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The Newsletter for all UNISON Stewards and Activists in the North West Region

Winter 2013



Save the NHS march at the Tory Party Conference, 29 September 2013

NHS: Tens of thousands march but media silence is deafening

A magnificent march and rally saw upwards of 55,000 gather in Manchester to protest against the coalition's plans to break up and privatise our NHS.

The colourful march saw UNISON take the lead with an estimated 20,000 UNISON members turning out on a crisp Sunday morning. But despite the huge numbers involved there was very little coverage of the event in the national media.

It is clear that strings are being pulled somewhere

to keep the level of anger about the destruction of our NHS hidden from the wider public. Even Tory Party MPs and members were being prevented by G4S security guards from taking photos of the march from the conference centre in case a powerful image escaped into the wider world. The message is clear. If the BBC and national newspapers are too afraid to cover demonstrations of public anger then we must do it ourselves.

Next time – and there will be a next time, we must all make maximum use of social media to spread our message. Get your photos of the march

onto facebook. Upload video to YouTube as the march takes place. Tweet away and tell anyone who will listen to you that ordinary working people will not stand by and see our NHS destroyed. If MPs and the bosses want an American type health system they should go and live there!

Meanwhile we must keep up the pressure. All NW Labour MPs were recently briefed by UNISON about the threats and left in no doubt that we expect them to step up to the plate in the fight to defend our NHS.

What can I do?

Write to your local doctor and demand that they argue

against privatisation in their local commissioning group. Write to your MP. And log on to the Keep Our NHS Public website for the latest news: www.KeepOurNHSpublic.com You can download a card from the site which you can give to your doctor requesting that any personal treatment you have is provided by NHS rather than private providers.



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Wishing all our activists a very happy Christmas and a healthy, prosperous and victorious New Year!





Calderstones Future Directions Members on the March

Future Directions – the community interest company set up by Calderstones NHS Trust – has imposed cuts in basic pay of 22-28% along with cuts to enhancements that have left some staff losing **half** their take-home pay. Over 100 UNISON members in Rochdale have now taken a total of 29 days of strike action. The members and the branch are very grateful to those who have donated to the strike fund.

UNISON representatives are currently engaged in talks with the employer through Acas. But further industrial action cannot yet be ruled out. Those who have heard the strikers speak at regional meetings will know only too well how vital it is that we win this dispute. Please dig deep and send another donation to the strike fund c/o Helen Harrison, Branch Secretary, Rochdale UNISON, 46 Richard Street, Rochdale OL11 1DU, or email unison@rochdale.gov.uk.

Together we will win!

Euro elections 2014

The campaign to vote out austerity starts now

Theresa Griffin, UNISON Regional Officer, recently topped a Labour Party ballot as the most popular choice to join Arlene McCarthy as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for the North West. Both are strong supporters of UNISON's agenda for workers in the region. Labour has eight candidates overall, and the ballot selected the order in which candidates would become MEPs depending on how many seats Labour win. If Labour wins 3 seats, a minimum target, Afzal Khan, former Labour Mayor of Manchester, will join them.

The elections, with 5.2 million voters in the North West, will take place on **22nd May 2014**, the same day as key local elections. This will be a vital opportunity for union members to show how they feel about the Con-Dem coalition, austerity and continuing attacks on our living standards and services. It will be the last chance to show how you feel before the General Election Campaign in 2015. However, apathy could be the killer as European Elections tend to have dreadfully low turn-outs. This helped elect fascist BNP leader Nick Griffin in 2009, who is defending his seat this time. UNISON is supporting the Hope not Hate "Sack Nick Griffin" campaign by urging the silent majority to turn out and vote.

Theresa's selection is good news for UNISON members. The national media give virtually no attention to the vital issues discussed in the Parliament, so we hear far too little about what goes on. Theresa will report back on how workers' issues can be pursued through Europe. This

is particularly important when we have a government that is attacking workers here, and our sacred national institutions like the NHS, without any mandate. Yet they veto and frustrate efforts by the European Union to control the banking sector and tax dodging by big business.

Theresa deplores what she described as the "humiliation of having to go to Europe for an umbrella to protect workers from attacks from our own government". Yet there is also a move from the right in Europe to water down workers' protection that we currently enjoy.

So it is not just about protecting the social rights that come from Europe, but pushing for change to improve the position for workers. If we are not to fall back in recession, we need a strategy for growth across Europe, not just in Britain.

Of particular concern is the easy ride UKIP has been given by our national media. UKIP is being tipped to win the European Elections in 2014. Theresa is determined to stand in their way. "UKIP portray themselves as an 'anti-politics' party, just standing up for no nonsense and common sense. But a glance at their policies shows what a disaster they would be for UNISON members. They oppose workers' rights, would cut our NHS and believe that Tory cuts are 'playing at it'. They believe in 'real cuts' and hacking back the public sector to boost private, non-unionised jobs".

Theresa will be campaigning hard, with our support, and the Campaign starts now.

Keep Probation Public, Keep Probation Local

The Probation Service is an important public service that protects victims of crime, supervises offenders after leaving prison, and supports them to reform and reintegrate into society.

Ed Massey, a UNISON rep and Programmes Tutor in the Probation Service, works to address the causes of offending behaviour. "People aren't always fully aware of the important role we play in keeping local communities safe. The Probation Service has a lot of experience in helping people to avoid offending behaviour and in protecting the general public."

The Probation Service is highly successful in performing its important functions for the benefit of us all. The Service has met and exceeded all its targets and has very high ratings from those it deals with.

This has not stopped the Coalition Government from rushing through



UNISON and NAPO members at a recent lunchtime protest in Minshull Street, Manchester.

its plans to abolish the 35 existing local probation trusts and privatise 70% of probation services. This vital public service work will be done by companies like Serco and G4S – both of whom are currently under investigation for alleged serious fraud in the running of previous Ministry of Justice contracts.

Ed Massey worries about the impact of privatisation on the service. "There is a great deal of expertise that could be lost through

privatisation. We are fully focused in our work on serving the community through preventing future offending. We do not have to think about making a profit."

The Offender Rehabilitation Bill is currently before Parliament and UNISON is lobbying MPs to get this privatisation stopped. You can help by contacting your MP and by looking out for actions on twitter (follow us: @NorthWestUNISON) and on the UNISON North West website.

1% is not enough HE members take strike action

UNISON members in Higher Education have now taken two well-supported days of strike action. UNISON members stood alongside colleagues from UCU and Unite in sending a clear message on the national HE pay offer: 1% is not enough.

This was not about wanting 'more', but about demanding a FAIR pay rise. A fifth year of below-inflation pay increases in HE means

our members are continuing to lose out. UNISON estimates that our lowest paid members are losing between £663 and £1,173 a year. Joining with UCU and Unite made our voices even louder, and members of all unions made it clear they were on strike for colleagues in jobs across higher education.

Freyja Peters,
Manchester University Branch

STOP PRESS:

Members at Liverpool University took an extra day of action in protest at changes being made to their terms and conditions. The severe impact of the changes means the dispute is likely to run into 2014. Well done to the many who took the action so near to Christmas. More on this next time.

Why austerity does and how it has failed

The Labour Party's recent attacks on the coalition over falling living standards will have been welcomed by many of us. The workers' share of national income is in decline while the very rich get even richer and ever more likely to Hoover up the proceeds of any future growth. There is certainly something in the case that, even on current public spending budgets, much could be done to improve the life of millions by redistributing wealth from the rich to the rest of us. Many voters will support this.

Yet we also need to see policies that will boost the economy and generate real jobs for all. UNISON North West has been working with author Barry Kushner to explain to our activists why austerity is just bad economics.

Below, we summarise some of the myths the government has relied upon to drive forward with public service cuts and why this has failed. Public service workers have been wrongly blamed and punished for the banking crisis. The worst crime of all is that the cuts have made a difficult problem much worse. Our main case is that when banks won't lend, firms won't invest and we can't afford to spend, then only public spending can take up the slack and generate the jobs and growth we need.

MYTH: THE CURRENT CRISIS WAS CAUSED BY TOO MUCH PUBLIC SPENDING.

TRUTH: If it had not been for the economic collapse, caused by the banking system, tax revenues would have been more than £100 billion/year higher. This is the lion's share of the annual public

sector deficit. This is because more unemployment, lower incomes and less spending means less tax is being raised. This is a crisis of falling government INCOME, rather than excessive government spending.

MYTH: CUTS TODAY WILL BENEFIT OUR CHILDREN TOMORROW.

TRUTH: Although public spending did rise under the last Labour Government it didn't rise excessively and did so largely to put right the damage done by the previous 18 years of Tory under-investment. History is repeating itself. Any reasonable growth in our economy will see people demand rebuilding what has been destroyed. In fact so severe has been the impact of Con-Dem policies that they are already putting money back to resolve the crisis they have created in hospital A&E Departments. For our kids the real threat for the future has been the way final salary pensions have been attacked, and in the private sector destroyed. Austerity has destroyed that which must be rebuilt and has paved the way for a pensions crisis to come.

MYTH: RECOVERY IS HERE THANKS TO COALITION POLICIES.

TRUTH: 66 months after the crash we are still 3% poorer than in 2008. It is likely we have at least another 18 months to go just to get back to where we were seven years ago. This recovery will have taken twice as long as that following the Great Depression of the 1930s. And even the weak recovery is patchy. London and the South East's share of UK's growth has rocketed from 37% (during the 1997-2006 boom) to 48% now.

MYTH: THE COUNTRY WAS ALMOST BANKRUPT

TRUTH: The British Government has borrowed money since the Bank of England was formed in the 1690s to fund the Royal Navy. The British Government has never defaulted on a debt payment. They have the clout to borrow long term and cheaply. In 2007, the debt was only 36.7% of national income, compared to 43% in 1997. **In 2012 it was 64.8%, yet this was still lower than in any year between 1914 and 1970.** In 1946 UK debt was almost 238% of our national income yet Labour rebuilt the country and created the NHS and Welfare State. The national debt fell every year for 30 years after because full employment and growth created the income to pay it off.

MYTH: THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BEHAVE LIKE HOUSEHOLDS.

TRUTH: This is misleading and dangerous. If householders are not spending, the government has to step in, to keep money circulating around the economy to prevent a recession from deepening. Government spending is part of the GDP calculation so if that is cut, we are actually worse off. However, households do borrow to invest in their future. For example to buy a house or repair your car so you can get to work. Student loans are a classic example. The Con-Dem policy is akin to starving your kids so you can pay off your mortgage in four years!

MYTH: INTEREST ON GOVERNMENT DEBT IS HIGHER NOW THAN EVER BEFORE.

TRUTH: Government borrowing costs less now than it did throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Interest payments on

Isn't work ed the UK

government debt now cost 2.84% of our national income. It was down to 1.97% in 2006, but it was 3.41% under John Major and 5.15% under Mrs Thatcher. This is the cost of not having to pay back the whole debt today. Would you hand your house back to the bank to save interest on the mortgage?

MYTH: UNEMPLOYMENT IS NOT AS HIGH AS IN PREVIOUS RECESSIONS.

TRUTH: Although some jobs have been created, 80% of new jobs are low paid and 33% of working men are in part time work. Those earning below the Living Wage have risen to over 20% of employees or about 5 million. Many are working part time and want full time work. Up to one million are on zero hours contracts. If unemployment were measured by the number of hours worked as a percentage of the hours people need, unemployment remains high. The number of young people unemployed is over 1 million. Unemployment in the North West is also higher than the national average.

MYTH: PUBLIC SPENDING CROWDS OUT THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

TRUTH: On the contrary, in a modern, balanced economy, public services should rise in proportion with wealth. There is no point in having more cars without roads, or having more wealth if, with no NHS, you don't live or are too ill to enjoy it. In fact, the real problem is with poor public services, people work longer hours and need more money to insure against the worst. It costs more money to feel secure in a society with poor public services.

MYTH: NOW THE ECONOMY STARTS TO GROW ALL WILL BENEFIT.

TRUTH: On the course this government has set, even if the economy returns to normal growth of 2.5% per year most people will still be worse off in 2020 than they were in 2010. This is because new jobs will continue to be low paid, if not part time or zero hours, or very highly paid. Unless we create better jobs we will have a divided hour-glass economy with the squeezed middle squeezed out of existence.

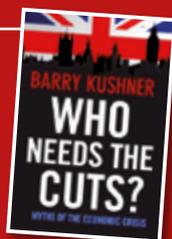
In our next edition, Barry Kushner, author of "Who Needs the Cuts" will say more on this. Why did austerity arise? And why have the media swallowed the "cuts are good" argument and failed to tell the story of opposition?



UNISON NORTH WEST SEMINAR

For UNISON Labour Link Officers & CLP Delegates

THE CASE AGAINST AUSTERITY – KEY SPEAKER BARRY KUSHNER



Mobilising to defeat austerity politically – UNISON speakers

**SATURDAY 11th
JANUARY 2014**

10.00am – 3.00pm

ARENA POINT

Branch Communication Officers' Network

Around two dozen branch communication officers had a successful get together recently organised by the Regional Publicity Committee.

Useful sessions on writing press releases and setting up branch websites took place. It was particularly helpful to talk to a real journalist and find out what it is they are looking for when they get a press release. The importance of the subject line on your e-mail to the local editor cannot be overstated.

The afternoon session revolved around a role-playing exercise designed to make us think about how we would choose ordinary members to put up for radio and TV interviews. Jason Hunter's portrayal of "rule-book man" and Judith Holt's tragic and tearful Ada clearly taxed their acting skills so far from their true characters were their parts. Lynne Morris' portrayal of an angry Scouse firebrand...

This was a useful and enjoyable get together and thanks to Peter Urwin and the other Regional staff who made it such a good event. If you're a new (or even an old) branch communications/publicity officer make sure you are on our network distribution list. Simply send your E-mail address along with your address and employer's name to Judith Holt at J.Holt@unison.co.uk and she will add you to our list. Our next event will take place in the spring.

Towards the Living Wage in the North West

As trade unionists, we all want to improve the pay of working people. Where low-paid staff get a pay rise that has a major impact on their quality of life it is something that is always welcome. We are therefore instinctively supportive of the moves towards implementation of the Living Wage.

There are now 50 North West employers who are accredited by the Living Wage Foundation – up from just five a year ago. This has undoubtedly had a major impact on the lives of low-paid workers in these organisations. Where someone moves directly from the National Minimum Wage (£6.31ph) to the Living Wage (£7.65ph) they get a 21% pay rise.

At a recent Living Wage Foundation event, employers who pay the living wage – Manchester College, Salford Council, Salford University and KPMG – described the advantages of paying it. Points were made from an employer's perspective about:

- how it contributes to staff commitment and work performance.
- how the costs of paying higher wages are recouped through savings from lower staff turnover and lower levels of staff absence.

The social justice argument was put that it was right to pay people properly and that this had a positive impact on the communities in which the organisations operate.

At the same Living Wage Foundation event, Niall Cooper from Church Action on Poverty stated that 140,000 people in Greater Manchester earn less than the Living Wage. The progress to date is to be welcomed, but no employer in retail or hospitality – sectors where a large proportion of the workforce are paid only the minimum wage – have yet become Living Wage employers. It is doubtful that they can be persuaded to adopt it voluntarily as individual employers.

How should trade unions respond to this? One part of the strategy might be to campaign for the Living Wage to be made compulsory – perhaps through a process of it being aligned with the Minimum Wage. There are strong justifications for this – paying higher energy and food bills is not voluntary for



Nixon Tod, Carl Greatbatch, Angela Rayner (all UNISON) and Lynn Collins (NW TUC) at the Living Wage event at Manchester College

employees, so why should paying staff properly be voluntary for employers?

The Living Wage issue also points to the enduring role of trade unions in wage bargaining. A legal requirement to pay the Living Wage would not be enough. There is a need for active trade union organisation to ensure that the Living Wage is not achieved at the expense of other terms and conditions.

Our society and economy need a switch in resources from profits to wages, and this cannot be achieved by a voluntary Living Wage alone.

Peter Urwin, UNISON North West Communications & Media Organiser
0161 661 6720 and 07950 262 300

UNISON Education courses: Mentoring for new reps

A New Year's Resolution?

Is your branch wondering how best to set up a mentoring scheme for new reps? Why not commit to a small group of branch officers and experienced reps attending our mentoring courses?

The courses run from 9.30 am to 4.00 pm each day – one day a week for three weeks beginning on the following dates:

- 28 January 2014 in Preston
- 12 March 2014 in Liverpool
- 19 March 2014 in Manchester

You can use the courses to get ideas together on how to run a scheme in your branch – how to arrange training for prospective mentors and then practice some of the skills needed by mentors so that you have a better understanding of what's involved.

Further information is available in the national policy document Supporting and Developing Workplace Representatives – available via UNISON's national online catalogue.

If you can make the dates send off an application now, to Kim Scott our

course administrator at Arena Point
Tel; 0161 661 6777 or visit www.unisonnw.org/unisoncourses (click on Catalogue and then Mentoring Skills) for further dates throughout 2014

Helen Titherington,
Regional Education Officer
UNISON North West regional centre
Arena Point
1 Hunts Bank
Manchester
M3 1UN
0161 661 6777

Pay 2014: recruit, engage and mobilise!

Local government branches will be running intensive recruitment and organising activities in January, supported by the Service Group and regional staff. The timing coincides with AGM preparations, drawing up Branch Organising Plans and local authority budget setting. So there will be plenty of issues around with which to engage people. In addition the NJC employers' consultation on our pay claim runs until the end of January and the links between organising in the workplace and campaigning on pay are obvious.

The ambitious programme was discussed at a special Local Government Service Group seminar held on 21 November. Linda Boyer, North West Local Government Chair, was clear that "the January campaign is not just about recruiting new members. It is equally an organising campaign to engage with existing members, get more stewards and contacts in the workplaces and promote UNISON membership as something that can make a difference. It is also self-evident that if we are building towards a major national industrial dispute on pay then we need to build our local organisation and density."

Over 50 activists from 29 branches held discussions and gave feedback on recruitment and pay campaign activities and priorities. It was agreed that recruiting and organising works best around local issues and we need to share experiences and news more between branches. Targeted materials, for example over particular issues or for different job types or demographics, can be supported by generic publicity. It was commonly felt that UNISON subscription rates can sometimes be seen as a barrier to recruitment but we need to be more 'bullish' in showing just what members can get for their subs compared to other unions. National campaigns, like pay, provide common ground to promote the union

and organise around.

The NJC Pay Claim was lodged with the national employers on 5th November – a fitting date as living standards for local government workers have fallen by 18% in just three years on this government's austerity bonfire. The claim is for at least £1.00 per hour for all NJC workers, to make the Living Wage the minimum point on the national pay spine and start the hard slog back to restoring the lost value of our pay. The Regional Service Group

came a week after a special meeting of UNISON's NJC Committee and Regional Heads of Local Government in London set out a campaign framework.

Sue Glithero, North West Local Government Vice Chair and national Chair of the NJC Committee, said "the pay claim is two parallel campaigns. First an external campaign to promote and lobby on the fairness of our claim, demonstrate the economic logic of raising spending power and show how it is affordable. And second an internal campaign to give confidence to our activists and members to mobilise for the unfortunate but inevitable need to be prepared for industrial action to pursue it. If we believe in a future for sector wide bargaining we have no choice."

The Service Group agreed some key priorities for the Regional Campaign Plan as well as discussing some of the detail that branches will need to include in local plans. It was agreed that branches and the Region needed to make the campaign happen on the ground. Leadership and direction can be provided by the NJC Committee and the

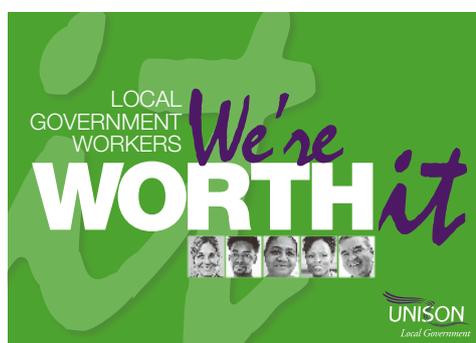
centre but if we are going to persuade local politicians to back the justice of the claim, and if we are going to need industrial action, then it needs to be won in our workplaces.

Summing up many views North West Service Group Executive member Glen Williams, recently elected as Chair of the national SGE, added "It is time for us to act on the anger felt by workers

in local government and associated services and demand fair pay and rewards. With 372 jobs lost in the public sector every single day since the Coalition came in it is clear we are suffering both huge job losses and huge

pay losses. Austerity is a smokescreen for dismantling public services, whilst bonuses continue to be paid in their £billions to the Tory's friends in the City. Enough is enough and our members deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. This is all we ask."

Reps were clear that making the case at every level for a new settlement on local government finance was central to defending services, maintaining local democracy and campaigning for fair pay. At the end of an intensive but constructive and positive seminar it was reported that discussions were taking place at regional level with the NWTUC on the logistics of organising a regional demonstration and rally around local government services in the spring. If progressed, this will provide a focus for highlighting the damage to services and local democracy being wrought by the government's unsustainable approach to local government finances. It would also provide a focus to show how decent wages and local authority spending are key stimulators of local economies.



Labour Link never been so important

A recent article buried in the depths of the Observer should have been front page reading for all. Under the heading, "We need a new deal on wages to kick start true recovery", Frances O'Grady, TUC General Secretary succinctly made the case that stronger unions are vital for everyone in Britain. That the trade union Labour Link is therefore life and death for both the Labour Party itself, but more importantly, millions of workers that look to it for hope for the future.

She quoted an exchange between Henry Ford, motor mogul, and Walter Reuther, US union leader, whilst on a tour of a modern factory in the 1950s. "Ford gleefully asked Reuther how he would get robots to pay union dues. Reuther shot back "and how are you going to get them to buy your cars".

As millions of workers suffer pay freezes, job losses and price rises, this goes to the heart of the failure of the right wing economic model that has delivered us to the crisis we face today. There has been a steady decline in the share of national income going to wages, down from 60% in 1980, to just 54% in 2011, although the fall continues. To be clear, wages have, until the last few years, tended to rise faster than prices. However, they have not kept pace with the combined increase in prices and productivity. So, simply put, workers cannot buy the extra wealth they create.

This is worse than it appears, as the

middle and lower paid workers have been getting a smaller and smaller share of this 54%, as top salaries boom. The higher paid tend to save or invest more of their income, or are more likely to spend it abroad. When workers get money, they spend it in their local communities. The short term fix was for banks, flush with the money of rich savers, to lend it to underpaid workers. However, what is borrowed must be repaid, and what is gained for businesses by customers spending on credit is cut from workers' incomes as they pay back the loan and the interest. Ultimately this got out of hand with the credit crunch.

The theory was that the higher profits made by business would be invested productively, and that we would all benefit long term. However, the profits went largely into the finance sector, business reorganisation and personal fortunes, with far too little benefit trickling down to the rest of us. Growth and productivity increases since 1979 have been a third down on the post-war decades where a pro-union Labour government ushered in full employment and new industries for a mass consumer society.

Unemployment is now a permanent feature, and recessions longer and deeper. Investment in productive sectors is way down on our competitors. In a world where both

the IMF and the OECD now recognise the importance of reducing inequality for economic and personal well-being, restoring responsible collective bargaining is a vital necessity to create balance in our economy. How else can we police Minimum Wage violations, or press employers to pay the Living Wage that most can afford but hold back from paying.

Yet millions of workers are not in unions and new businesses are set up in a way to make it difficult for unions to organise. The effects are not just economic. Through lower paid, part time and even zero hours contracts, 83% of workers say they could not live on the Minimum Wage. It also affects every aspect of our lives as 53% of all workers surveyed say they are afraid of their boss, and 50% of women are afraid to tell their boss they are pregnant.

Never has it been more important for unions to engage with the Labour Party, locally, regionally and nationally. To secure policies that will make work pay for millions. With this in mind, UNISON North West Labour Link will be working with branches, activists and members to take our concerns to the heart of the Labour Party. To make the most of the opportunity that the new found spotlight on the Union Labour link has presented. We must aim to make Labour say what it says on the tin, the party of workers.



Reading this but not a member?

It's easy to join the North West's brightest and best public service trade union. Phone 0845 355 0845 for details and an application form.

www.unisonnw.org

Thanks this issue to Steve Gwilt, Judith Holt, Jason Hunter, Frances Kelly, John Lewis, Pat McDonagh, Lynne Morris, Freyja Peters, Helen Titherington, Peter Urwin and Glen Williams.

Got something to say? Our next edition will be out in February 2014. E-mail J.Holt@unison.co.uk with details of your news story.