

ACTIVE!

UNISON
the public service union

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UNISON takes legal action over dismissal of shop steward Carol



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OUR UNION**GENERAL SECRETARY**

Dave Prentis

REGIONAL SECRETARY

John Cafferty

REGIONAL CONVENOR

Wendy Nichols

UNISON Yorkshire & Humberside

Commerce House, Wade Lane,
Leeds LS2 8NJT 08000 857 857 or freephone
textphone 08000 967 968

W www.unison-yorks.org.uk

Lines are open 6am-midnight

Monday-Friday and

9am-4pm Saturdays

EDITOR

Barrie Clement

CONSULTING EDITOR

Mary Maguire

CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

Jim Varney

CONTRIBUTORSPeter Carrol, Ryan Fletcher, Helen Hague,
Rachel Halliday, Louise Larkin, Mary
Maguire, Paul Routledge**COVER IMAGE**

Vicky Matthers

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Century One Publishing Ltd.

Alban Row, 27-31 Verulam Road

St. Albans, Herts AL3 4DG

T 01727 893 894

F 01727 893 895

E enquiries@centuryonepublishing.uk

W www.centuryonepublishing.uk

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

Jonathan Knight

T 01727 739 193

E jonathan@centuryonepublishing.uk

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Caitlyn Hobbs

T 01727 739 189

E copy@centuryonepublishing.uk

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URGENT NEED TO ACT

For decades, our union has stood firm against privatisation in all its forms. Throughout the 80s and 90s when successive governments have sought to hive off our public services to the rich and powerful, we have always fought to keep those services in public control – because we know, and the evidence shows, that public services by the people for the people are the best services. When the greedy take control, whether in care, our NHS, or elsewhere, it's our people who suffer.

Successive privatisation disasters have only sought to strengthen our case.

This year we've taken the fight against privatisation – and for bringing services back in house – to the TUC and the Labour Party. I'm delighted that our movement

and the Labour Party both backed our position with overwhelming support.

At a time when the NHS is at risk of being parcelled off to American corporations as part of a grubby trade deal with Donald Trump, the need to act is more urgent than ever. Public funds are already being siphoned off into the pockets of the powerful and the dodgy world of off-shore companies.

Privatisation demeans, damages and destroys. Privatisation was never a necessity, nor will it ever be. The toxic mix of privatisation and austerity was a political choice, but there is an alternative to this wanton profiteering. That alternative is public services in public hands – and our union won't stop until all public services are back where they belong.



DAVE PRENTIS
GENERAL SECRETARY

Dave Prentis

BEWARE TORY LIES

Incredibly, the Tory party conference hall was plastered with posters advocating support for public services.

After more than ten years of austerity, the systematic destruction of local government services has cost thousands of jobs and spread misery throughout our communities.

And the NHS remains chronically underfunded and vulnerable to exploitation by private companies desperate to make illness profitable.

So despite all the clear evidence to the contrary, the Tories are once again pretending to care about public services.

After slashing around 20,000 jobs in the police service, they say they will now appoint – guess what –

more than 20,000 new police officers.

These lies are being polished up in anticipation of a General Election so the public can be manipulated into thinking the Tories have their interests at heart.

But our members are fully aware of the effects of austerity and it was heartening to see more than 300 of them on the picket lines in Bradford, fighting to stop their jobs being privatised.

UNISON is there every day to protect individual members from discrimination and unfairness.

And we will not hesitate to take industrial action when our members reach the point where they have no alternatives left. UNISON is ready for the battles ahead.



WENDY NICHOLS
REGIONAL CONVENOR

W. Nichols

UNISON'S POET IN RESIDENCE

Chair of the Leeds University branch Nick Allen's career as a poet has really taken off. Over the last two years he has had three books of poems published and has read at more than 40 gigs. "I think it was a surprise to people when I said I wrote poetry and in my experience there are two words that scare people off, 'poetry' and 'opera', but to be fair my colleagues and friends have been supportive", he says.

His first full collection of poems, "the riding", is about Yorkshire where he has lived most of his life; the geography of the area, the wildlife, his schooling and the politics. The second publication this year, "between two rivers", is a collaboration with York-based artist Myles Linley and



concentrates on the landscape around the River Humber.

His poetry has appeared in recent anthologies such as Verse Matters and The Valley Press Anthology of Prose Poetry, as well as publications such as The Interpreter's House, Poetry Salzburg Review and Stand. He helps organise Rhubarb at the Triangle, a spoken word evening in Shipley, West Yorkshire.

Nick has been chair of the branch for ten years, having been an activist during the previous ten. Active! asked

him what were the main issues he faced in his role with UNISON: "How long have you got? Stress and mental health are big issues and so is the fact that we've had no real pay increase for the last ten years."

LEGAL ACTION OVER SACKED STEWARD

UNISON has started legal proceedings against Wakefield school catering contractor ISS, alleging shop steward and full time convenor Carol Dewrow was victimised and unfairly dismissed for union activity.

In April, the firm withheld the wages of hundreds of predominantly low paid women in the town and Carol supported members through the grievance procedures.

Within days of a legal claim being lodged on behalf of the unpaid school caterers, ISS began disciplinary procedures against Carol, terminated her secondment

to UNISON and sent her job vacancies in other organisations.

As well as challenging management's unlawful behaviour, Carol secured reinstatement for members who were unfairly dismissed.

UNISON regional organiser, Rianne Hooley, said: "Carol has been victimised and hounded out of her job. An injury to one is an injury to all and Carol has the full support of UNISON."

[Toughing it out page 28](#)



THOR THE CONVENOR

It's our John Campbell as you've never seen him before. Deputy regional convenor as king of the Sheffield Carnival, showing off UNISON colours in his "Thor" outfit.

Similar to last year's carnival, some of the highlights included African dancers and belly dancers, activity tents, fairground rides, craft workshops, face painting and live stages. Sheffield's own urban dance music singer Lornnah Stewart also returned to her home city to perform at the carnival.



READY FOR MORE ACTION

Members at the Bradford NHS Trust are preparing for further strike action to save their jobs from privatisation.

More than 300 members, including porters, domestics, security and catering staff, joined the picket lines at Bradford Royal Infirmary and St Luke's Hospital for a total of three weeks in June and August.

They are fighting plans to transfer their jobs to a "wholly-owned subsidiary company" which they and the district's MPs have called "backdoor privatisation".

Their jobs were due to be transferred on October 1 and members voted for an indefinite strike from August 1.

But arbitration service ACAS secured an agreement with the trust to delay the change.

Regional Head of Health Tony Pearson said: "We are engaging with the trust to look at a variety of options which would allow them to increase revenue without transferring staff.

"The trust clearly underestimated the resolve of our members. If the trust doesn't listen to their concerns, they will definitely come out on strike again."

Pride, loyalty and solidarity page 20



A great day out at UNISON's Doncaster Raceday in August



CLIMATE SHOCKER!

The media is in a frenzy over the environment courtesy of a Swedish teenager, but the Yorkshire Post says Leeds was ahead of the game. **Mary Maguire** reports

Disaster. One word guaranteed to grab the news agenda. Add cataclysm, extinction, billions of plastic bottles, a cuddly polar bear and a girl into the mix, and you have the best story with the best legs. Ever.*

The climate change story has been around for a while. Sporadic forays grabbed most editors' attention from time to time. The weather is always an easy pitch. But they reported mostly men getting together periodically to argue about carbon emissions; who was to blame and who should reduce them, and then jetting back home. And then there was the occasional programme or article about a lump of ice the size of some small nation melting, or aerial shots of massive fires in the Amazon forest.

Movie moguls made a killing at the box office as extinction event disaster films had the earth being destroyed by meteors, or floods, or temperatures so hot that the earth boiled, or temperatures so cold that the oil lubricating a helicopter froze. It was all seen as entertainment.

Some people believed. Some people denied. Earth mostly shrugged its shoulders, thinking it'll never happen to me.

Then suddenly and dramatically this summer, up popped two magic ingredients and the story was a run-away success. Australian journalist Craig Leeson, set out to film the blue whale, but ended up filming plastic bottles – millions of them clogging up the Indian Ocean. And a young Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, turned her one-girl crusade into a blockbuster with a cast of millions around the world.

Editors loved her. Pages and pages of analysis, pictures of polar bears on blocks of ice, striking schoolgirls waving placards or being arrested, boffins brought out of cold storage to explain the dangers of a two percent rise in global

temperatures. Coverage in the Hull Daily Mail was typical with stories of students on strike and pictures of colourful home-made placards, a replica of Noah's Ark, and of "die-ins" in town squares across the nation. Extinction rebellion protestors brought travel chaos. Meanwhile, Bradford's Telegraph & Argus was extremely worried about the impact of heatwaves, droughts and storms on...erm...cricket. Quite.

Opinion was divided over the strikes, with much harrumphing in the letters columns of the Telegraph, and the grown-ups telling the kids to get back to school. Events took a nasty turn as, according to the Wakefield Express, "a prickly debate about the environment during a meeting in Wakefield over councillor car choices drives heated climate change squabble".

Evidence emerged that not all dinosaurs were wiped out by an extinction event millions of years ago. The world's media reported how strike-leader Greta sailed across the Atlantic to confront one of them in New York – Trump. And she inspired the ire of big girl dinosaur, talkRADIO's Julia Hartley-Brewer who mockingly said: "Hi Greta, I've just booked some long haul flights for my family to enjoy some winter sun on the beach this Christmas. Level of guilt being felt: 0%". Yah, boo, sucks, eh?

And in an unashamed bid for global recognition, the Yorkshire Post declared: "Whether it caused frustration and delays to your daily commute or piqued your interest in peaceful protest, it has undeniably been a success in raising the profile of their cause – the threat of climate change. But long before the big yellow boat or colourful placards arrived, Leeds has been taking this issue seriously. Back in 2017, the city established the Leeds Climate Commission." I knew that. □

*Until the next one.



MOVIE
MOGULS
MADE A
KILLING
AT THE
BOX OFFICE

Mary Maguire





there for you

supporting UNISON members
when life gets tough

- Financial assistance
- Debt advice
- Wellbeing breaks
- Support & information

Please make sure our members
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UNISON
the public service union

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!



UNISON's regional centre is being switched to a stunning canal-side site in Leeds city centre. Active! editor **Barrie Clement** spoke to regional secretary John Cafferty and head of corporate services Laraine Senior who did much of the groundwork

Early next year one of the first things passengers will see as they pull into Leeds railway station from the South will be the new UNISON building.

And on the outside will be all the latest messages from the union on a large electronic board.

This will be UNISON's new regional centre which is cheek by jowl with the Leeds and Liverpool canal in an area which was once derelict, but is now a vibrant waterside location with cafes, bars and art galleries.

But it wasn't admiration of

the new building or its location which drove UNISON's decision to relocate from its present home at Commerce House. It was the fact that the lease on the current building runs out next June.

The landlord had made it clear the building was required for other purposes and the current lease would not be renewed, so the union had to decide whether to lease or buy elsewhere. It was decided that buying an office outright made far more sense for the union's finances.

With the backing of regional convenor Wendy Nichols and

her team, regional secretary John Cafferty and head of corporate services Laraine Senior started pondering alternatives back in 2017. The consensus among senior leaders was that Leeds was the best option because of its location near motorways and fast rail links to other parts of the country. UNISON's national headquarters is about half a mile away from Kings Cross, the terminus of frequent services from Leeds. If and when the HS2 is built linking Leeds and London, journey times will be significantly less.

Apart from that, Leeds is home



Photo: Jim Varney

to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and if the One Yorkshire proposal comes to fruition, probably to the Yorkshire mayor.

John and Laraine were given the task of looking at a number of buildings. Many were rejected. A key requirement was that the new office had to be reasonably easy to get to and one of those looked at was three miles out of the city. Another was the right size and had sitting tenants which would have provided UNISON with an income until the union moved in. Unfortunately this building was in an area which had a reputation for anti-social behaviour. It was agreed

that the risks for staff and members was too high.

The decision to press ahead with the canal-side building – currently called Quayside House – was not taken lightly. “We were spending precious resources and members’ money and we needed to weigh up the pros and cons very carefully indeed,” says John. “The argument had to be made in front of the union’s national finance committee.”

One drawback was that it was smaller than the current office. It is approximately 12,700 square feet, around 3,300 square feet less than the optimum. But they are confident the 76 full-time equivalent staff will have plenty of space, with “hot-desking” used only in cases where staff need to be out of the office most of the time to do their jobs. Those responsible for recruitment are a case in point.

The site has 24 parking spaces and there are two multi-storey car parks within two or three minutes’ walk.

It was also clear that there were no other suitable buildings for sale on a freehold basis in Leeds city centre.

“But what sold us on the building was the location,” says John. “It is about 10 to 15 minutes’ walk from Leeds bus station, five minutes from the train station and within minutes of the motorways.”

High up on the side of the building, which was built in 1995, is an electronic screen. The aim is to enlarge it so that passengers and visitors will be able to see it from the local walkways and from trains as they pull into Leeds station. “It will allow

our campaign teams to put across their latest messages,” he says.

The union’s regional headquarters has been at Commerce House since the 1970s, the lease on which was renegotiated in 2007-8 and reduced. However it would have cost an estimated £250,000-£300,000 a year more to lease somewhere in that locality.

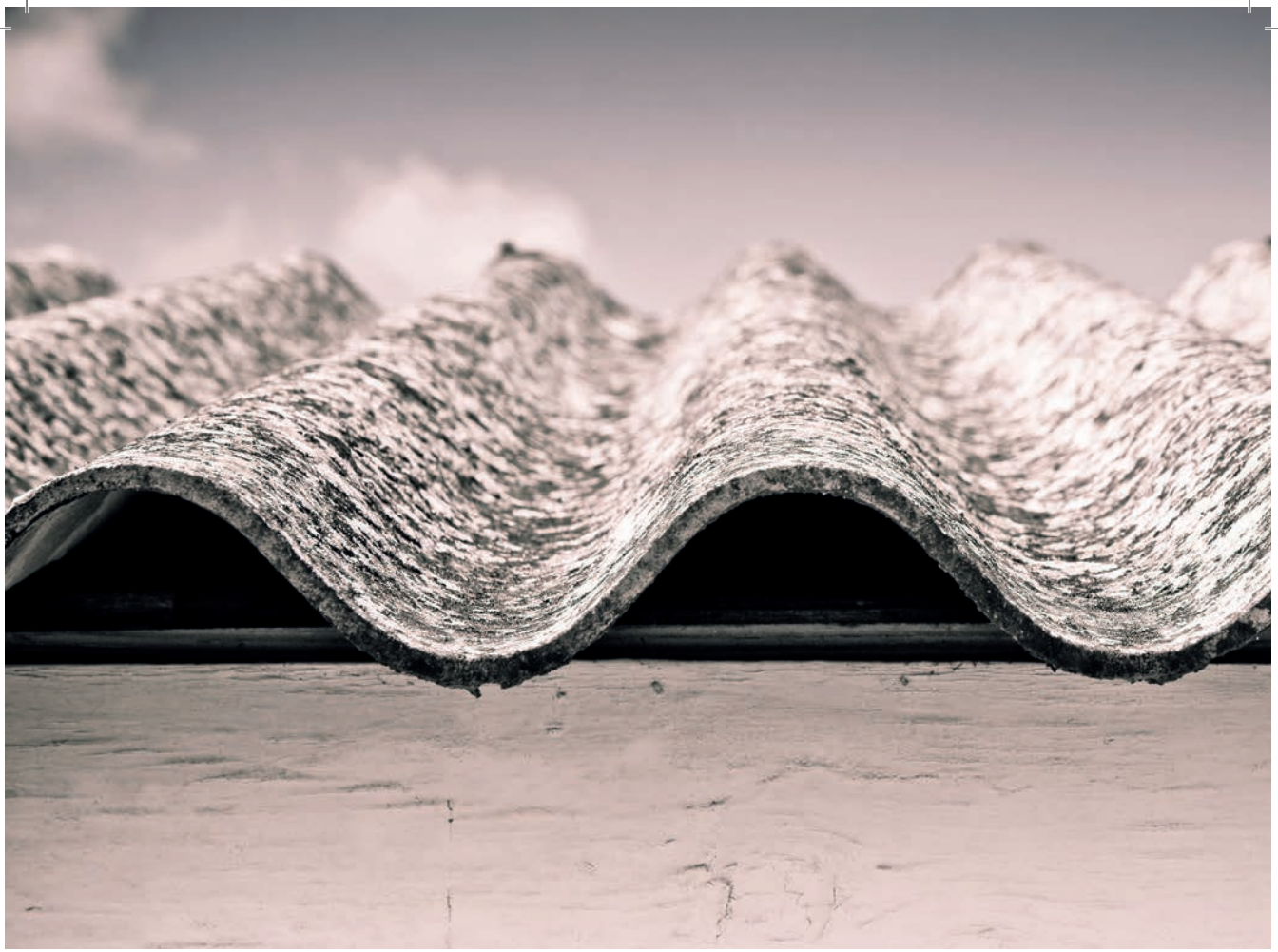
And of course the other argument for buying rather than leasing a property, is that it is an asset and not a drain into which members’ money is poured, never to be seen again. John estimates that the new HQ will save the union significant sums, with the asset remaining in the union’s ownership.

Following the departure of the previous owners, investment company Investec, the new headquarters is being refurbished by UNISON as Active! went to press. Much of the building was being reconfigured to suit the union’s requirements, with extra space created on the ground floor to accommodate seminars, meetings and conferences with up to 120 delegates. More space is being devoted to the education and training department which as Laraine put it, is a “big winner” for the union and which is expanding its education programme for the region’s 120,400 UNISON members. It also had to have new gas boilers and new energy efficient lighting.

It is hoped the big move will take place early next year, with the general secretary invited to cut the ribbon at the official opening. □



WHAT SOLD
US ON THE
BUILDING
WAS ITS
LOCATION



CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

Deaths from exposure to asbestos are still rising and can affect staff in schools and hospitals as well as tradespeople. **Louise Larkin**, a senior asbestos lawyer at Thompsons Solicitors casts considerable doubt on official predictions that the death toll could peak next year

The increased number of deaths due to asbestos exposure should concern everyone, yet most people wrongly think that asbestos is a problem of the past, not the present.

Asbestos imports were banned more than 40 years ago, but it continues to be the greatest single cause of work-related deaths in the

UK and it is reported that the number of people killed due to asbestos exposure is expected to keep rising until next year.

But the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) predicted that the number of deaths caused by the cancer mesothelioma would peak in 2012. This was later changed to 2016 and then 2018 and now it's 2020. Patients normally die within 12 and

21 months of diagnosis with the disease.

Statistics published in 2019 noted that annual asbestos deaths in the UK have increased steeply over the last 50 years. The dangers of asbestos are now well-known throughout industry and regulations designed to control exposure to the material have been in force for several years. Nevertheless in 2017, there



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were 2,523 mesothelioma deaths and the latest projections suggest that there will continue to be around 2,500 deaths a year for the rest of the decade before numbers are predicted to decline.

But the official statistics have been wrong in the past and while Professor Peto, Professor of Medical Statistics and Epidemiology at the University of Oxford, has predicted that mesothelioma deaths would decline in time, that is yet to happen.

A recent epidemiological study of mesothelioma in the UK confirmed that former tradespeople such as electricians, plumbers and joiners, are at a higher risk of developing mesothelioma than other occupations as a result of their extensive

use of insulation board in buildings.

But it's not just tradespeople that have been affected. Nearly 700 schools have been recently referred to the HSE over concerns they are failing to safely manage asbestos in their buildings. That means that potentially thousands of staff and pupils have been - and possibly remain - at risk.

It is thought that about 85 per cent of school buildings in England contain asbestos, particularly those that were built between 1945 and 1975. In addition, a Freedom of Information request revealed that 198 out of 211 NHS trusts have asbestos in their buildings, leading to risks for health workers in our hospitals.

They say that there are "lies, damn lies and statistics". So far the predictions for a peak in asbestos-related deaths have been wrong on three occasions and the figures show no sign of dropping only a year away from the next predicted peak in 2020.

The medical consequences of asbestos exposure take a minimum of 10 years to develop and typically, it usually takes 30 to 40 years from exposure for the first symptoms to develop.

There is no time limit

after which a person is deemed "safe". Awareness of the dangers of the material may be better known and managed today, but given the level of asbestos in public and industrial buildings - such as schools, hospitals, factories and older council housing stock - as well as ignorance of its dangers in the past, there is a cohort exposed over the past decades yet to learn their fate.

It is vital that plans are put in place to control asbestos safely wherever it is present. More needs to be done by those in charge of public buildings to ensure that the material is properly managed. That involves identifying where it is and what condition it is in. It may not be an issue - if it remains undisturbed and it is highly unlikely that there is a significant risk - but turning a blind eye is no longer an option.

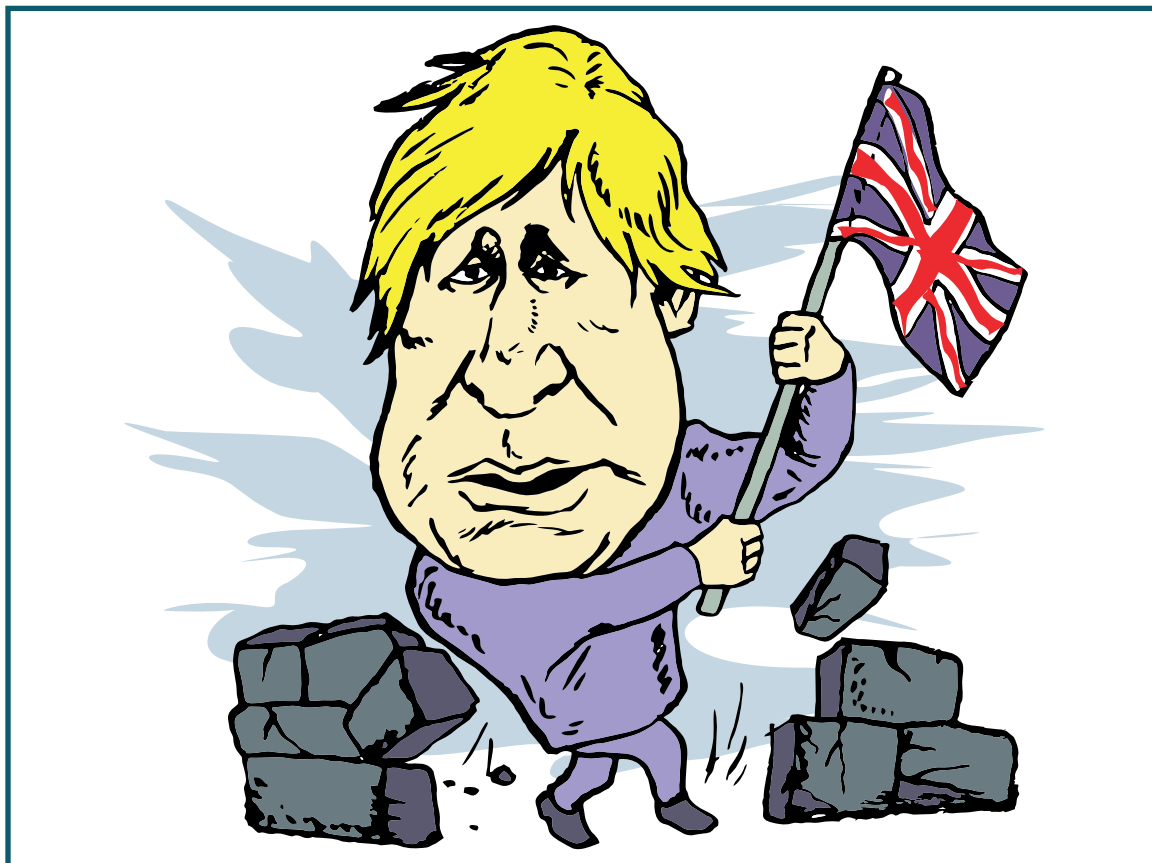
Let's hope asbestos deaths start to drop at the turn of the decade, but sadly it will still be a long time before we can say that the impact of asbestos is something of the past. Until this is the case, Thompsons Solicitors will continue to campaign for the rights of the families and communities who have been devastated as a result of avoidable exposure. □



LET'S
HOPE
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OF THE
DECADE

DISEASES THAT CAN KILL

Asbestos-related diseases are disorders of the lung and pleura (a thin membrane that lines the surface of the lung and the inside of your chest walls) caused by the inhalation of asbestos fibres. Asbestos-related diseases include non-malignant disorders such as asbestosis (pulmonary fibrosis due to asbestos), diffuse pleural thickening, pleural plaques, pleural effusion, rounded atelectasis and malignancies such as lung cancer and the fatal disease malignant mesothelioma.



SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM?

Labour's foot soldiers in the region must rally to the flag if the nightmare of five years of bumbling, lying Boris Johnson is to be averted, says Mirror man **Paul Routledge**

Jeremy Corbyn has put Labour on full election alert after the Tories' Brexit strategy crashed and burned.

It's chaos at Westminster, with a Budget vital for public services cancelled and the Government incapable of implementing their cruel joke of a Queen's Speech.

Blustering Boris Johnson offered an early poll if MPs approved his rubbish

withdrawal deal first. He wanted to go to the country as "the man who got us out".

But they saw through his not-so-cunning plan, and Parliament looks set to back a plan for a snap election on December 9 – while staying in the EU until January 31 next year. The membership extension means politics will continue to be dominated by Brexit.

There's all to play for. The

challenge facing UNISON activists is to deliver for Jeremy and working people in what's likely to be the dirtiest, most deceitful contest in living memory.

Politics has been in election mode ever since Johnson was chosen Tory leader – with fewer votes than the population of Halifax. And once his aides showed him where Yorkshire was on the map, he was all over Tyke



HE ISN'T
WANTED
UP 'ERE,
BUT
STILL HE
BLUSTERS

country like a bad rash.

And that's the effect he had on voters. He was humiliated by a woman shopper in Doncaster market, and blew it with a controversial speech in front of police cadets in Wakefield.

At the Northern Convention in Rotherham, he was heard in polite silence with virtually no applause before being hustled out the back by security men. Ex-London Mayor Bojo just doesn't understand what working people in the North, especially in public services, have suffered under the Tory decade of austerity.

He isn't wanted up 'ere, but still he blusters on, promising billions for railways, education and the NHS, because he knows he has to win here if he is to crawl back into Downing Street.

Big lies, for big stakes. There are 54 parliamentary constituencies in Yorkshire and Humberside. At the 2017 election, Labour won 37, a net gain of four: two from the Tories, who held on to 17, and two from the Lib Dems, who have none.

Last time, the appeal of Jeremy Corbyn and a radical manifesto pushed up Labour majorities pretty well everywhere, and helped capture Colne Valley and Keighley and Ilkley from Mrs May, and Bradford East and Sheffield Hallam – leader Nick Clegg's seat – from the Lib-Dems.

Tory hopes of winning a swathe of Yorkshire constituencies – Halifax, Dewsbury, Wakefield and Penistone – were dashed. And former UNISON official Melanie Onn held on to marginal Great Grimsby, where Ukup had high

expectations. Labour only just failed to pick up two more marginals – Calder Valley and Pudsey.

In this year's May council elections, the Tories were routed, and the political map of west Yorkshire is totally red. This is an encouraging trend, but it would be unwise to read across to a general election.

It is not going to be easy for Labour. Nine constituencies are vulnerable to a swing of less than five per cent, and the Tories are targeting our heartlands like never before.

Standing as "the party of Brexit" they believe they can win seats like Doncaster that voted heavily in favour of "Leave" in the 2017 EU referendum.

They even imagine they could pull off the solid-Labour former mining constituency of Rother Valley, where veteran MP Sir Kevin Barron is standing down. It would fall to a swing of just under four per cent – but to whom?

The unknown factor at this stage is Nigel Farage and his Brexit Party. If (as seems likely) he fails to secure an electoral pact with the Tories, and stands against Boris's candidates, that will split the Leave vote, bolstering Labour's chances of retaining seats like Great Grimsby and Scunthorpe.

Brexit will obviously be a key issue in the election, and Labour's divisions will be mercilessly exploited by the Tories. It has already cost one seat, Penistone, vulnerable to a swing of less than two per cent, where "Remain" Labour MP Angela Smith defected to the Lib Dems during the summer and has now crossed the Pennines to seek

re-election in Tory Cheshire.

Electoral calculations apart, much will depend on what Labour looks like to the voters. The Brighton conference – my 50th! – was massively encouraging on policy, but damaging for perceptions of party unity. A cack-handed attempt to get rid of deputy leader Tom Watson – scuppered by the chair, Yorkshire UNISON's Wendy Nicholls – initially overshadowed media coverage.

Going into the campaign, Labour internal polling showed the party nationally holding on to 61 per cent of its 2017 vote, with 17 per cent going to the Lib Dems, nine per cent to Brexit and only five per cent to the Tories – according to a survey published by Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry.

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell put the situation in a nutshell: "The choice for voters couldn't be starker. In the words of Rosa Luxemburg, our choice is 'socialism or barbarism'.

"We're going to tax privilege, redistribute wealth, and re-invest in public services. We've set our sights on another world, radically fairer, more equal and more democratic, where prosperity is shared by all.

"That world is within our grasp, and with our grassroots army of activists and campaigners we'll hopefully have the chance to start building it."

That grassroots army has to get out on the march, in the cities, towns and villages of Yorkshire and Humberside if the nightmare of five years of bumbling, lying Boris Johnson is to be averted. □



HE KNOWS
HE HAS
TO WIN
HERE IF
HE IS
TO CRAWL
BACK INTO
DOWNING
STREET



Photo: Mark Harvey

SALT OF THE EARTH

John Hepplestone combines his exacting “day job” helping the homeless in Sheffield with looking after the interests of UNISON members at St Anne’s community services. **Helen Hague** reports

Sheffield hostel worker John Hepplestone – ex miner, ex steelworker – is a life-long trade union member. And more.

In the great tradition that built the British labour movement, he has stepped up to support and represent co-workers – by playing an active role in his union branch.

John works at Bevin Court, a hostel for adult men on the outskirts of the city, helping

people settle in to their temporary home. This includes checking that new arrivals are signed up for the right benefits and getting them registered with the council, the housing association and the GP. Or as John puts it: “Just helping them get on with their lives”.

He is often the first point of contact. Form-filling is an essential part of accessing services, and it can seem bewildering. “I’d sooner do it with people, than for them” –


an approach, he says, shared by the rest of the resettlement team.

First impressions matter – a positive encounter can help shape the stay for people who have faced life on the street or are learning to live in a new country.

The Sheffield hostel doesn’t stand alone. It is part of St Anne’s Community Services, a charity providing accommodation, services and support to homeless and



JUST
HELPING
THEM GET
ON WITH
THEIR
LIVES



John works in the garden at the hostel

He's not one to rush to judgment, and knows only too well even people in work can be just one pay cheque away from penury. Zero hours contracts, rising rents and benefit cuts can all pave the way.

Working at St Anne's has given John front-line insights into the housing crisis – and he knows where the blame lies. Over decades, governments “just haven't done enough to invest in social housing. People need homes.”

John is active in the St Anne's UNISON branch. It has around 800 members and branch officials are drawn from across the area St Anne's serves, with monthly branch meetings in Leeds.

Like other branch officials at St Anne's, John doesn't have just the one role: he is shop steward, union welfare rep and health and safety rep. “I'm just a small part of the team,” says John, not one to big himself up. “We all do multiple jobs.” His patch is mainly South and West Yorkshire.

On the day Active! magazine catches up with him, John is getting ready to visit three of St Anne's properties in Leeds - to check fire and safety protocols are in place to minimise risks. There are two other health and safety reps covering the patch.

In his role as one of the branch's shop stewards, John prepares the paperwork for members facing disciplinary hearings. And when members face acute financial difficulties or traumatic life events, the branch welfare rep is there to offer advice and support. John has developed particular expertise in this role, says Tracy Brown, St Anne's

UNISON branch secretary.

It's a role members might not know much about unless they find themselves facing hardship. A change in circumstances, bereavement or other unexpected life events can lob an Exocet into the best-run budgets.

And with successive cuts in sick pay for St Anne's staff last year – from six months' full pay to one month's half pay - members off with long-term sickness have seen their income shrink, says Tracy.

John's backstory in coal and steel gave him a thorough grounding in solidarity - he was out on strike for a year with other NUM members in 1984/85. It didn't stop the Thatcher government pressing ahead with pit closures.

John enjoyed the camaraderie of working in the coal industry. But by 1989, the writing was already on the wall - “so many pits had shut ...they were getting it ready for privatisation”.

After a few contract jobs, he joined Sheffield Forgemasters in the city – and became a lay union official in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. After a couple of name changes, that union is now part of Unite.

John is very much a family man, married for more than forty years and with a grandchild and step grandchild. He's a couple of years off retirement and plans to step down from his role in the St Anne's branch next March, making way, he hopes, for a younger branch member to join the team.

John could be a hard act to follow – just ask Tracy Brown. But fresh talent is no doubt out there, ready to give rank and file members support and help when they need it. □



WE ALL
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I'M JUST
A SMALL
PART OF
THE TEAM

vulnerable people in Yorkshire and the North East. St Anne's, a housing association as well as a charity, helps people in partnership with local authorities and specialist services.

Bevin Court is a “generic” homeless hostel. But some clients arrive with vulnerabilities – from mental health, drug and alcohol problems to the limbo-like status of “asylum seeker”, after fleeing war and conflict back home. Others find themselves unexpectedly homeless when relationships break down, illness strikes, contracts end or, as John puts it “they are down on their luck and things haven't worked out”.



ALL I DO IS LISTEN

Labour movement photographer Mark Harvey noticed the number of rough sleepers started to increase on the streets of his home city Sheffield. So he volunteered to help and it “completely changed” his perception of what it means to be homeless.

Active! reporter **Helen Hague** tells his story and those of the people he helps

We’ve all seen them – and we’ve all walked on by. Men - and less often women - sitting on the street, with a handwritten placard and a paper cup maybe, asking for change. They are the conspicuously homeless. And walking on by is what most of us do.

Mark Harvey, seasoned labour movement photographer, used to do just that. But, about five years ago he started noticing

more homeless people on the streets of Sheffield, his home city, and felt increasingly appalled.

So he volunteered to help at Sheffield Cathedral’s Arches Project, a compassionate place in the heart of the city where homeless people are fed, welcomed and offered one-to-one support.

In getting to know people through the project Mark has gained fresh insights into the impact of austerity on some of the most vulnerable

in our society. He has also “completely changed” his perception of what life is like for rough sleepers and those without a permanent home in one of the most affluent countries in the world.

But volunteering has also led him to question the right of people like him, professional photographers, to take pictures of homeless people – reinforcing stereotypes and narratives, without even bothering to ask. “Of course it’s legal to take pictures if it’s in a



ROUGH
SLEEPERS
I TALK TO,
SAY
THEY FEEL
INVISIBLE”



One homeless man in Sheffield
- and everything he owns

public place ... but that's not the point," says Mark. Whose engagement with homelessness has forced him to confront his own preconceptions – and even elements of his photographic practice.

It has prompted a photographic project "A Box for a Bed" – framing homelessness through the traces people living on the streets leave behind. "I wanted to photograph rough sleeping in Sheffield, looking at the environment where people sleep and the possessions they leave in public spaces." Not everyone even has their own sleeping bag. "Many sleeping on our streets use cardboard, usually discarded packaging from shops, for insulation"

The dispossessed are hiding in plain sight. "Rough sleepers I talk to say they feel invisible, but the evidence

is in front of our eyes," says Mark. Charities, shelters and local authorities are over-stretched and increasingly strapped for cash. And there are, he says, "so many barriers" to people who have fallen through the net finding a way back into mainstream society.

He learned quickly that many of the people he encountered have suffered some kind of trauma before finding themselves without a safe place to stay – and drug, alcohol or mental health problems have made it harder for some to get back on track. A good few of the men he has got to know through the project have an ex-military background – including people who saw active service on the frontline in Afghanistan. Mark was in the Royal Marines way back – which gives him a link, and some understanding – of what soldiers can have to go through. Mark grew up in North Devon and after leaving Barnstaple Grammar school with two O levels, he joined the Royal Marines. He served for six years including three tours of Northern Ireland. He realised the marines wasn't really for him so he bought himself out, subsequently supporting the 'Troops Out' campaign, realising that British soldiers weren't helping the situation over there.

SUFFERED

"I have been volunteering with the Archer Project for five years and what has impressed me most with the clients is that their personal qualities are never used by organisations that are supposed to support them. From my military experience

there is little support for veterans, a number I know have not told anyone they are even vets because of the trauma they have suffered. I experienced some shit, a mortar landed three meters away from me in XMG (Crossmaglen) and I occasionally experience night sweats."

SHARKS

He's witnessed how traumatised people bereft of money, family support and stability can lead chaotic lives. This can come at considerable cost when missing appointments with officialdom. It can lead to benefit sanctions – an official euphemism for slashing payouts, leaving people with even less money to get by. If rehoused in temporary accommodation, there is little security; failing to engage with a "key worker" can also lead to benefits being cut – and even eviction. And private landlords cut little slack.

Then there are the predatory below-the-radar drug dealing 'sharks'.

"There are people whose benefits go into their account at midnight on a Tuesday who are being told to withdraw money from the cashpoint at ten past midnight if they want to buy drugs," says Mark. If life's tough and you are a drug-dependent rough sleeper this can seem very alluring – and even if not yet addicted, the prospect of chemical oblivion for a few hours could be just what you think you need. Until the craving starts again.

Mark is fairly low-key about the support he is able to give people who have been marginalised. "All I do



I ACT AS AN
ADVOCATE
IF POSSIBLE

Mark Harvey





“
PEOPLE
CAN FEEL
THEY’VE
BEEN
‘SOCIAL-
WORKED’
TO DEATH”

is listen, treat people with respect and act as an advocate if possible. That’s it in a nutshell.”

He encourages people to go to the doctors if they need to – and goes with them if they want him to. He has helped an ex-soldier get a reference from his former commander when successfully appealing against a benefits sanction. But perhaps most importantly, he is there as a non-judgmental companion who is not going to force them to reveal their troubled past.

“In their own time, on their own terms, only if they want to,” is the way he prefers to play it. Being forced to give an account of yourself is par for the course when you are on the margins, says Mark. “People can feel they’ve been ‘social-worked to death’ – but still not got the help they really need.”

When Active! caught up with Mark, he’d just driven six homeless people out for a walk in the Derbyshire Peak District – to “get away from the city and the hassle” and enjoy the countryside together. Some took pictures – Mark was happy to lend out

his camera. It was, he says “a very good day out”.

After all, walking alongside people amid beautiful scenery, chatting and taking pictures, certainly beats being ignored in the city, as people just walk on by. □

IT’S GETTING WORSE

The Arches Project is at the sharp end – an island of hope for the homeless in a city hit by steep industrial decline, joblessness and poverty in the 1980s. By 1989, Sheffield Cathedral had become a regular place for those with nowhere to shelter. Tea and toast came first.

Now, in purpose-built premises within the Cathedral, there’s a lounge area, showers, a kitchen, meeting rooms and a programme of activities to help people learn new skills and grow in confidence. There’s even an in-house nurse and a dentist. The admirable aim is to help homeless people live “fulfilling, stable and enjoyable lives”. But as Mark and other volunteers have found, austerity, cutbacks, benefit sanctions and drug pushers are making life on the streets ever tougher for the vulnerable.



As Britain's biggest organisation for women, fighting for gender equality is at the heart of everything we do. It's no surprise then that ending the gender pay gap is a critical priority for UNISON.

Right now, men earn 18% more than women in the UK, and though the gap has narrowed in recent decades, that's still a huge disparity between men and women in the workplace.

The battle to end the gender pay gap is far from won – that's why we've launched our Bridge the Gap campaign.

**[www.unison.org.uk/
our-campaigns/bridgethegap](http://www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/bridgethegap)**
#bridgethegap



PRIDE, LOYALTY AND SOLIDARITY

Commitment, camaraderie and public support have kept low-paid NHS workers on the picket line in an ‘inspirational’ strike against privatisation at Bradford Infirmary. **Peter Carroll**, who has personal reasons to be thankful to the staff at the hospital (P30), tells their story



I AM VERY PROUD OF THEIR SOLIDARITY AND THEIR STRENGTH”
AMI SINGH

More than 300 UNISON members in Bradford are leading the fight against the backdoor privatisation of the NHS in what has been described as an “inspirational” strike. The Bradford NHS Trust

wants to transfer porters, cleaners, security staff and others into a “wholly-owned subsidiary company” - in other words, a private company.

But UNISON’s Bradford health branch balloted for strike action and members were on the picket lines for a

total of three weeks over the Summer.

The huge support they received from the public surprised even UNISON veterans of major industrial action over many years.

Health branch secretary Ami Singh was almost overwhelmed by how the

Left to right: Local organiser Jane Jordan, activist Shakeelah Suleman and branch secretary Ami Singh

people of Bradford showed their solidarity with the fight.

"We had a sign asking passing motorists to honk to support the strike. Day after day you could hardly hear anything other than the horns blaring. They were cheering and giving us the thumbs up through the window. Thousands of them," said Ami.

STRENGTH

"It is a very emotional experience and a very inspirational one. We had tearful pensioners coming to the picket line to give us money for the strikers. They have lived their lives with the NHS always being there for everyone. The threatened privatisation of their hospitals deeply upsets them because they fear future generations will not be able to pay for private insurance.

"We also had patients who had just been discharged joining the picket line. People realise that our members are not striking on their own behalf but to save the NHS from the greed of the privatisers who want to exploit illness for limitless profits."

Ami thinks the trust completely underestimated, not only the strength of public support, but also how precious it is for members to be employed by the NHS. They are proud to be employed by the NHS and are fiercely loyal to its core values.

"That is the motivation for our members and their action has made many others realise just how dangerous the trust's plans are. I am very proud of their solidarity and their strength in fighting for the NHS," he said.

Shakeelah Suleman, a

hospitality supervisor at the infirmary, was on picket duty every day of the strike, come rain or shine. She spoke of the sacrifices made by the strikers as an indication of their sincere commitment to the action they took.

"I have lost £200 in wages during this strike, and I know of some members who have lost £500," said Shakeelah.

"That is money none of us can afford and it has been very hard for us. But we are still prepared to go out on the picket lines. I have been working in the trust for 22 years and this strike has really brought us all together. We have created strong bonds between us and lasting friendships between people who had previously never met."

SPIRIT

Shakeelah worked very closely during the strike with staff from UNISON's regional office and says the spirit of team work, mutual support and solidarity was typical of her colleagues who run the hospitals every day.

She said: "We value our work and we all give 110 per cent to ensure the best patient care possible. We work as a team and we know that if the NHS is privatised, that spirit and that ethos will be destroyed.

"We have some patients who can't afford a pair of pyjamas. I have many colleagues who have gone and bought them a pair out of their own money. We go above and beyond our role to make sure patients are cared for.

"That is the sort of person who is fighting this serious threat of privatisation. People who are deeply proud to work for the NHS."

Regional organiser Natalie Ratchiffe was on the picket line throughout the strike and says she was delighted by the diversity of those taking part. She said: "This dispute created some natural leaders from our young members. "These members are the future of UNISON and it was so heartening to see how they are so committed and passionate about the NHS. Some of our members come from a wide range of countries across the world and to see the way all of them are so united and so supportive of each other is wonderful.

ADAMANT

"In particular, the women who have stepped up and fought for our NHS are a great example of the confidence and strength that UNISON is so committed to encouraging.

"I am very proud to be involved with this vital dispute. It is very hard on members who have lost money, but they remain adamant that they will not step back from the fight. Their spirit is so strong." □



THIS
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HAS REALLY
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US ALL
TOGETHER"
SHAKEELAH
SULEMAN



WE'LL NEVER FORGET HER

UNISON member Clare Mills Roberts pays tribute to the staff who tried to save her tiny baby Florence and those who cared for her little girl until she died. Consulting editor **Mary Maguire** hears her harrowing story - and about Clare's imminent arrival



IT SEEMED LIKE SHE WAS TELLING US THAT SHE'D HAD ENOUGH

After 28 weeks of pregnancy, Clare Mills Roberts ended up in Sheffield's Jessop Maternity Hospital, for an emergency caesarean. What should have been a joyful event, turned into heartbreak as Clare and husband Paul struggled as their tiny daughter Florence clung on

to life.

Born on 24 August, 12 weeks prematurely, Florence was delivered early after doctors detected a rare form of cancer. Nothing could really prepare Clare and Paul for the pain that followed. Florence lived just six weeks.

Clare told me: "Florence had lots of tumours causing her serious problems. One

in particular blocked the blood supply to her lungs. Eventually an oncologist diagnosed Florence with infantile myofibromatosis - an extremely rare condition usually only found in full-term babies or toddlers. They weren't sure how to treat her, but tried chemotherapy."

Chemotherapy worked

Clare with the book on
Florence's short life

initially and Florence improved slightly, but further tests discovered she also had tumours in her heart. Tumours around any of the organs are serious and make recovery a lot less likely in such a case. Florence also had serious brain damage and was on life support, breathing with the aid of a ventilator.

HEARTBREAKING

Eventually doctors broke the news to Clare and Paul that they couldn't recommend carrying on treatment. There was nothing more they could do for Florence. Clare and Paul were offered the option of transferring Florence to a children's hospice – Bluebell Wood – for end of life care.

Clare said: "It was a heart-breaking choice. Florence was deteriorating a lot. It was so hard to see her tiny body struggling, but it seemed like she was telling us that she'd had enough in a way. So we made the agonising decision to go to Bluebell Wood."

Florence came off life support and died soon after arriving at the hospice. Bluebell Wood is a very special place. A place where parents can spend precious time with their babies. A refrigerated cold room set up much like a baby's bedroom with a little crib, allows parents and families a private space after death.

Bluebell Wood gave Clare and Paul the chance to gradually say goodbye to Florence in privacy and comfort. Staff helped with memory-making activities, like hand and foot prints and gave Clare a memory box. Staff helped wash and dress Florence after she died and

organised funeral directors, registered the death and organised counselling. There's also a bereavement group.

"It was such a help," said Clare. "We were completely shell-shocked and didn't know what we were doing. Staff allowed us to concentrate on saying goodbye to Florence and start the grieving process. For five days after Florence died, we were able to see her and hold her every day, until it was time for the funeral."

Clare naturally wanted to support the hospice and to stay connected to the place where Florence had died. The hospice receives only 10 per cent of its funding from government. So Clare felt that raising funds so that other bereaved parents could be helped was a tangible way of doing so. She organised friends to take part in a fund-raising race. Clare was "blown away" by the amount raised, more than four times their target.

TRAUMATIC

"I know other mums whose babies died at the Jessop but weren't given the option of Bluebell Wood. It makes such a difference to your mental health to have support early on. There's such a long waiting list for NHS counselling and that makes a traumatic time even worse. If there were more government funding, other families going through the most devastating experience you can imagine, would get help".

Clare is also full of praise for all the NHS staff at Jessop who, she felt, gave their best to give Florence her best chance. "It was very

difficult and traumatic, but we couldn't have asked for better treatment from all the staff. They tried their best for Florence, despite her rare condition and poor outlook. We had access to the best level of expertise. The amount of time, effort and money spent on trying to keep our tiny baby alive, to try to give her a fighting chance, was amazing."

Six months later, Clare went back to work in the materials and engineering research institute at Sheffield Hallam university. She provides admin support for the academic staff and students, and organises the big annual research conference, along with other seminars and conferences and continuing professional development courses.

Dealing with the anniversary of Florence's death was difficult and, once again, Bluebell Wood helped. Each year Bluebell Wood holds a memorial celebration for all the children and babies who have died there.

"People say time heals and you will get over it. We won't ever get over Florence. Bluebell Wood understands that you will never forget. We will always miss Florence and can never go back to the way things were before."

Clare is now pregnant and her baby is due in November. It's a happy but anxious time for her. She's back at the same hospital, seeing the same NHS professionals.

"I get so anxious, but they (the doctors) are so reassuring and understand my fears. And we'll make sure that the new baby knows all about Florence the big sister who will always be a big part of our lives". □



FOR FIVE
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AFTER
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HOLD HER



YOU'RE NICKED, BORIS

Boris Johnson's antics at the West Yorkshire Police training centre angered the chief constable and his promises were greeted with scepticism from UNISON, says **Ryan Fletcher**

Boris Johnson was greeted by UNISON protestors demanding the reinstatement of thousands of police community support officers (PCSOs) and other police support staff during his visit to a Wakefield police training centre in early September.

The union is warning that

the prime minister's pledge to recruit an extra 20,000 police officers is not enough on its own to halt the rise in serious and violent crime.

UNISON is calling for ministers and police chiefs to restore the entire police workforce to 2010 levels, by replacing thousands of police staff jobs lost since then, including 999 call takers, fingerprint experts

and detention officers.

In West Yorkshire alone, the force has lost 264 PCSOs since 2010, down from 763 to 599, while in total 954 police and support staff positions have gone during the same period.

Joint secretary of UNISON West Yorkshire police branch, Jane Wilkinson, said the impact of the cuts has been "catastrophic" and



STRESS
LEVELS
AND
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THE ROOF

UNISON members let Boris Johnson know how they feel

resulted in PCSOs being sent to situations that should be handled by police officers.

She said: "Although we cut staff numbers the work has not ceased or diminished. Stress levels and sickness have gone through the roof.

"We've lost a lot of staff, not just through redundancies, but because they've left the force due to the pressures they've been put under. We have members who are not just doing their own job but three or four different roles."

This has led to a rise in mental health issues amongst staff, said Wilkinson's co-branch secretary Becky Aspin.

She said: "I've seen demand increase and staff members go off and I've had to support them because actually the force haven't given the support they need and the government haven't given us the numbers we need.

"It's alright to say we're here to support you and put a poster on the wall but actually there's nothing behind it."

INFLUX

Jane pointed out that police support staff are the "foundations" of the West Yorkshire force and that officers are not able to perform their roles properly without them.

"Across the region, you can see the ripple effect; violent crime is going up and that is connected to the force being under resourced," she said.

"The public want to see officers out on the beat. But without police staff, any new officers will simply be performing supporting roles

because of the shortages."

Aspin said members are also concerned that an influx of new police officers could lead to job losses among support staff.

She explained: "When Police Scotland got extra officers, staff members were made redundant and officers had to fill those roles.

DIRE

"We already have spending pressures and we're concerned our staff could be pushed out in order to afford new police officers."

The dire situation facing West Yorkshire Police and other forces needs to be brought out into the open, Wilkinson said, because police bosses are very cautious about addressing such matters in public.

She said: "Unlike the NHS or other public services, it is very difficult for a police force to openly admit that it is struggling from the point of view that you've got the criminal fraternity out there looking for the chinks in the armour."

As if to illustrate Wilkinson's comments about police forces being brought to their knees by the Conservatives, during Boris Johnson's speech in Wakefield a female police officer behind him fainted after being made to stand for a prolonged period because the prime minister failed to turn up on time.

Johnson was later condemned for using the group of officers as a backdrop during his address, which was supposed to be about his pledge to recruit 20,000 new police, but quickly deteriorated into a party

political rant.

Commenting on Johnson's appearance at the training centre, West Yorkshire Police's chief constable John Robins said: "We had no prior knowledge that the speech would be broadened to other issues until it was delivered.

"I was therefore disappointed to see my police officers as a backdrop to the part of the speech that was not related to recruitment."

Johnson's reputation for dishonesty and double dealing is one of the reasons his pledge to recruit more officers is being taken with a pinch of salt, said UNISON regional organiser Rachel Hodson.

TRUST

"UNISON is obviously very pleased there are going to be new police officers – if we trust Boris Johnson to deliver it. The local UNISON police branches are very sceptical about whether the promises he's made will actually come to fruition," said Hodson.

"Even if Johnson sticks to his word, he's made no mention of police staff. Ultimately you can employ new police officers but if you haven't got the rest of the staff, they're not going to be able to do their job in the community."

UNISON has written to the police minister Kit Malthouse as well as organisations, including the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, urging them to support its campaign to rebuild the whole police team. □



EVEN IF JOHNSON STICKS TO HIS WORD, HE'S MADE NO MENTION OF POLICE STAFF

WENDY WAGES WAR

UNISON is set to receive an answer to a 10 per cent pay claim lodged on behalf of local government workers, some of whom have been forced to use food banks, while others have been helped by the UNISON charity There for You. **Mary Maguire** reports

There was a time when a career in local government was looked upon with a degree of envy. Reasonable pay, secure job, respected, and a good pension at the end of it. How times have changed.

Today, there are local government members in this region who've had to go

to a food bank to feed their families. And others who've had to turn to the union's charity, There For You, for help to buy school uniforms for their children or for one-off loans to help pay off debt.

It's not hard to understand the reasons why. Austerity and a Tory government that has wilfully shifted the burden of the national

deficit onto the shoulders of those least able to pay. Millionaires have been given an eye-watering £8.6bn in tax cuts – an extra £554,000 each in pocket money – while cuts to funding, to services, to benefits and frozen pay is the norm for the many.

Local government has had to weather a storm of cuts so deep – nearly 60 percent



OUR
MEMBERS
WORK
HARD
DAY IN,
DAY OUT
**WENDY
NICHOLS**

Regional convenor Wendy Nichols:
Members have paid the price for austerity

since 2010 – that two-thirds of councils predict they will run out of funds to honour even their statutory duties in the next few years.

UNISON members have been struggling to keep council services going over the past 10 years, as jobs are cut and pay is frozen or squeezed. In real terms, most spine points in the pay grades have been devalued by 21.8 percent, yet core costs including travel, electricity, house prices and childcare have gone up way beyond that point.

AUSTERITY

As regional convenor Wendy Nichols, says: “Our members work hard day in, day out, to deliver excellent public services that communities and businesses across Yorkshire & Humberside rely on.

“They have seen the value of their pay fall in real terms in recent years, so any funding settlement from the Government has to put money in to deal with that.”

Since 2010 council workers had to put up with eight years of Government-imposed real term pay cuts – either frozen or held to a one-per cent pay increase. Next year, sees the end of a two-year pay deal with just a two percent increase in each year, with a higher rate for the lowest paid.

The pay claim submitted to the employers to operate from April 2020, by UNISON, Unite and GMB, seeks to catch up on some lost ground and to provide a cushion for the lowest paid workers. A £10 an hour minimum wage has support across political parties as a “common sense

solution to the unsustainable problem of topping up low pay via tax credits”.

LOWEST

It also seeks a 10 percent increase on all other pay points, an extra day’s annual leave, and a two-hour reduction in the working week.

Says Wendy: “This claim and a cut in the working week will go some way to recognising the heavy price our members have had to pay for this Government’s austerity programme since 2010”.

A look at the current rates of pay for typical local government workers shows just how far they have fallen over the years – with for example, a library assistant down nearly 17 percent, a teaching assistant down more than 20 percent, a social worker down nearly 22 percent.

Pay in local government is still among the lowest in the public sector. UNISON found that in a benchmarking exercise of 24 roles, 15 of them were behind other public sector comparators for basic pay. And, even amongst the higher grades, compared to the private sector, the picture is equally bleak.

A local government solicitor typically earns £32,000 less than their private sector counterpart, a surveyor and an IT project management worker earning £11,000 less. Recruitment and retention problems are acute in some areas, with councils having to plug the gaps paying agencies expensive rates for staff.

Unions also want a

comprehensive joint national review of the workplace causes of stress and mental health problems throughout local authorities. This is in the light of studies that found a high percentage of members experience work-related stress, poor morale, increased workload and a culture of long hours.

The Tories are constantly talking about “making work pay”, but that doesn’t seem to translate into actually paying decent wages.

As regional manager, Karen Loughlin, says: “Recent pay awards have not addressed the real increase in the cost of living, meaning many local authority employees in this region have had a pay cut in real terms, with some council workers having to rely on in-work benefits. That is not making work pay.

PRESSURES

“The Government still fails in its duty to local authorities by not giving councils in Yorkshire & Humberside an adequate funding settlement. With over a decade of funding cuts and increasing pressures on services, such as social care, this has meant that non-essential services including transport, housing and culture have been hit, resulting in many job losses still occurring today. While there continues to be a shortage of funding for councils in the region, redundancy threats remain high, leading to job insecurity”.

The Local Government Association was due to respond to the unions’ pay claim as Active! went to press. □



**MANY
JOB
LOSSES
STILL
OCCURRING
TODAY
KAREN
LOUGHLIN**



TOUGHING IT OUT

A divorce and the victimisation of her gay son has made UNISON convenor Carol Dewrow stronger... and a union rep to be reckoned with. **Ryan Fletcher** reports



YOU ARE
A LOT
STRONGER
THAN YOU
THINK
YOU ARE

It wasn't until UNISON convenor Carol Dewrow untied the knot that she began to realise her full capabilities. Getting divorced was daunting for the 52-year-old school kitchen manager from Barnsley, but striking out on her own unleashed a new found confidence to effect change and an ambition to inspire it

in others.

"It shaped me going forward," says Carol, who became the convenor for Wakefield Council's public/private partnership with property management firm Engie two years ago.

"You realise when you've got to fend for yourself that you are a lot stronger than you think you are. That's true

for everyone, but for women especially, it's important to remember that. I have a lot to give and I'm pleased that I'm giving it."

Feeding hordes of hungry kids was Carol's bread and butter for 20 years. But after the divorce and following assistance from UNISON to successfully settle a workplace dispute, Carol

Carol with her son Chris who DJs part-time as "Miss Crystal"

“
SCHOOLS
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realised helping people through the union was the change of direction she was looking for.

As well as handling workplace issues, Carol tutors UNISON members on assertiveness and confidence courses. Most of those taking up the courses are women, says Carol, and many are dealing with issues that are close to her heart.

"There's still this sense of women just being mothers and wives. There's a lot of that and it's unfortunate in this day and age," Carol explained.

"I'm not saying they're downtrodden or anything, but the feeling is the man does the real work and he's the one that gets to go out and enjoy himself and the woman has to get on with everything else. Women have got to remember that they are just as important as men."

FIGHTBACK

Another issue that is important to Carol is LGBT equality. Carol's son, 25-year-old Chris, is gay and has suffered because of others' prejudices in the past.

Carol said: "He DJs part time as Miss Crystal and he's pretty good, even if I do say that as his mum. I feel so passionate about this issue because of some of the hassles he's had to go through. Over the last couple of years, I've arranged for the branch to do Pride and get talking to people and offer some sort of support wherever we can."

Things are no less busy on the industrial front, with Carol being at the centre of a dispute with school catering contractor ISS.

UNISON is taking legal action against the firm after it unfairly dismissed Carol for leading the fightback against it shortchanging staff a week's pay. The international corporation, which is subcontracted by Engie to deliver school meals, changed the way it paid staff in April – leaving some reliant on food banks in the process.

CAMPAIGN

The new system meant ISS school caterers in Wakefield were not paid for as long as three weeks. When the wages were eventually paid, there was a week's pay missing. Instead of acknowledging the mistake, ISS, which brought in global revenues of nearly £9bn in 2018, is denying it owes any money.

Carol said: "When ISS announced the changes, they offered support loans to help in the interim. Now they've started taking that money back, just as they've taken a lot of hours off people as part of the streamlining. For ISS to say that they don't owe them anything, to cut their hours and take the loans back, it's just wrong."

The ISS pay scandal in Wakefield, which, along with Carol's unfair dismissal case, is now being handled by UNISON's legal department, is why UNISON activists in neighbouring Barnsley are determined to save their council's in-house school catering. Their campaign paid dividends in May, when Barnsley Council announced that the decision on whether to privatise services will be delayed until next summer.

Barnsley Council should look at Wakefield as they

consider their decision, says Carol. Engie began its ten-year £200m contract to provide cleaning and catering services to 86 Wakefield schools and maintain other council buildings in 2016. Since then the partnership, supposed to save the public £10m, has been beset by scandal.

In September 2018, Wakefield Council fined the firm £100,000 for failing to carry out more than 900 contractual obligations and criticised it for inaccurate invoicing. At the time officials were forced to admit that they didn't know how much money, if any, had been saved by hiving off the services.

PROGRESS

The council said in March that there was "still work to do" but that Engie had made "significant progress". In July, however, it was revealed that the council is also locked in a legal dispute with Engie over the costs of transferring more than 700 public sector workers to the firm.

Carol said: "Time and again it's been shown that privatising services just doesn't work. Councils are having less and less to do with education. You can see it in the amount of academy chains that are taking over. How many of them have gone bust or refused to take on schools because they're not performing well? Schools now are being run as a business, not as a place to go and learn."

Outside of work, Carol enjoys watching motocross and taking her two chihuahuas, Billy and Peter, who are each "about the size of a bag of sugar", on walks. □



WHO'S A LUCKY BOY THEN?

Active! writer **Peter Carroll** tells about the massive heart attack he suffered in April. Luckily for him he was just yards away from A&E at Bradford infirmary at the time



HEARTFELT
THANKS
TO OUR
WONDERFUL
NHS

It turns out that I am a very lucky man! My friends and family keep insisting that "somebody up there likes me".

But I haven't won the lottery. As far as begging letters are concerned, I'm still sending them, so don't

waste your time sending any to me.

I had a heart attack last April. Far from somebody up there liking me, it felt more like somebody up there actually had it in for me.

But when the chest pain struck, as luck would have

it, I happened to be at Bradford Royal Infirmary.

We were doing some TV interviews with MPs and UNISON activists about the strike to stop their jobs being privatised in a wholly-owned subsidiary company.

I was just yards away

from the A&E department when I started to feel very ill indeed.

Ami Singh, secretary of the Bradford health branch, and regional manager Tony Pearson both said I looked “awful, really terrible” (a bit harsh, I thought at the time) and escorted me to A&E.

Within ten minutes I was wired up to a scanner which showed I was having a heart attack there and then.

The medical staff had alerted heart specialists at Leeds General Infirmary that I would be there in half an hour for emergency treatment.

Then they gave me a morphine injection, which made me sick, but soon made me almost euphoric.

I rang my sister Louise from the ambulance: “Can you hear those sirens? That’s me being rushed to Leeds Infirmary.”

The paramedic, who was holding my hand, asked gently if I knew what had happened to me. Yes, I said, with the self-satisfied smile of a man who had just won the local pub quiz. I’ve had a heart attack!

CAMERA

They trundled me straight through the double doors at the L&G and onto the operating table.

A local anaesthetic was pumped through a tube in my wrist followed by a tiny camera which transmitted pictures of my beating heart to a TV screen.

The surgeons worked on me for an hour and a half. I tried to lift my head so I could see the screen and witness the action live.

One of the surgeons said: “Don’t do that please, your

head is blocking out the pictures of your heart.”

You don’t need telling twice not to actively impede someone who is working to save your life. I laid back and thought of Brexit.

After two days back in the cardiac unit in Bradford, wired up to monitors and cared for round the clock, they said I could go home.

My sisters, Louise and Helen, came to collect me and I went to stay with Louise and her family to recover.

SKILLFULL

As luck would have it yet again, Louise is a senior nurse practitioner and has worked for the NHS for more than 40 years. You couldn’t ask for a kinder, more skilful woman to aid your recovery than her.

I stayed with the family for more than two months before even venturing outside, then I went home to slowly resume normal life.

To put my experience into perspective, there are 100,000 hospital admissions for heart attacks every year. That’s one every five minutes.

A quarter of all deaths in any given year are caused by heart attacks – around one death every three minutes.

When told he had terminal cancer, the late journalist and political commentator Christopher Hitchens was understandably shocked.

Not long before he died, he wrote this: “To the dumb question ‘why me?’, the cosmos barely bothers to return the reply: why not?”

But are there reasons cancer and heart attacks

happen in the first place? Can we do things to avoid those killers shortening our lives?

The NHS is committed to preventing fatal diseases by advising against smoking, eating too much of the wrong kind of salty, sugary food and not enough vegetables.

Smoking is a proven cause of both cancer and coronary heart disease and obesity is up there with tobacco in the fatal illness stakes.

But there is another factor at work as well as unhealthy lifestyles.

A consultant came to see me in the middle of the night to ask if there was any history of coronary heart disease in my family.

I said I didn’t think so, although my father died of a heart attack when he was 57 but everyone said it was because he was a 30 fags a day man.

SYMPATHY

She said there was a genetic inheritance of the disease within my family – and that this is by far the biggest risk factor for heart attacks.

A friend told me he had every sympathy with my plight. He said the doctors had told him that to survive, he had to take a pill every day for the rest of his life. “But they only gave me four!” he wailed.

Well, I’ve got hundreds (nine a day is the well-balanced way) so hopefully I’ll be around for a while yet.

So heartfelt thanks to our wonderful NHS.

Rest assured, UNISON’s fight to save it from greedy privateers will not cease. □



CAN YOU
HEAR
THOSE
SIRENS?
THAT’S ME
BEING
RUSHED
TO LEEDS
INFIRMARY



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

MIRROR POLITICAL COLUMNIST

LIES, DAMNED LIES - AND HEADLINES

The Conservative Yorkshire Post trumpeted figures showing how many working days were lost through drug and alcohol abuse at four hospitals in Yorkshire and Humberside. In fact the figures were not only tiny, they were meaningless. The Post would be better employed expressing outrage at how gross underfunding is hammering morale.

Shock, horror! The Tory Yorkshire Post says NHS staff at four hospitals in the county took a total of 557 days off last year - six months - because of drug and alcohol abuse.

Hull University Hospitals headed this supposed league of shame, with 190 days off, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals came second with 110, then Humber Teaching with 103 and York Teaching, 100.

Hang on a minute. Let's take a close look at the figures. These trusts employ a total of 35,000 employees, with an annual potential of almost nine million working days. Not including overtime.

So this statistic is not just a drop in the ocean, it's meaningless. In Hull, it represents 0.09 per cent of the hours worked, by staff under stress in a 600-bed facility catering for 600,000 people.

Charity Alcohol Change UK, which did the survey, says heavy drinking or drug abuse could damage the mental health of NHS staff and impact on their decision-making.

Of course that's true. But let's keep things in perspective. Drink and drug abuse, mainly involving clinical staff and technical/support people, is not really a major problem for NHS hospitals.

Not when set beside chronic underfunding and understaffing that are hammering morale

As Hull hospital points out, the current crisis in the NHS requires a strong occupational support system, in an open and honest culture where staff can freely discuss their problems, whether work or home-related.

Not lurid and misleading headlines. But you don't read a Tory newspaper to find out the truth about working people.

HENS AND GIBLETS

The city centre gets so crowded, it sometimes feels like Leeds has more hen and stag parties than Prague.

But revellers might wish to give historic Briggate a miss. New figures show it's the most crime-ridden street in West Yorkshire, with more than 1,000 offences in a

single year.

I worked at Woolworth's on the street in the late fifties as a Saturday lad, stacking shelves for thirty bob. That's £1.50 - a day, not an hour.

And I once burned thirty chickens in Woolies' catering ovens after forgetting to take out the giblets. But that's another story.

MR EXPENSES

Now it can be told. Sir Gary Verity was the nearest thing to Mr Yorkshire until his downfall as chief executive of the county's tourist body.

He resigned "on health grounds" after admitting "errors of judgment" over £24,000 of repaid expenses, and amid allegations of bullying staff.

Two independent reports found unacceptable use of luxury hotels and high-end restaurants for "networking" and £900,00 expenses claimed by senior managers over six years that could not be assessed as justified.

And the chief executive's conduct had "fallen short" of expected standards.

It could all have been



YOU DON'T
READ
A TORY
NEWSPAPER
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PEOPLE



so different. I can disclose that local Tories wanted Sir Gary, a well-off sheep farmer, to run as an Independent to become directly-elected Mayor of One Yorkshire. They calculated that a Conservative candidate would never beat Labour – but high-profile Gazza, who brought the Tour de France to the county – could.

The plan came to nothing after his embarrassing departure as publicity-loving £243,000 a year chief executive of Welcome to Yorkshire, and the government's subsequent rejection of local leaders' plans for devolution.

I wonder if the two events were related?

HELLO... GOODBYE

Surveys of the population are usually just another way of selling you something you don't need. But occasionally they're revealing.

According to a new poll, employees in Yorkshire and Humberside are the least unhappy at work in the whole of England. Only 21 per cent are miserable on the job, if you get my meaning.

Britain comes eighth in global rankings for workplace happiness, up two places on last year. Weirdly, Romania comes top. So why does one in six of their population work abroad – many of them right here, including the hospitality industry and our public services? (And very welcome they are, by the way).

Another poll suggests that people in Bradford spend less

time making a mobile phone call – maximum six minutes – than anywhere else. Scousers talk twice as long, *quelle surprise* (italic)!

Put the two surveys together, and we're happy because we live and work in God's Own County and we don't have to brag about it on the blower...much.

TAXING TIMES

Sounds daft, but it's true. NHS hospital trusts pay full business rates on their buildings – unlike private hospitals.

They are registered charities, so they get an unbelievable discount of 80 per cent, just like private schools.

Seventeen NHS trusts are taking the government and 45 councils to the high court to demand the same discount as the pampered private sector.

NHS hospitals will pay a combined £408.6 million in rates this year, a staggering rise of 42 per cent on 2017 after a revaluation, figures by rates specialists Altus Group show.

Court hearings begin in November, and it's likely to be a hard-fought legal battle. Crazy that it should happen at all, but that's what happens when you turn public services into businesses.

SERCO SCAM

Outsourcing giant Serco, gobbling up public services all over the country, has been fined more than £19 million for

"cooking the books".

The company, worth £1.8 billion and with contracts in hospitals, immigration, prisoner services and defence, engaged in a scam overcharging the State – that is you and me – for tagging criminal offenders. These costs were "complete fabrications" a judge held.

By accepting responsibility for three offences of fraud and two of false accounting on contracts with the Ministry of Justice, and also paying £3.7 million costs of a Serious Fraud Office investigation, Serco Geografix (the company's UK subsidiary), escaped prosecution.

So that's alright then. But I wonder how widespread is this form of fraud? It isn't the first time Serco has been in trouble. The company paid almost £13 million compensation to the Ministry of Justice as part of a £70 million civil settlement in 2013

Untold billions of pounds have been handed over to these outsourcing profiteers since Thatcher introduced privatisation in the 1980s, often with lamentable results – like the recent probation service scandal.

And these are the people to whom Boris Johnson would hand over the NHS in a palsy-walsy trade deal with his alter-ego, Donald Trump, despite his current protestations to the contrary.

UNISON members know better than most working people what that would mean for their pay and conditions of employment. □



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Management can't pick on you for being a trade unionist – not even in Tory Britain. Thompsons Solicitors' **Rachel Halliday** sets out the legal protection available to members

Membership of a trade union is a human right. If your employer seeks to target you or discriminate against you simply because of your union membership, the law is there to protect you.

The Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 states it is unlawful for someone to refuse to employ a person because they are a trade union member.

The law says workers have the right not to be subjected to a "detriment", if the employer's main purpose is an "unlawful purpose". A detriment means a disadvantage. Examples of detriments include being demoted, being asked to work extra or unsociable hours or having disciplinary action taken against you.

Subjecting a worker to a detriment is unlawful if the employer's main purpose was to prevent, deter or punish trade union membership, taking part in union activities or making use of trade union services. It is automatically unfair to dismiss someone if the principal reason for the dismissal is one of these "unlawful reasons".

If the employer's main motive for the dismissal was that the

employee either took part, or even just proposed to take part, in trade union activities or made use of trade union services, that would be unlawful.

It is automatically unfair to make someone redundant if the principal reason for selecting them for redundancy was an "improper purpose".

For courts to find that a detriment or dismissal is unlawful the employer has to have an improper purpose. In assessing this, tribunals look not only at the effect of their actions but also at the objective they were aiming to achieve.

Factors which might support a claim that the employer has an 'improper purpose' include: evidence of anti-union bias, a failure by an employer to follow the normal procedural steps, or if the employer is unable to give a credible explanation for their actions.

To be protected trade union activities must take place at "an appropriate time". This usually means outside the worker's working hours, or at a time within working hours when the employer has agreed to the employee taking part in trade union activities.

The tribunal, using its "industrial common sense," will decide what constitutes a "trade

union activity" but usually the following activities are protected:

- Participating in bargaining, consultation, handling grievance and disputes procedures
- Having discussions with full-time union officials
- Representing members and having discussions with them
- Engaging in the recruitment of new members
- Undergoing approved training
- Putting up union notices and distributing union literature
- Voting in a union election
- Attending branch meetings or national conferences.

If you believe you have been treated unfairly at work due to your trade union status, you may be able to bring an employment tribunal claim. Normally, the deadline to start the employment tribunal claim process is three months less one day after the act you are complaining about.

If you were dismissed and a claim for unfair dismissal is successful, tribunals have the power to award a minimum basic award and compensation for financial loss caused by the dismissal.

If you need more information, contact your local representative. Don't forget, UNISON is there to protect you. □



DON'T FORGET, UNISON IS THERE TO PROTECT YOU



Rachel Halliday is a senior member of Thompsons' trade union law group

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