phil Hope MP

Making sure workers are paid fairly - no excuses not to pay up

Labour to end tips counting towards payment of the National Minimum Wage

New powers come in to take action against rogue employers who underpay staff

When families are struggling with rising fuel, energy and food prices it is more important than ever to have the National Minimum Wage.

Everyone should earn a fair wage for a fair day's work - there is no excuse not to pay up. And there were two welcome bits of news this week that will be a boost to workers in Corby and East Northamptonshire.

The Government has said that it wants to change the current minimum wage rules on tipping so that in the future, tips will be in addition to the Minimum Wage.

For me, this is a matter of fairness and common sense. When you go to a restaurant or to have a hair cut and leave a tip, you expect it to go to the staff on top of their pay, not to be put through the payroll to make up the Minimum Wage.

This action on tips will benefit workers throughout the constituency people we all rely on, but who sometimes don't have the strongest voice.

And as part of Labour's crackdown on those who try to exploit workers, tough new penalties for employers who underpay their staff have been made law.

I supported and voted for Labour's Employment Act because I wanted to see tougher action on rogue employers who con their staff. It has now become law. This will mean that the tough new penalties come into force in April. There could be unlimited fines for the most serious cases rather than the current maximum limit of £5,000. It will also mean a fairer way of dealing with national minimum wage arrears, calculated so workers do not lose out.

But to make sure people are getting the National Minimum Wage rogue employers need to be exposed. If you think a rogue employer is not paying up then get in touch with me on 01536 443325 or call the national minimum wage helpline on 0845 6000 678. And don't worry, you don't have to give your name or details to them if you don't want to.

This year marks 10 years since Labour voted to introduce the National Minimum Wage in 1998. When it came in ten years ago people like David Cameron strongly opposed it.

I'm proud that, while the Tories opposed the minimum wage and still criticise it, our Labour Government is taking steps to strengthen it - ensuring that working people know their rights and employers know their responsibilities.

Protecting vulnerable women and tackling demand for prostitution

Labour's Home Secretary Jacqui Smith this week set out tough new measures to protect vulnerable women and tackle the demand for prostitution by clamping down on sex buyers and kerb crawlers, with the publication of the Government's Tackling Demand Review.

The measures include a new offence which will encourage men to think twice before paying for sex, and will protect women who have been groomed or trafficked into prostitution or those who remain involved for fear of violence from a partner or pimp.

The new offence will mean that sex buyers will be liable for prosecution even if they didn't know that the prostitute was being controlled by a pimp or had been trafficked. People who commit the new offence will get a criminal record and up to a £1,000 fine.

The Government is also giving police new powers to close premises associated with prostitution and is cracking down on kerb-crawlers by making sure that police can act on their first offence.

Deal secures better access to drugs for Patients

The Labour Government has finalised a deal with the pharmaceutical industry that will allow more patients to benefit from a wider range of drug treatments at a fair cost to the NHS.

The flexible pricing scheme agreed will cut the price of many drugs to the NHS - allowing patients to have faster access to new medicines which are clinically and cost effective.

