

NUS picks new Labour woman leader and backs gay fight

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LABOUR kept control of the presidency of the National Union of Students in elections at the union's conference in Blackpool yesterday.

The new president will be Ms Maeve Sherlock, aged 27, at present the union's treasurer. She succeeds Ms Vicky Phillips on July 1.

The election, which attracted 11 candidates, produced a few surprises, and suggested that even the NUS is not immune to the new realism. Mr Simon Pottinger, of the Trotskyite SSIN (Socialist Students in the National Organisation of Labour Students) was beaten into third place by Mr Lembit Oplik, an independent who stood on an anti-factionalism ticket and told the conference: "It's time for student unity to take control of the NUS again. If you think there's nothing wrong with the union, then don't vote for me."

After the election, Ms Sherlock, a Liverpool University sociology graduate, said her priority would be to build a strong but united union capable of defending its members from the full range of attacks ex-

pected in the coming year. "These range from attacks on basic rights of access to education, to the introduction of student loans and cutbacks on courses," she said.

"If the full implications of a key issue like loans can be put across, and some of the myths and distortions put out by the Government can be exploded, then I think that will find a resonance with the people of this country, who are very proud of their education system. There is a very high level of latent support which can be mobilised."

Delegates voted for a policy of defiance — "even in the face of legal action" — against clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, which prohibits the promotion of homosexuality. It becomes law on June 1.

They committed the NUS to support student unions which run into trouble through opposing discrimination against gays.

During the debate, Ms Julie Frost, from the Polytechnic of North London, said the NUS had to defy the law: "I am a teacher, and if I put forward positive images of lesbians and gays in the classroom, my job will be on the line. I am prepared to do that."