

● Issue 20

UNISON

intouch

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

Winter
2010

.....30 years on...

1981-2011

People's march for
public services

**26th March 2011
Hyde Park, London**



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Countdown to National Demonstration against the Coalition's Cuts

Hyde Park, London

Saturday 26 March 2011



The TUC has called a national demonstration against the cuts for Saturday 26 March 2011. This event is to demonstrate the depth of opposition to the Coalition's programme of cuts and attacks on public services and we therefore need to ensure maximum turnout for this event from the North West region. Further details of the event will be circulated to branches in due course, but we would be grateful if you could put the date in your diaries and promote the event in newsletters, at AGMs, branch meetings, to your family and your friends etc.



A first-time lobbyist's view...

Lobby of Lib Dems Conference in Liverpool: 19 September 2010

First of all I would like to say this is my first lobbying event in Liverpool let alone my first under the UNISON banner. The lobbying took place at Salt House Dock at around 12pm. Before the lobbying began Dave Prentis appeared and spoke to all of the UNISON people there including myself and we had a little chat. He mentioned he was happy with the fact young members wanted to get involved in this as it affects everyone up and down the scale. Dave Prentis also asked how I was finding the event and he also gave me some advice about how to lobby successfully.

The police presence was huge (at the arena where we were not allowed) as the police couldn't "guarantee our safety"(!) but they could guarantee the safety of the bed fellows of the Tories and also the safety of the Hope Street festival that was going on. They also had the resources to monitor our every move but not the resources to let us protest near the stadium - which is a poor excuse at best. (In my opinion the Lib Dems were scared of the protestors).

I was amazed by the number of other unions that turned up: UNISON, UNITE, GMB, PCS, NUT and

many more. The little area we were "corralled" into (so our safety was monitored) was not the biggest but it held 4,000 union members and members of the public.

The speeches went well. Dave Prentis likened the two coalition leaders to politics answer to Jedward which got a good laugh. He also suggested that no one could now trust a Lib Dem as they have gone back on their promises several times since the election. He said they have sold out their party and the members of the public for five seats round the cabinet table.

So in short with the weather as British as it was (rainy) I believe we sent a message to the Lib Dems: if you think we will be stopped by not letting us protest near you we will protest anyway, if you think we will be stopped by the rain you are sorely mistaken. If you think we will back down you are sorely wrong.

As someone new to the "fight" I am looking forward to my next lobbying event to send them a clear message they can take back to the political sell-outs. "We will never back down!"

Martin Nelson

National Young Members' Forum
North West Rep, Sefton Health Branch

Welfare Centenary Dinner

The North West Welfare Committee worked hard over the last few months to organise a fundraising Centenary Dinner at the De Vere Whites Hotel at the Reebok Stadium in Bolton. Bolton is of course the town where Jabez Darricotte started a welfare fund for widows and children one hundred years ago. In this time of the Coalition Government's cuts and attacks on our welfare system, UNISON Welfare is keeping the focus on those UNISON members who are affected and will need help and assistance.

The aim of the night was to raise substantial funds at this time when many of our members are fighting to keep their jobs,

pay their bills and maintain viable pensions. One hundred and sixty people helped us to celebrate UNISON Welfare and its history with a special raffle, an auction of shirts, pennants, guest speakers and a disco.

Guests included the Head of Welfare Julie Grant, Angela Ishmael who provides a service to employers on Diversity and Dignity at work and Dave O'Brien a case worker who has researched the history of UNISON Welfare. Both Angela and Dave were our speakers on the night - Angela a last minute rescuer when Jane Clack from Payplan took ill. We wish her a speedy recovery and hope we can invite



Diane Daniels,
June Pool and
Anne McAleer

her to another event in the future.

A bottle of champagne was donated by the TUC, the winner, newly engaged, celebrated with panache. The dinner went very well, the food and service was excellent with a disco to round the evening off in great UNISON style. The amount raised on the night was £910, this total will increase substantially from ticket sales when we have paid out the expenses incurred.

We extend many thanks to those who supported the committee, those who donated, the branches, helpers, affiliates, sponsors and all the members and friends who rocked the night away and who made the night such a success. Special thanks to Diane Daniels and June Poole who worked very hard to ensure the night was such a special one.

Anne McAleer
Chair, North West Regional Welfare Committee



A message from Frank Hont, Regional Secretary

Next year we face the biggest challenge yet to public sector jobs and the services our members provide – the essential services which ensure that communities function day by day. All public services are under threat but we will have to be at our best to defend the NHS. If

implemented the coalition proposals will destroy the Health service we have nurtured and developed since 1948.

So, for 2011 we have one priority. We have to ensure that all our energy, all our ingenuity, all our experience is aimed at meeting the challenge

presented by the Tories and their craven changelings who used to be known as the LibDems.

Our National Executive Council (NEC) have agreed a simplified set of objectives for UNISON in 2011. Look them up on our website. They are short and sharp and make sense for the difficult times we are living in.

Every day we have members whose jobs are at risk. Every day terms and conditions of employment

come under threat. Every day there are individual members worrying about their future and the prospects for their children and grandchildren.

Our job – both elected officials and employed staff of the union – is to empathise with those workers and oppose the attacks with all our strength.

Have a great Christmas and let's come back in 2011 ready to work together and build the union.



Cutting all over...

Here's a snap shot of the latest news from around Greater Manchester.

BOLTON (Labour control) Were looking at shared legal services with Bury but this seems to be increasingly unlikely. £60million cuts and 1500 jobs on the line.

BURY Council is imposing a three day lock-out at Christmas where staff will be forced to use three days of their annual leave. The council is also proposing no incremental progression next year. 550 redundancies announced last week. Consideration of merging out of hours services, winter gritting, street lighting and pest control with Bolton perhaps. Pest control with Rossendale?

MANCHESTER (Labour control) Rapid developments. No compulsory redundancies announced yet but the council will face one of the biggest reductions in government grant in the country.

OLDHAM (Labour) 800 job cuts. Council said to be looking at shared services

with Rochdale (Call centre) and outsourcing of fleet management.

ROCHDALE (8 Lib Dem Councillors have resigned leaving Labour as the largest party) The previous Lib Dem-Tory coalition proposed up to £220m of cuts in schools and 1,600 out of 5,000 non-school staff at risk. The council is thinking of also imposing 2.5% pay CUT on all staff (5% for Exec Leadership Team but as they are already on 40% tax bracket this largely means cheating the taxman rather than the leadership team). The council also seems keen on ripping up the Green Book national conditions completely. AGMA is believed to be waiting to see whether they can get away with it at Rochdale before inflicting this sort of thing elsewhere. Rochdale has particular problems being already in a difficult position even before the recent cuts were announced.

SALFORD (Labour control)

Looking at shared legal services with Manchester and shared vehicle maintenance/depots with Trafford and Manchester. Looking to replace computer system which all three currently use – may replace with a single system that could be developed into a single joint service call centre in the future. Reorganisation of children's services. Cull of 3rd tier managers. 500 job cuts. Compulsory redundancy not ruled out.

STOCKPORT (Lib Dem control) The council is now saying that there will be redundancies. Outsourced home support workers and property management. 150-400 jobs to go by April 2011. £53m over 4 years cuts. Council is said to be looking at joint working with Trafford across Highways & Transport.

TRAFFORD (Tory control) £60million cuts over 4 years. 800 jobs to go. Care homes closing. Looking at joint

Trafford/Wigan/Stockport HR & Payroll set up.

WIGAN (Labour control) £55m over three years. Compulsory redundancy not ruled out. Redeployment policy imposed. Looking at asset management joint venture with Stockport and Trafford.

TAMESIDE (Labour controlled). £100m cuts over 4 years with as much as £36m next year. No compulsory redundancies planned but out-sourcing of facility management and other services being considered.

LIBRARIES PROJECT Timetable already slipped. 23 upper tier councils in North West – counties and Mets are investigating a regional library service – or 2 or 3 sub regional services. Maybe it will end up merely as clusters of authorities. Pulling library services together aims at reducing management tiers and senior library officers.

Meanwhile at Burnley Borough Council...

100 posts are going. After removing vacant posts from the equation there will be 79 redundancies by the end of March, to be selected from 108 currently "at risk". The selection process will be completed in early

December. The branch has lobbied Burnley M.P., junior treasury minister Gordon Birtwistle (Lib Dem) who assured the lobbyists that Burnley would still get a decent chunk of Housing Market Renewal money

- the week before it was all cut! Birtwistle also told teenagers who lobbied him on tuition fees that the Lib Dems weren't in charge – it was all the Tories fault. So much for transparency and truth!

Schools' Support Staff Negotiating Body - Abolished

The ConDem government has abolished the SSSNB. The SSSNB was set to be the national negotiating body for school support staff— something UNISON has been fighting for for decades.

The Secretary of State for Education said that the SSSNB “did not fit well with Government’s priorities for greater deregulation”. Support Staff are already undervalued and want the recognition for the important role they undertake. But the decision will help head teachers push more unpaid hours on staff, and continue to create “temporary” jobs and split contracts. And when the financial belts are tightened it will be our members who will take the brunt of it. This decision will put school support staff back further in pay

terms and it will lead to a lowering of professional status in the workplace.

We must however continue our work in schools, strengthen our structures and continue to develop a strong local network of school support staff in each branch.

As In Touch went to press initial soundings of members in the region suggested that generally school staff may consider a work to rule or only working to contracted hours as a protest. However UNISON’s lawyers now appear to be saying that we cannot ballot for any sort of industrial action because legally no trade dispute exists.

We await further clarification from headquarters on this important issue.

What is a credit union and how does it work?

Credit unions are local, ethical and not-for-profit ‘community banks’ which are owned and controlled by their members. They are different to high street banks and other financial institutions because they have no external shareholders and because of this, money is kept within the local area.

What services do they offer?

The main purpose of a credit union is to offer savings, loans and financial advice to its members. Dependent on the size of the credit union, some will offer other services such as current accounts, child trust funds, and ISAs.

A credit union may suit you if:

- you are having difficulty opening a high street bank account, or you don’t want one;
- you want the flexibility to save what you can;
- you prefer a local cooperative.

How do you join a credit union?

To join a credit union, you must share a ‘common bond’ with its members. For example, you must live or work in the same area or work for the same employer. Once you have become a member, you get a say in how the credit union is run. For further information, or to find your nearest credit union, visit www.abc.ul.org/page/members.cfm.

Union welcomes withdrawal of jobs threat

UNISON has welcomed an announcement from Accenture to withdraw the threat of redundancies from employees working on their Scottish Power contract.

After several months of detailed negotiations and discussions between trade unions, Accenture, Scottish Power and parent company Iberdrola, Accenture announced that they have secured significant new project work and extended the scope of their support contract with Scottish Power.

This outcome means that hundreds of employees who were facing redundancy and the insecurity of unemployment as Christmas approached can now look forward to a more stable flow of work and job security for the foreseeable future. Regional Organiser, Paul Summers said this was excellent news and is a testament to the hard work of all those involved in trying to prevent job losses at a time of great economic uncertainty.

For more information please contact UNISON Media Team on 0161 831 1623

Personal injury update Settlements approach £2 million

More great success with members’ personal injury claims. For the period from March to September this year, 306 members benefited to the tune of £1,943,606 with individual settlements ranging from £337 to £100,000. Our consistent message to all our branches and activists is to make full use of this fantastic membership benefit as part of your recruitment strategy.

ADVERTISEMENT

Are you ready for winter?

The winter season is upon us, so we can expect dark nights and cold, wet weather. This makes driving conditions hazardous, so you need to take more care when driving. Britannia Rescue, UNISON's approved breakdown service, suggests the following tips to prepare yourself and your car for any winter journeys:

What to check...

- The lights are in working order
- The screen wash bottle is full.
- Oil and water levels. Ensure you use the correct concentration of antifreeze.
- The tyre tread. The minimum legal tread depth for cars is 1.6mm. Remember to check the spare too!

Be prepared...

- Carry gloves, a blanket, and a torch.
- Keep a set of jump leads in your car in case the battery goes flat.
- Make sure that you have adequate breakdown cover, as not all breakdowns are avoidable. If you do break down, you'll want to be confident that you can get back on the road as soon as possible.

Contact Britannia Rescue

Britannia Rescue offers UNISON members and their family cheaper breakdown cover. Call us now on 0800 756 8696 or apply online at britanniarescue.com/unison.

Mon-Fri 8am-8pm, Sat-Sun 8am-5pm
Calls may be recorded.

Contact LV=Frizzell

LV=Frizzell also offers UNISON members cheaper car insurance. Call 0800 756 8160.

Or go online at UnisonCarInsurance.com
8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun.
Calls may be recorded. For Textphone call 18001

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Angry and noisy in Rochdale

Members of Rochdale Local Government Branch were joined by community groups and service users in an angry and noisy demonstration outside the Town Hall on 25th November. Rochdale MP Simon Danczuk (pictured with Branch Secretary Helen Harrison), also lent vocal support to the demonstration. The peaceful protest went on for several hours, despite freezing conditions, whilst inside the building members of the Council Cabinet met to decide on Phase One of a savage cuts programme which, if implemented, will have a devastating effect



on some of the most vulnerable people in the local community. Rochdale branch is conducting a vigorous campaign to defend both vital public services and the pay and conditions of the workers who provide them.

Defend Council Welfare Rights Services

The coalition government's draconian cuts to public services mean that many local authority welfare rights teams are currently facing serious cuts.

But a period of dramatic financial down turn with increasing unemployment (including almost 500,000 job losses in the public sector) is exactly the time when government should be looking to fund services that provide advice and support to the most vulnerable members of our society.

Without proper advice about benefits and their qualifying conditions, there is a serious risk that increasing numbers of legitimate claimants will fail to claim their correct benefits. This is not to mention the invaluable support provided to people in guiding them through the often baffling process of reviews and appeals when their claims are initially refused.

The support of the independent advocate is a crucial but often unrecognised role in helping

vulnerable claimants through the intimidating appeals process when the bureaucratic systems of government get it wrong.

If we are not vigilant in opposing cuts to these services this role could become a thing of the past before we realize it, sacrificed in the name of efficiency.

The government intends to roll out a number of sweeping reforms to the benefit system solely intended to reduce costs by narrowing the criteria for entitlement to benefits. As such we are already seeing a dramatic increase in the amount of genuine benefit claims being refused or withdrawn only to be overturned on review or appeal.

The short term savings to public expenditure will not be worth the long term suffering to the individual or the cost to our society, both financial and social.

Elliot Costello - UNISON Steward
Bolton Welfare Rights Service

Salford City UNISON's Ray Boyle gives his personal view on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010.

Welcome to Con-Dem “Slumponomics”!

The Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010, (CSR 2010), may turn out to be a key turning point in the history of local government. Purely in terms of the projected cuts in public expenditure the Con-Dems are attempting to impose a level of retrenchment not seen since the early 1920s. Incidentally the cuts of the 1920s like those that we face now, were made at the behest of international bankers.

In the coming weeks and months whilst being occupied with the minutiae of the cuts there is a danger that we fail to distinguish the wood from the trees – I believe that the long term effects CSR 2010 may ultimately bring the future of local government into doubt!

A common conceit is to view an economy like a living, breathing organism – liquidity; the availability of money performs a function akin to a blood supply. Basically there are two main sources of liquidity to an economy; the wholesale market (known to you and me as “the banks”) and public expenditure.

Since the onset of the credit crunch in 2007, banks have become “financial vampires” i.e. they have been sucking liquidity out of the economy. This is at a time when banks received government assistance amounting to 100s of billions of pounds in both direct cash injections and in the provision of guarantees for investments deemed to be of dubious quality.

CSR 2010, if allowed to

go through, will shut off the remaining source of liquidity for the economy. Just as a living organism would die without a blood supply, so our local economy is likely to go the way of all flesh!

Welcome to “Slumponomics” Con-Dem Style!

Over the next four years the contribution coming from central government to local government is scheduled to drop from £29.7 billion to £24.2 billion – a cut of 26% over four years.

The main point to grasp here is that local government faces a double bind – reduced budgets because of the recession at a time when demands for local services are likely to rise. The scale of the cuts is likely to overwhelm local politicians. Decisions made in haste are likely to lead to long term regret.

The relationship between local electorates and their councils, already poor, will become more fractious. Such a breakdown may lead to “a crisis of legitimacy” – what right have local councils to curtail/remove services that citizens require and value? Are councils custodians or proprietors of local services?

The danger here is that at a future date central government may consider it a fairly low risk strategy to abolish local government in its entirety. To the right this might be a price worth paying in its crusade to let market forces reign supreme!

• **A 74% reduction over**

four years, £6.8 billion to £2 billion, in the capital budget available to Social Housing.

The prospect here both for providers of social housing and low income families here are truly horrendous. To start there must be a serious question posed to the future viability of social housing providers and assorted Housing Associations. These cuts are likely to lead to a lengthening of housing waiting lists with all the attendant human misery and anguish.

• **Encouragement, in terms of subsidies, for councils who implement multi-year Council Tax freezes.**

This is a truly perverse measure. Hard pressed local councils will be offered blatant bribes to further tighten the squeeze on local communities. Like Gordon Brown’s disastrous Thatcherite budget of 2008, such moves will lead to political ruin for councils. Any local authority implementing such a freeze will be rightly reviled as “Cameronian collaborators and dupes”!

• **From April 2012 employee contributions to the Local Government Scheme will increase by 3%.**

Let’s be clear here what the 3% here refers to, it is 3% of an employee’s salary. Someone on £25,000 will suffer a contribution hike of £750 per annum, this on top of the 1.5% hike of 2007, on top

of a multi-year pay freeze, on top of the rising cost of living. Basically it amounts to a pay cut which may lead to many opting out of local government schemes which in turn may lead to the collapse of such schemes. Perhaps this is the true intention of the Con-Dems? After all it would get them off the hook of tackling skinflint private employers who in increasing numbers are closing their pension schemes.

• **By 2013 Councils will be obliged to implement their own regime of Council Tax benefits “tailored to local needs”.**

To my mind at least, this is the real kicker of CSR 2010, similar to the measures announced over child benefit or the cuts in housing benefit. It is a full frontal attack on the principal of universal benefits. Citizens in similar economic circumstances may see their relief for council tax varies purely by where they live - for example between Salford and Manchester.

That Nazi toe-rag, Albert Speer, once said that the central economic dilemma was between “guns and butter”. Under the Con-Dems councils will face a stark choice between services and council tax relief. It will pit the absolute poor against the poor, against the barely managing and in my opinion, probably constitutes the greatest long term threat to the future of local government.

Don’t moan, organise!

Sixth Form Colleges pay offer 2010/11

UNISON members working in sixth form colleges have voted to accept the 2010/11 pay offer of 0.75% on all salary points, backdated to 1 September 2010, along with an increase in London weighting and fringe area allowances in line with the

pay award.

It was also agreed to issue a joint statement reminding colleges that colleges should seek to ensure that the rise is paid before Christmas.

UNISON negotiators placed the offer within the

context of other recent public sector settlements, funding difficulties within many colleges and the continued uncertainty about future funding.

The rise means that the new minimum hourly rate for staff in sixth form colleges is

£6.41 from September 2010. The rate of payment of the Sixth Form Colleges Support Staff Standards Payment will remain at £320. If you have any questions relating to the settlement please contact Ben Thomas b.thomas@unison.co.uk

Further Education Matters

Further Education Funding Axed

The government has announced savage cuts to Further Education funding in England. The cuts, announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review, include:

- The FE adult education and skills budget will be cut by 25%, or £1.1 billion, by 2014.
- The Educational Maintenance Allowance, which provides up to £30 a week support for 16 – 19 year old students from low-income backgrounds, is being axed.
- The Train to Gain workplace training programme is to be abolished. Under the previous government this programme saw at least a million employees receive

training to develop their workplace skills.

- Adult learners over 25 who do not possess a Level 2 qualification (equivalent to 5 GCSE's at grade A – C) will no longer be able to study for these qualifications free of charge.
- Further Education students age 24 and over, taking A Level equivalent qualifications for the first time, will be asked to pay fees - a new student loan system will be introduced.
- Adult learners overall face the prospect of higher fees and increased debt levels.
- English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) funding is to be restricted to "settled communities". The government has not yet spelt out what this means in practice
- Further "efficiencies" will

also be expected in Further Education including pay restraint (it's hard to see how more restrained over pay the sector could be – the 2010/11 pay offer is just 0.2% or £50 whichever is the greater).

These cuts will have a devastating impact on our colleges and our communities and they are only the tip of the iceberg. An increase in fees for adult FE students is also expected.

What you can do about it

- Write to your MP and urge them to oppose education cuts. You can find your MP's contact details at <http://action.unison.org.uk/page/speakout/cuts>
- Write to your local newspaper about the impact these cuts will have on your local communities
- Sign up for the UNISON

FE news bulletins: <http://www.unison.org.uk/news/maillinglist.asp>

- Finally don't forget to join the UNISON Defend Further Education Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=142274199135739>

FE colleges pay 2010/11

UNISON members in FE Colleges have voted very narrowly to accept the Association of Colleges' pay recommendation offer for 2010/11. Members voted by 53% to 47% to accept the AoC final offer of 0.2% or £50 whichever is the greater.

ATL, ACM and GMB also accepted the offer. UCU and UNITE members have rejected. A further meeting with the AoC is being sought to try and find a way forward.

Lancashire Police Branch: The fight continues

In the last edition of InTouch I wrote about the uncertain future that some of the Police Community Support Officers of Lancashire were facing. I am sad to say that dark cloud has not lifted; in fact it's turned into a Thunder Storm. The situation has worsened, now the whole force's 400+ PCSOs are facing possible redundancy when the Chief Constable served UNISON with a 90 day consultation notice because of the prospect that ring fenced central government funding may be pulled. However, branch officers and members of UNISON's Lancashire Police Branch have put up their brollies and are refusing to get wet.



FULL TIME TEAM
Counting the petition signatures

Left to right:
James Tattersall – Ass. Sec,
Karen Poole – Chair,
Maureen LeMarinel – Sec

A wave of campaigning has spread across the branch in such a way that has never been experienced before. Lancashire Police Branch has a very proud history of excellent industrial relations but this has not held the team back in the face of fights to come, not only to protect the jobs of its members but the valuable services they provide to the communities in which they live. Karen Poole, Branch Chair, has been co-ordinating the campaign for our branch, and told me: "...the public are very concerned about the loss of the vital services that are provided by PCSOs - support to retain numbers has been overwhelming..."

Campaigning started back in October with the branch being involved in the TUC co-ordinated Day of Action on the Preston Flag Market. Since then a petition has started and to-date has accumulated over 7500 signatures that the branch intend to present to the Home Secretary with the intention

of showing her how much the county of Lancashire care. Roadshows have also been held in 9 major towns of Lancashire with branch officers and members braving the weather raising public awareness of the impending troubles the Coalition Government are about to bestow on us.

Our Branch Secretary, Maureen LeMarinel, has also started a letter writing campaign with an array of positive responses resulting in:

- Questions being put to Nick Clegg in Prime Ministers Questions, and an Emergency Motion being put to the North West Labour Party Conference that was passed with immense support,
- an Early Day Motion being put to Parliament and raising awareness amongst all North West MPs asking them to support our campaign and make representations to the Home Secretary regarding the impending cuts.
- She has also written

to Peers in our region resulting in questions being asked in the House of Lords.

- On the back of these letters we have also seen an increase in media interest with several local newspapers running stories on job losses and the effect it will have on policing in Lancashire.

December 9th saw Theresa May address the House of Commons, updating them about the Home Office budget cuts. Maureen LeMarinel said "We must not lose sight of the fact that over 170 PCSO's employed by Lancashire Constabulary are also part funded by partnership arrangements with local councils, schools PCT's and other agencies and therefore there is still a funding risk. Our campaign will continue with a different emphasis on putting pressure on these organisations to continue with their funding."

There is no doubt, in my mind anyway, that at some point over the term of this government we are all going

to have to fight for the public services we rely on; not just for employment but for the vital benefits they offer to society. So, just because you may not be affected yet, you could well be tomorrow. If you are reading this, and are not involved in the campaign against the cuts, then ask yourself what can you do to help? Don't leave it too late to make your voice heard, we must fight now and we must fight hard.

Clive Haslam, Branch Communications Officer, UNISON Lancashire Police Branch

STOP PRESS

UNISON is celebrating the announcement to retain the ring-fenced funding for PCSPs for two years. Maureen Le Marinel said "we are extremely happy following the announcement in parliament to retain the funding stream it means that the majority of our PCSO colleagues look to be safe from redundancy – at least for now!"

United Utilities Pay Rise

UNISON members employed by United Utilities have won a terrific 2.75% pay rise following pay talks conducted by the Joint Trade Union Committee.

This is a major move forward at a time when pay bargaining is very tight and represents the largest increase across the national water companies this year. It is the culmination of a year of tough negotiation and hard work by local representatives and regional officials of the trade unions. UNISON, Unite, GMB and Prospect were all involved in discussions and as the largest trade union, UNISON is particularly pleased that our members recognised both the achievement and the message sent to all workers on the benefit of union membership.

85% of UNISON members accepted the deal in a ballot. UNISON spokesperson Joe Degnan said, "This provides a platform to demonstrate to members that UNISON works hard for them even in difficult economic times and that with membership support much can be achieved."

Bolton Boost For School Meals Service

Bolton UNISON is supporting efforts by Bolton Council to encourage local parents to make use of a £1 a day meals service for children attending local primary schools – despite the Con-Dem Government withdrawing funding. All primary school children in Bolton now have the opportunity to enjoy healthy school meals that cost just £1 a day or £5 a week. This means that families with two young children can now save £8 a week – over £300 a year. Bolton's successful school meals service not only benefits local families at a time when many local families are struggling, it also provides much needed employment and supports the local economy. Bolton School Meals Service provides on average 3.8 million meals a year to people of all ages including elderly and disabled adults across the town. The service employs over 250 people with a further 300 employed as School Meals Support Assistants. It also uses local food suppliers, giving much needed support to various local businesses.



North West delegates to this year's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender members' conference in November urge activists to 'Act Aware' on HIV issues

'ACT AWARE' on World Aids Day

By James Bull, North West Regional LGBT Co-Chair

At the end of last year a total of 7,729 HIV infections had been reported to the Health Protection Agency in the North West, and by the end of 2011 there will be more than 100,000 people living with HIV throughout the UK.

December 1st marked World AIDS Day and it was an important time to come together and remember those we have lost to HIV/AIDS, to support those affected by the virus and raise awareness within our communities of the importance of safer sex, HIV testing, as well as challenging stigma and prejudice. The public sector cuts set out in the comprehensive spending review mark the beginning of a vulnerable period for HIV services and voluntary support organisations, especially since the end of local authority ring-fenced grants. Many fear some services may face closure.

As well as funding for support and prevention services being under threat, HIV-positive staff continue to face discrimination and harassment at work. In 2009, a National Aids Trust survey found that over a third of HIV positive workers in the UK have suffered discrimination in the workplace because of their status, or fear unequal treatment if it were disclosed. Four out of ten respondents who experienced discrimination after telling

employers they were HIV positive felt they had lost their job as a result.

HIV is a trade union issue, and one which affects every service group of our union.

From December 2005, workers living with HIV have been covered by the anti-discrimination provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equality Act from the point of diagnosis. World AIDS Day provides an ideal opportunity for branches to raise the issue of HIV and AIDS with employers and ensure that appropriate anti-discrimination policies and practices are agreed and implemented.

To assist with this process and to mark World Aids Day 2010, the North West LGBT Self Organised Group, along with other SOGs, is sending a copy of the UNISON HIV Branch Toolkit to every branch in our region throughout December. This guide contains practical advice and guidance on fighting discrimination, defending the rights of HIV positive members and negotiating policies with your employer.

The North West LGBT Self Organised Group exists to campaign for the rights of LGBT members at work and in wider society. For more details or to find out how you can get involved, email Sarah Whitaker, Regional Equalities Officer (s.whitaker@unison.co.uk).

UNISON Welfare: How does the charity help members?

UNISON Welfare is a registered charity for the benefit of UNISON members and their dependants. It is unique in that it is the only trade union charity of its size. How does the charity help our members?

Through our network of branch welfare officers and regional welfare committees we offer a listening and support service, personal advice, debt advice, financial assistance and even short breaks and holidays. We support members with confidential advice and financial assistance in the form of grants, or put members in touch with other organisations that can help.

Our team of case workers at national office are very experienced in giving up to date advice on benefits and sorting out finances. Grants can be given to assist with household bills, to ease debts or even help with the cost of a much needed break. (Because we are governed by the Charity Commission, any assistance has to be means-tested). Grants have also been given to pay for equipment or disability-related adaptations and even funeral expenses.

These grants can give valuable breathing space for our members whilst we work to find long term solutions to their problems.

The first port of call for assistance should be through the Branch Welfare Officer or Branch Secretary.

UNISON welfare works very closely with Pay Plan, which provides free and confidential advice to help clear debts. An assigned

officer from Pay Plan is linked to the member, and is available for advice throughout the repayment programme.

This is a completely free service with no hidden charges. In these harsh times of cutbacks, reductions in pay or even loss of jobs we urge anyone who needs help to contact Pay Plan who can help reduce multiple debts to a single affordable payment, liaise with creditors etc. This can be for any amount of debt where a

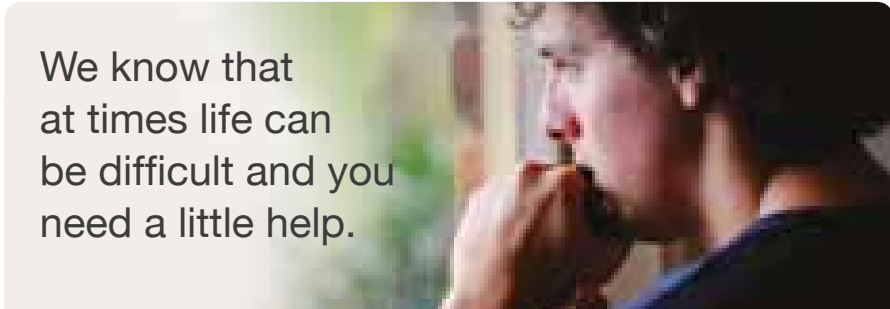
change in circumstance results in difficulty in keeping up repayments.

The important thing to remember is that this service is completely free. We advise against anyone taking out a consolidation loan to pay off several debts because this could cost dearly in the long term. The adverts seen in the newspapers and on television all sound very enticing and can be seen as a way out of your problems but be aware. Always make

Pay Plan your first phone call. They can be contacted on freephone 0800 389 3302 or on the internet at www.debtclinic.co.uk/unison

If any branch would like a member of the regional welfare committee to visit their branch to talk about all the benefits of UNISON Welfare please contact Angela Lysons at Arena Point on 0161 661 6205.

June Poole
*Vice-Chair of UNISON
Welfare Board of Trustees*



We know that at times life can be difficult and you need a little help.



UNISON Welfare is the charity exclusively for UNISON members and their dependants.



Whether its practical information, financial support or debt advice, we are here to help in whatever way we can.

- Confidential support
- Signposting and information
- Wellbeing breaks
- Financial support
- Debt advice

Call: UNISON Welfare on 020 7551 1620

Between 9am – 5pm Monday – Friday

UNISON Debtline on 0800 389 3302

for immediate advice if you have debt worries
Between 8am – 9pm Mon-Fri & 9am – 3pm on Saturday

Or visit our Website:
www.unison.org.uk/welfare

UNISON Welfare
Making a difference in members lives

Organising in the Community Service Group

You should now know that we have a new service group for members who work in the community, voluntary, charity and housing sectors. Most of these members had previously been linked to the local government and health service groups and indeed remain within their original branches.

The regions are now in the middle of setting up structures for the new service group. To this end a meeting was called of all branches with over 100 community members so they could be involved in the process of creating the new structure. The meeting took place in October with 3 branches and 1 self organised group

attending. A further meeting is provisionally arranged for the 13th of January and branches with over 100 members are encouraged to ensure they are represented. The Community Service Group is the third largest in UNISON and at this time when the Con Dem Government is attacking our members in local government and health, it is all the more important that we are organised in the community sector.

First Community Service Group Conference

Over 100 members including six delegates and visitors from the North West attended the first Community

Service Group Conference in Telford on the 3 November. The conference was very successful with 18 motions submitted from branches and the Service Group Executive. The motions were wide-ranging covering personalisation, violence in the workplace, funding in the community and voluntary sector, volunteering and housing as well as motions on the service group structure. There was also an emergency motion on the savage cuts announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

There was also a panel discussion involving Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, Shadow Civil Society Minister,

Steve Davies of Cardiff University and Neil Cleeveley of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action. The Government Minister had been invited but had declined the invitation because of other commitments, which may be a sign of this government's commitment to listening to the public! The panel discussion was dominated by the depth of the cuts in public sector spending, the repercussions for the community and voluntary sector and what our response should be to the cuts. There were also fringe meetings on the hidden workforce and personalisation.

This autumn, leaves haven't been the only thing hitting the streets

Thousands of workers, students and the generally angry have been out in force with one thing in common – opposition to the Conservative and Liberal Democrat backed cuts in public spending.

UNISON members working with other unions in a TUC-led campaign were out in force in a very rainy Liverpool on 19 September to greet the Liberal Democrats and put a dampener on the air of self congratulation that delegates demonstrated. UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis, told the crowd of trade unionists who had gathered by the Mersey that unions would lead the fight to defend services and jobs.

Whether the Liberal

Democrats heard the voices on the dock front in Liverpool is open to question but they were not in doubt a month later when trade unionists again gathered, this time on the MPs' own door step in Westminster. Representatives from UNISON's North West branches turned out in force to meet the region's MPs, present our alternative budget and remind MPs of the damage cuts will do to communities and services. The lobby of MPs in Westminster took place on the day before George Osborne presented the Comprehensive Spending Review and the scale of the cut-astrophe became a little clearer.

Disappointingly, but true

to form some of the Tory MPs chose to find other business to keep them away from meeting their constituents but many other MPs were lobbied. In all UNISON activists lobbied 44 of the region's MPs. Particularly in the firing line were the 6 Liberal Democrat MPs.

But what next? The spending review has been announced and the cuts following it don't appear to have diminished in scale or impact. The answer is the campaign continues and has to grow to be successful.

A benchmark was set on 10th November when over 50,000 students and members from the universities union UCU, took to the streets of London. A

TUC rally on 26 March 2011 is a date everyone who cares about public services should have in their diaries to ensure it is the biggest and clearest rejection of government spending plans.

What should branches be doing?

- Set up a campaigning committee.
- Organise and recruit around the issue of cuts.
- Monitor the impact of cuts on services and jobs – the regional office is collecting this information so that UNISON has a clear picture of the effects of cuts.
- Build support with community anti-cuts campaigns.

Wheelchair user compensated after shower seat collapse

A man who was badly injured when a poorly installed disabled shower seat collapsed under him has been awarded £3,900 in compensation.

James Allison, 70, of Arnside in Cumbria, was on vacation at the Holgates Caravan Park in April 2009. He had been for a swim and was taking a shower when the disabled shower seat he relied on as a wheelchair user completely came away from the wall and dropped him hard onto the floor.

Mr Allison suffered injury to his thumb, lower back, left elbow and left ankle. The injuries to his left thumb and wrist caused significant symptoms which aggravated his arthritis.

“After the accident I had a splint on my right hand from my fingers to about four inches above the wrist joint. The bruising was about eight inches by three on my spine, and I was completely immobilised for about three weeks. I couldn’t even fasten my own shirt buttons, and for quite a few months I couldn’t drive. One of my great joys in life is cooking, but I couldn’t cope with that because I couldn’t hold anything in my left hand, the pain was just excruciating.”

As a life member of UNISON, Mr Allison was able to receive free legal assistance from Thompsons Solicitors, which pursued a personal injury claim against the caravan park. Jill Griffiths from

Thompsons Solicitors says: “The disabled shower facilities had recently been refurbished and the shower seat had clearly not been installed using the correct wall fixings to ensure that the seat remained firmly in place when the seat was in use.”

“Holgates Caravan Parks had a duty to ensure the safety of their guests whilst using their facilities by ensuring the shower seat was fitted correctly.”

It’s never much fun getting injured through no fault of your own, but it’s a lot easier to get fair compensation if you’re a union member. It’s great to see life members like James making use of UNISON’s free legal services. Although retired and suffering from the effects of multiple sclerosis, Mr Allison continues to play an active role in his community, including volunteering as a disability and welfare rights adviser in his spare time.

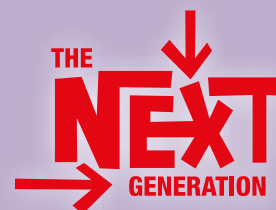
Thompsons legal advice line is 08000 224 224.

T THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS

THE MOST EXPERIENCED
TRADE UNION FIRM IN THE UK

Under 27?

If the answer is yes then you are classed as a young member.



UNISON wants young members to play a full part in the union. At the same time we know for many young people it can be difficult getting time off work for union activity, being taken seriously, or speaking out with confidence in a room full of older people who can give the impression they know it all.

That’s why we have created a young members organisation which is designed to:

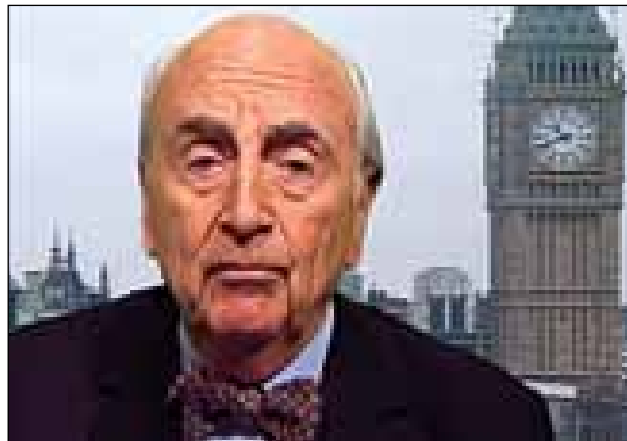
- encourage participation by young members;
- provide a voice for young members;
- give young members the chance to develop their skills and knowledge;
- support young members in becoming active in the wider union.

You can get involved at branch level by becoming your branch’s young members’ officer.

At regional level there are regular young members meetings, where you get the chance to meet young members from elsewhere in the North West and discuss your experiences and ideas. You also get to plan young member activities and get support from other members in the region. If you want to find out more get in touch with James Rupa, the regional young members contact, on j.rupa@unison.co.uk or call him on 0161 661 6779.

Health & Safety under attack

The last few weeks have been particularly troubling for those of us involved in health and safety. A prolonged attack has culminated in two recent events. First, the publication of the “Common Sense: Common Safety” report by Lord Young of Graffham, and second the announcement stemming from the Comprehensive Spending Review of 35% cuts to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) over the next 4 years.



Young’s report was pretty much as expected however we must not be fooled by the rhetoric into believing that it is actually common sense or that it is a positive move for anyone. Rather it is a poorly disguised attack, based on Tory ideology, at working people and working conditions bowing to pressure from employer organisations.

Prior to Young’s demise for opening his mouth once too often, he should have actually gone a few months ago when he outrageously said “People occasionally get killed. It’s unfortunate, but it’s part of life.” He only allowed three weeks for research into the issue and took about ten weeks to prepare his report.

The result of his deliberations were a number of recommendations that do nothing to improve

the quality of health and safety in Britain, and in the areas where UNISON is active, have the potential to substantially weaken it.

He proposes that we should see offices, schools and shops as “low risk”. As such they would not require detailed risk assessments but rather we should adopt a more mechanistic approach – tick box forms! These are starting to appear on the HSE Website and fall well short of what we would like to see. He wants to exempt employers who have staff working from home and self-employed people from undertaking risk assessments.

In schools, parents will be asked to sign a one-off catch-all form for all external school activities such as educational visits. And classrooms would see the introduction of a simplified risk assessment.

He also suggests that there should be a shift from risk management to risk benefit.

Young and the other Con Dem politicians have, yet again, proved that they know nothing about the real costs of their policies on working people. The recommendations are a recipe for a disastrous increase in workplace accidents.

This is compounded by the spending cuts. The HSE has already been hit hard over the last few years and has reached an all time low on inspections and enforcement activities. This will further reduce this activity and leave us all the poorer for it.

We as trade unionists are in a good position to fight back. Firstly we should all join the UNISON-supported Hazards Campaign “We didn’t vote to die at work” – get posters and put

them up. Buy and wear the T-shirt, talk to colleagues and most importantly recruit them! Become active in the union, take on the role of a safety rep and insist on proper risk assessments. Consult with both colleagues and management – show them that as far as UNISON is concerned, health and safety is important. Let colleagues know what we are doing to further the cause of health and safety. Show them that the trade union is relevant and important and is determined to fight all the way to ensure that their health, safety and welfare is not marginalised, trivialised or constrained by a tick box mechanistic approach that will fall short of providing the proper protection that our members deserve.

Greater Manchester Hazards Centre website:
www.gmhzards.org.uk

Medical Secretary Review

Back in July the Southport & Ormskirk NHS Trust announced it intended to implement a new structure for the provision of medical secretarial services from 1st November. The Trust proposed to save £147,000 within the medical secretarial service by implementing a ratio of 1 Band 4 Medical Secretary for every two consultants (and their respective teams) and downgrading roughly 50% of Band 4 Medical Secretaries to Band 3 Medical Administrators, the duties of which would be restricted to typing of clinical letters and filing of documents.

Clinicians and medical secretaries unanimously expressed concern on the proposals. It was felt by all involved that they could lead to a loss of clinical effectiveness and efficiency and increase the risk to patient safety. The new structure would see negative

consequences, such as:

- Reducing the time clinicians spent with patients, as they would now have to deal with tasks that the medical secretary used to carry out
- Increasing the workload of the Band 4's such that important admin work around patient records would be delayed, possibly with damaging consequences.
- Reducing the availability of patient access to clinicians by being first-line contact.
- Losing continuity and patient knowledge as work is divided between typing and administration.

The campaign against the changes developed. A petition of all medical secretaries and 40 clinicians were submitted to the Trust, along with 15 letters from clinical specialisms. Both the

staff side of the JNC and the JMSNC (Medical Committee) rejected the proposals, while the clinician committee in medicine required that their "anger and disapproval" of the proposals be minuted.

At a meeting on 21st October, the Trust presented an amended set of proposals which marginally reduced the downgrading ratio from 50% to approximately 35%, and it was clearly indicated that no further negotiations would be taking place. The amended proposals were rejected by the staff side, and the Trust was informed that a lobby of the board would be forthcoming.

A mass meeting of medical secretaries and clinicians took place on 3 November to discuss the required future action in opposition to the proposals. But before this meeting took place the Trust called an urgent meeting between

senior managers and the staff side, with staff side being informed that all proposals to date had been unilaterally withdrawn and it was agreed a full review would be undertaken by the Trust over the next 3 months, with both medical secretaries and clinicians involved. We now await the outcome of this review.



5 out of 7 Nobel Prize-winning economists agree with us!

The TV and the press are uniting with the politicians to try and convince us that the cuts are necessary, that the cuts are inevitable and that there is nothing we can do to stop them.

We have an uphill struggle to put the counter arguments – even if five out of seven Nobel Prize-winning economists agree with us!

But one thing is worth remembering: when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979 – too

long ago for a lot of us to remember - she wanted to privatise the NHS. Over the next few years she told a series of health ministers to come up with a plan to do so, sacking each as they failed. Finally Kenneth Clarke told her that she couldn't: it wouldn't be stood for. A major reason for that was the MASSIVE 1982 quarter of a million-strong demonstration on the banks of the Thames, not even in defence of the NHS – but in defence of the health

workers' pay claim.

Without that demo, and the other resistance, we would already have a completely private health service. We must make the 26th March demo as big or bigger than that. It is more than a decade since people have realised that they need to involve themselves in doing things (being active) in order to affect the policies of our government. This will take a lot of talking to get that message across – and talking to our members

is something we don't appear to be doing... can we change that?

The NHS isn't the only service facing the cuts – and it won't even be hit the hardest in the first round – but this example can help change people's minds about getting involved, rather than sitting back in resignation. And it is not just the 26th March – there are lots of other things to support that are going on before then as a warm-up.



A branch secretary writes...

Pat McDonagh, Branch Secretary of the Manchester Local Government Branch, recently had the following printed in the Manchester Evening News. It makes some great points – points that we all should be making by writing to our own local paper. Have you written yet?

I would like to add our union's support to the young people and students who protested loudly but peacefully in Manchester

on Wednesday about the Government's attack on education.

As they rightly pointed out, it wasn't spending on education or public services that caused the financial crisis that is wreaking havoc throughout our economy.

Yet the Government's plans effectively punish the users of public services, like students, rather than attacking the real cause of financial crisis - deregulation, an unbalanced economy over-reliant on

financial services and a reckless and arrogant banking sector.

This Government appears happy to allow bankers to continue claiming their massive, undeserved bonuses whilst it axes Educational Maintenance Allowance for young people from low and middle income families.

The Coalition Government's bleat that 'we're all in this together' is already starting to sound pretty hollow, coming

▲ Around 3000 students marched through Manchester City Centre

from a Cabinet where 23 out of its 29 members are millionaires. Add to this the shameless Lib Dem u turn on their pre-election pledge to students, and yet who now cynically support these socially destructive policies for a few ministerial perks.

No wonder young people are so angry at this injustice. They are not alone.

Regional Communications Survey – Tell us what gets to you and you could win £100 of shopping vouchers

Suffering from information overload? It would be surprising if, as a UNISON activist, you weren't constantly bombarded by information from your branch, the regional office and the national office. But how much of the information you receive in the form

of leaflets, newsletters, magazines and e-mails is useful or even read?

The regional publicity and campaigning committee is trying to get the answer to some of these questions. Chair of the committee, Ashley Bramwell explained "it's vital that activists have the

information they need to be effective but a suffocating amount of information doesn't make sense – we have to be effective and efficient in getting the right amount of information out".

The committee has now set up an on-line survey to try and measure the effectiveness of current

communications. This can be accessed through the regional website and as an added incentive everyone who completes the survey before 31st January 2011 will be in with a chance of winning £100 worth of shopping vouchers courtesy of LV=Frizzell. www.unisonnw.org.uk

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.uk

Thanks this issue to: Colin Baker, Bolton Branch, Stephen Booth, Ray Boyle, Ashley Bramwell, James Bull, Elliot Costello, Paul Foley, Nick Green, Steve Gwilt, Clive Haslam, Frank Hont, Frances Kelly, Pat McDonagh, Neal Linsky, Angela Lysons, Anne McAleer, Martin Nelson, June Poole, Dave Read, James Rupa, Paul Summers, Ben Thomas, Peter Thorne, Victoria Walton and anyone else who submitted photos and articles or who gave encouragement. If you have anything to say, then write to us c/o the Communications & Media Team at the Regional Centre, UNISON North West, Arena Point, 1 Hunts Bank, Manchester, M3 1UN or e-mail to nwmedia@unison.co.uk