

General secretary promises an autumn to remember

■ "This autumn is where we make a stand. This far – no further."

Dave Prentis drew a line in the sand when he addressed UNISON's national delegate conference in Brighton in June.

And the general secretary went on to say that "that's why we've got to mobilise for the biggest demo this country has ever seen on 18 October".

This wasn't just about UNISON, though, he stressed.

"Our nation needs you there," he told them. "We need you to make it happen."

It would, he said, "be an autumn that this coalition will remember", an autumn of co-ordinated industrial action and the October demonstration in London.

Mr Prentis described the actions of the government as driving the country into a Dickensian "tale of two countries": the one rich, the other, "our nation," where "our people are suffering".

One of these countries sees "bankers' bonuses huge once more ... house prices booming and champagne corks popping".

But the other is one with "prices rising ... pay melting faster than an Arctic glacier and, floating alongside it, job security and, with them, any sense of hope".

Saying that "David Cameron's big society is now a bigoted society," he also had stern words for the leaders of all the mainstream political parties, describing the rise of UKIP as "a commentary on the lack of an alternative opposition".

And on the Labour Party specifically, he said that it had a "responsibility to stand up ... to build a bridge to our nation ... to present a real opposition".



Above: Dave Prentis addressing conference.

Below: the hall rises to applaud Care UK workers

Photos: Steve Forrest/
Workers' Photos

It could not, he continued, "be in the pocket of big business" or "define 'opposition' as rewritten sentences from a Tory manifesto".

Mr Prentis also set out an alternative UNISON vision of a fairer society for all.

And he went on to call for a moratorium on job cuts in public services, a reversal of



the bedroom tax, a rise in child benefit, a review of social care, a real living wage, a proper council house building programme and – to loud applause – the "scrapping of the *Health and Social Care Act*, with no privatisation of the NHS".

And he noted: "That's our manifesto, Ed, and if you want our support, I suggest you get writing."

In a wide-ranging speech, the general secretary emphasised

the victories that UNISON had won over the last 12 months, including gaining the living wage for hard-working staff in many universities, and resisting hospital privatisations.

And Mr Prentis paid tribute to those members who have taken industrial action in recent months.

Introducing six Care UK workers from Doncaster to the hall by name, he led an emotional ovation as the entire conference rose to applaud them.

But he also told delegates of those members at Lambeth College who were taking strike action later that week.

And on industrial action, the general secretary had a clear message: "When we fight on pay, we don't expect Labour to oppose us. 'Opposition' means opposing the coalition – not us!"

Mr Prentis told those in the hall that "we have a big job to do," but he also said that "this is our time – and it's not a time for self pity".

"We're not here simply to debate injustice – we're here to commit ourselves to fight injustice."