

# Put people before profit, urges MP

**LEEDS** Labour MPs are spearheading a fresh campaign for a windfall tax on energy companies which are making millions of "unearned profits" this winter.

Leeds North East MP Fabian Hamilton is leading efforts to persuade Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling to slap a levy on the gas and electricity giants in the March budget.

He has tabled a motion in Parliament which has won the backing of 50 MPs including John Battle (Leeds West) and Colin Burgon (Elmet).

The motion expresses "grave concern" that the average household now spends more than £1,200 a year on energy bills and warns that price hikes could leave six million people in fuel poverty.

It says the "inflated" price of energy is making "massive unearned windfall profits" for the energy firms and urges ministers to use the cash raised from a windfall tax to help families struggling to pay their bills and launch a home insulation drive.

MPs believe next month's publication of British Gas profits will further infuriate the public and heap pressure on the Government to get tough.

British Gas caused outrage last year with profits of £571m - just weeks after imposing a 15 per cent price rise on 16 mil-

**by Weekly News Reporter**

lion customers.

Last year's price increases were justified by energy bosses as a result of the soaring oil price that hit a record 147 dollars a barrel last July but then dropped back to just under 40 dollars by the end of the year as the global economy started to slide.

Mr Hamilton said: "There is no excuse for keeping energy bills high. We cannot allow our constituents to suffer in the way that they are suffering now. People cannot afford to pay these bills and the irony is these bills do not have to be that high."

Many MPs point out that there is a precedent for a windfall levy - New Labour used its first budget in July 1997 to slap a one-off tax on the unearned profits of the newly privatised utilities.

That tax was introduced by John Battle when he was Tony Blair's energy minister.

He said: "We went ahead last time and it was successful. It was a very focused, targeted tax."

"This time, instead of funding the New Deal, the money should be used to drive down the bills of those who pay the highest price and are the least able to pay."

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● **CAMPAIGN:** Fabian Hamilton MP wants money back from the energy companies.



● **SUPPORT:** John Battle MP.