

UNISON

ACTIVE!

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE

**ELECTION
SPECIAL
2015**



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If Cameron wins on
May 7 will the last
person to leave
the public
service
please turn
out the lights



PLEASE
USE YOUR
VOTE

(WITH NO APOLOGIES TO THE SUN)



there for you

supporting UNISON members
when life gets tough

- **Financial assistance**
- **Debt advice**
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- **Support & information**

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are aware of the help that is
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UNISON members struggling
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get help from 'there for you' by:-

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You can also find out more
information by visiting our website

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help-with-problems-at-home/
there-for-you/](http://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/help-with-problems-at-home/there-for-you/)**

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UNISON
the public service union

OurUnion**General Secretary**
Dave Prentis**Regional Secretary**
John Cafferty**Regional Convenor**
Wendy Nichols**UNISON
Yorkshire & Humberside**
Commerce House, Wade Lane,
Leeds LS2 8NJ
T: 08000 857 857 or freephone
textphone 08000 967 968
W: www.unison-yorks.org.ukLines are open 6am-midnight
Monday-Friday and
9am-4pm Saturdays**Editor**
Barrie Clement**Consulting Editor**
Mary Maguire**Chief Photographer**
Jim Varney**Contributors**
Peter Carroll, Amanda Dixon, Ryan
Fletcher, Helen Hague, Mary Maguire,
Anne Mitchell, Paul Routledge and
Tristram Sterry**Cover Image**
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St. Albans, Herts AL3 4DG
T: 01727 893 894
F: 01727 893 895
E: enquiries@centuryonepublishing.uk
W: www.centuryonepublishing.uk**Advertising enquiries**
David Murray
T: 01727 739 182
E: d.murray@centuryonepublishing.uk**Design and art editing**
Miny Sharma and Sarah Ryan
T: 01727 739 189
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**DAVE
PRENTIS
GENERAL
SECRETARY***Dave Prentis*

THE KEY TO VICTORY

We're in the midst of the closest election in living memory – even hardened political pundits say the result is too close to call.

With everything to play for, the attention between now and polling day is all on 100 or so key marginal seats – as it's here that the election will be won.

Several of these are in Yorkshire and the Humber – in constituencies like Bradford East and Dewsbury where the votes of UNISON members could prove crucial in determining who gets the keys to No 10.

But many people have still not registered – they risk having no voice and no say over who wins in May. There is still time to sign up but the deadline is April 20.

Since 2010 UNISON members working in hospitals and local councils across Yorkshire and Humberside have been on the receiving end of the Government's harsh austerity programme.

Pay frozen or held back, spending slashed, services axed, hard-pressed staff working hours of unpaid overtime to cover for colleagues who've been made

redundant or who've left and not been replaced.

And if David Cameron remains in charge, there'll be no let-up in the cuts. Much worse is coming down the track if – despite all their attacks on public services – the Tories somehow manage to form a government in May.

So don't let them destroy the public services you care so much about. Don't leave the NHS and local services at the mercy of the Tories for five more years. Make sure you have a vote on May 7 – and use that vote wisely.

**WENDY
NICHOLS
REGIONAL
CONVENOR***W. Nichols*

Let's kick out the tax dodgers

In the past five years our members have suffered a sustained and vicious attack on their jobs and incomes from the Tory-led Coalition.

From the start, they set out deliberately to destroy unions and privatise the public services which all of us rely on.

The Tories and their allies hate public services and – even more – the very principle of unions defending the rights of

members who provide the services.

But we have not folded. UNISON has led the fight against this corrupt Government. We have fought back at every turn and fully supported our members in every form of action they have taken to

defend jobs and services.

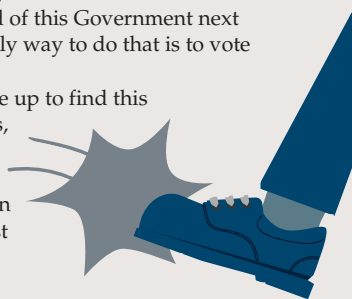
The Care UK strikers in Doncaster not only held out for 90 days to protect their own pay and conditions, they also set the agenda for a national debate about privatisation.

The Labour Party has pledged to put a halt to further NHS privatisation by abolishing the Health and Social Care Act the Government rushed through Parliament.

Meanwhile, thousands more jobs will go in local government as a result of huge central government budget cuts.

We must get rid of this Government next month and the only way to do that is to vote Labour.

We cannot wake up to find this bunch of heartless, tax dodging millionaires have somehow clung on to power. We must vote them out.



More battles ahead over NHS pay

More than two-thirds of UNISON members working in the NHS voted to accept the latest pay offer after a last minute concession from the Government.

The members were due to take further strike action in their long-running pay dispute with the Con-Dem Government.

They were outraged when ministers refused to accept a recommended one per cent pay rise proposed by the independent pay review body.

The offer which was accepted included a one per cent payment for staff up to senior level, an extra £200 for lower paid staff and the bottom level of pay boosted to £15,100 a year.

UNISON's regional head of health, Tony Pearson, said the offer was the best that could have been gained through



Image: Apatsara / Shutterstock

negotiation.

But he said the issue of fair pay for NHS workers has not gone away and there is much more



Tony Pearson

to be done in future to bring about real and lasting improvements.

"Our members have been targeted by this Coalition Government for the past five years. They have suffered years of pay freezes, which are pay cuts in reality as prices rise.

"The industrial action they have already taken shows they are prepared to stand up for fairness

and justice.

"The fact that there is a General Election approaching is probably why the Government has come up with an offer, to avoid industrial action for the time being.

"Their record on the NHS is appalling and they want the health service pushed as far off the political agenda as possible."

Heather wins the argument over facility time at York council

Attacks on facility time for UNISON activists to represent members are still a grave threat as the Taxpayers' Alliance pushes its anti-union agenda.

Councillors in York voted against a proposal to slash paid time off for

lay officials to represent colleagues after listening to the arguments of branch secretary Heather McKenzie.

She reminded them of their legal obligations regarding time off to represent members, and of the millions of pounds

saved by employers through reductions in workplace injury and illness every year.

Heather said: "One of the lines of argument is that they are in favour of the system but want our members to pay for it instead of the

employer.

"But this is not an 'us and them' arrangement. Facility time is a sensible and cost effective means of ensuring good practice and fairness. But I have no doubt this will rear its head again somewhere else."

Only Labour can stop the destruction of our public services

There is a simple and stark choice for UNISON members at the forthcoming General Election, says regional Labour Link chair Ken Curran.

He says that if the Tories retain power, either outright or in an alliance with other right-wing parties, they will complete the destruction of our public services they set out to achieve in 2010.

If Labour gains power, they will repeal the privatisation charter known as the Health and Social Care Act, clamp down on mass tax avoidance and invest the resulting income in urgently needed social housing and job creation.

"The decision for our members is obvious. They have been cruelly treated by the Tory/Lib Dem

Government," said Ken.

"I would say to everyone, whether they are traditional Labour supporters or not, go out and vote for the only party that can realistically stop the Con-Dems from piling even more needless pain on our communities. Only one party can do that."

Ken believes Labour and Ed Miliband are offering voters genuine change for the better, characterised by the battle with David Cameron over MPs' second jobs.

He said: "He has pledged that if he gains power in May, no Labour MP will be allowed to have a second job.

"He has also made no bones about tackling the

tax avoiders and Tory Party donors to pay the tax they owe. He has stood up to the powerful elites who have dictated Government policy for so long.

"It is clearly in the interests of all trade union members, and all working people, to get this government out of office.

"I hope all of us make sure our families and friends are registered to vote and that they use that vote for Labour.

"We must not let the Tories extend the misery they have already

inflicted on ordinary working people and their families.

"They are openly on the side of the rich and powerful. They cut the top rate of tax for millionaires and did nothing to tackle tax avoidance.

"That's why they donate fortunes to the Tory Party - for 'services' rendered. We have to rid ourselves of them."



Ken Curran

**PLEASE
USE YOUR
VOTE**

In the 2010 election, **35%** of Britons had no say about who would represent them over the next five years. This included **9.1 million** women. Some seats were decided by as little as **50** votes, so please use your vote



For those who are not registered to vote, the deadline is April 20. Go to www.gov.uk/register-to-vote All you need is your name, address, date of birth and National Insurance number. Otherwise you could contact the Electoral Registration Officer at your local council.

DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE!

UNISON's welfare fund is unique in the union movement and it's definitely 'There for You', says branch activist Anne Szczepanska. **Peter Carroll** reports

UNISON branch welfare officer Anne Szczepanska is a firm believer in the maxim, a problem shared is a problem halved.

She is working hard to get the message out to UNISON members suffering financial hardship that the welfare fund 'There For You' is ready and willing to come to their aid.

Anne, health and safety and welfare officer for Leeds community health branch, has been involved in similar roles in UNISON for more than 14 years.

Married with three children, she joined COHSE in 1977 when she was a nursing assistant working with people with learning difficulties at Meanwood Park Hospital in Leeds.

"There For You is a charity and we are the only trade union to have one," she says.

"We hold quiz nights and



Images: Andy Paraskas



WHEN WE
SAY THE
SERVICE
IS THERE
FOR YOU,
WE MEAN IT



sponsored walks around Hadrian's Wall and the three peaks in Snowdonia. Members can apply to take part in these events and we are asking people to try to raise £700 each in sponsorship to make sure the service is financed.

"We have regional welfare committees and people are elected onto them from regional committee and regional council. It is a key component of what we do as a union and I am doing all I can to make sure we prioritise the service to our members."

And as the endless austerity imposed by pay cuts and ever rising bills corrodes the lives

of individuals and whole communities, welfare services are going to be a vital lifeline for increasing numbers.

GENUINE

When a member seeks a completely confidential meeting with Anne, she talks through with them what their immediate problems are.

They go through an application form together and assess what the fund can do to help.

She said: "Obviously we make sure that any application is based on genuine need and then try to work out the best ways to help."

"I get around seven

applications a year, which is not as many as I thought there would be in the current financial climate.

"I think a lot of people are too proud to seek help, and perhaps some members are not aware of the help that is available.

"We have newsletters and other information for members and we tell people about it when we have the chance. But I think we should be doing even more to promote the service."

STRUGGLING

A typical case dealt with by Anne involved a member who was off work through ill-health and was on half pay.

The member was suddenly unable to pay rent and bills for gas and electricity and was struggling even to buy enough food.

Thanks to There For You, UNISON was able to help with those bills and pay for some food and clothing to tide the family over until the member could get back to work.

Anne said: "I've had people coming in and I've had to direct them to a foodbank, usually the St George's Crypt in Leeds because we also donate food to them.

"We have built up a rotation list and we work with organisations in Hunslet, Beeston, Horsforth and Moor Allerton.

"But it's not only payments, we also provide advice with things like debt and benefits entitlements to help people get some longer term solutions to their problems. We direct people to the best advice to meet their particular needs.

"For example, people with disabilities are put in touch with DIAL which specialises in that area and can give invaluable advice and support.

"We also help others to gain access to victim support services."

Figures across the country show a massive 38 per cent increase in applications for help with heating bills and the best part of £1 million has been paid out – significantly up since the cuts started to be inflicted on public services.

Applicants are not given cash payment. The debt is dealt with by UNISON welfare experts after they have seen copies of the relevant bills and paperwork.

It is a demanding role because such financial worries can drive people to despair and they are often very emotionally and psychologically damaged by their experience.

Anne said: "Sometimes it can make me feel a bit despairing. Some people just cannot see the full picture because they are in such a bad way.

"You have to have patience to help people understand their situation. A lot of tact and persuasiveness are required to help people through their problems.

"And it is very rewarding when someone comes through a crisis because we have been able to help them. One member came to thank me and said she couldn't have got through without us. That is very striking, and you know that you have made a difference.

"Our firm policy is that all members should be treated



▲ Above: Anne helps out at St George's Crypt foodbank, Leeds

equally. That's what we are here for.

"I think it is certainly true that a problem shared is a problem halved.

"I want to tell people not to suffer in silence. If you are struggling to cope, contact your branch and ask to speak to the welfare officer. When we say the service is There For You, we mean it." ■

HelpAtHand

If you are a member and you are experiencing financial difficulties, whatever the circumstances, There for You can offer you support.

There is no guarantee of financial help, but thousands of members and their families benefit from the fund every year.

For more information call 020 7121 5620 or email thereforyou@unison.co.uk or contact your branch welfare officer.

For those who would like to support this vital work, the monthly Octopus lottery is a great way to do it. You can find out more about the lottery at the website above.

GAFFES GALORE

First there was 'Pinkgate', then there was 'Nungate'... closely followed by 'Finkgate'. The press loves to whip up a frenzy about something, says **Mary Maguire**

“IT'S NOT WHAT THE PARTIES OFFER THAT OBSESSES THE MEDIA, IT'S HOW MUCH RAGE CAN BE WHIPPED UP”



I was sitting shouting at the television one Thursday evening. Not for the first time. It's usually provoked by some self-appointed, opinionated, right-wing 'guest' on Question Time. Some billy-no-mates blogger or some odious tax-avoider that the BBC seems to think representative of well, who exactly?

This particular Thursday was during the so-called long General Election campaign. The time of the zombie Parliament. And it led to the first of the three BIG stories that characterises the finest of political reporting.

It's not what the parties offer that obsesses the media. It's not what they said. It's more how they said it, what they forgot to say, how they looked, what they wore and how much rage can be whipped up.

PRAYERS

Labour's Tristram Hunt fell mouth first into a hole. He sneered at the notion of nuns educating arch right-whinger Cristina Odone. And so Nungate was born.

Journalists were despatched to find any nuns willing to be 'incandescent' (Mail), 'deeply offended' (Express), or even 'a bit upset' (Radio Coast radio). Sister Maria Concepta declared that she would remember him in her prayers

(Catholic Herald).

Only a public flogging would redeem the situation. The Yorkshire Post's reporting was typical 'Hunt says sorry after nun gaffe'. Although the London Evening Standard's Sam Leith naively asked: "Monsterring people into declaring a position on nuns – is that where we've got to in our political debate?"

No, don't be silly, Sam. The colour of a bus is a much more interesting subject for a political dissertation. Not any old bus. Not a cerise bus. Not a magenta bus. But a full-on pink bus, well van, actually. The Labour 'woman to woman' van.

Pinkgate: A modern tale of how Labour's plan to reach the 9.1m women who didn't vote at the last General Election, crashed into a media storm.

"Patronising to women" screamed the Telegraph & Argus (et al). Then there was the shocking news: "Man to drive pink bus" (Yorkshire Post). Regional newspapers wanted to know when it was coming to their patch so that they, too, could ridicule it. Yorkshire & Humber, you have been warned.

Inevitably, such is the fickle nature of the news, Pinkgate gave way to Finkgate.

The Rt Hon Member for

Doncaster North, Mr Ed Miliband, landed a punch on the Tories in that weekly bear pit known as Prime Minister's Question Time. About rich Tory donors who avoided tax.

His attack sent the tax avoiders, the Tory Party and the media into a feeding frenzy. The story totally eclipsed Nungate and Pinkgate in impact, duration and rage. It was a sensation.

DODGERS

Tory donor Lord Fink, took exception and, egged on by Tory HQ, harrumphed to the nation's media:

"If Ed Miliband whants to imply I did anything improper in my welationship with HSBC, I would lake him to say that owtside Pahlment where he is not hiding behind Pahlmentary pwivilege, at which pint I will soo him"

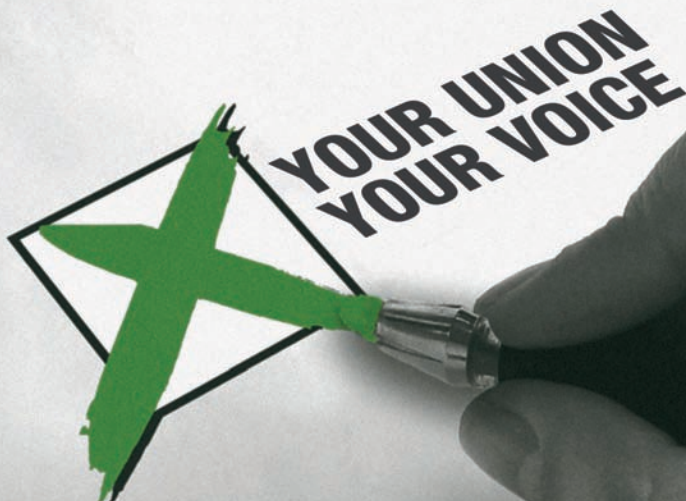
In common parlance: "Outside mate, if you fink you're hard enough."

Ed, apparently was. As the Harrogate Advertiser remarked: "Miliband won't back down and vows to go after tax dodgers." Fink then blinked first and confessed to 'vanilla' tax avoidance with the breathtaking claim that everyone does it (NorthYorks news et al). And the media tempest continued. Vanillagate anyone?

Oh, and vote Labour, please. ■



Mary Maguire is retiring as UNISON'S head of press and broadcasting, but will continue to write for Active!



UNISON is proud of being a democratic member-led union. UNISON members should always be aware of this and encouraged to take part in shaping our union. The National Executive Council (NEC) elections begin on 7 April 2015, and voting ends on 15 May 2015.



**Every vote counts
in the General Election
on 7th May 2015**

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

When people are not on the electoral register and therefore not eligible to vote, it's democracy that suffers. Politics becomes less representative and less effective.

In the 2010 election, 35% of British adults didn't have a say in who would represent them over the next five years. This included 9.1 million women.

And when you consider that some seats were decided by as little as 50 votes last time, every vote really does count.



There's no time to mince words, says UNISON regional secretary John Cafferty. The upcoming general election is the last chance to stem the severe and irreparable damage being done to our public services and to society at large.

At the desks outside his office at the union's Leeds headquarters phones are ringing bearing messages from members under fire from slash and burn Tory policies. All day everyday corners are fought for people working under increasingly difficult circumstances. The pressure is palpable and the clock is ticking.



LABOUR
MIGHT
NOT BE
PERFECT
BUT IT'S
CERTAINLY
A FAR
BETTER
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THAN
THE TORIES



"She's been working in that position for ten years on the correct pay band. They can't just decide to lower it on a whim," says one UNISON officer into his phone. Similar conversations are taking place all over the building.

Nearly one million public sector jobs have been lost since the Tories came to power, and many more are under attack. Despite this, austerity measures have not decreased the country's debt and vital services are on their knees. Policy shifts benefiting the forces of privatisation and aimed at creating a country ruled by the rich have been disguised as a roadmap to recovery, says John.

"Their mantra was 'we're all

in this together.' In fact it has been a typical Tory transference of wealth from the many and the poorest to the few and the richest. People cannot underestimate the damage they have done to public services and the quality of life for working people," he said.

DECISIONS

UNISON does all it can to defend its members, but in the end what dictates whether we will live in a country that values everyone - rather than just a powerful few - comes down to a public vote this May. Friends, family, colleagues and neighbours hold the cards now, and their decisions will affect Britain



Image: Marcus Gann / Shutterstock

“
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”

for years to come.

"Labour might not be perfect but it's certainly a far better choice than what's facing them if the Tories get back in again. We urge people to cast their vote the right way because if the Tories come back we won't be able to remedy this in another five years' time. There won't be anything left to salvage. There are services they've destroyed that we will never get back." John told me.

"Labour would halt the decline. It's not turning a speed boat, this is turning a bloody great oil tanker and it's going to take years if not decades to repair the damage they've done. Labour can start to make changes that

will create an environment where the wealth starts to transfer back from those favoured few down to the majority."

Tory governance has not just widened the divide between those with money and those without, it has also caused tensions between various geographical regions. Britain is in danger of becoming fractured; a situation reflected in the growing influence of smaller parties on the political landscape.

FUNDAMENTAL

Regional head of local government Chris Jenkinson explained that in the Yorkshire and Humber region Conservative policies have not only decreased funding but unfairly reshaped how it is allocated.

"The amount of money provided to local government by central government has been cut by 50 per cent. As part of that, we've seen money being shifted from northern towns and cities to the more affluent and prosperous south. Thanks to cuts in refuse collection, grass cutting and road mending, the degeneration in our towns and cities is noticeable to everyone," said Chris.

"What people don't see are the cuts to quality of life and safeguarding services: day centres for the elderly, libraries, children's and young peoples' centres.

These services are fundamental for the well-being of communities. Social isolation, loneliness, the deterioration in people's mental health, the increase in

suicide rates - it all comes from this fracturing of our communities and society."

The drain started in 2010 when the coalition abolished Labour's grant funding for local authorities in economically disadvantaged areas - which are disproportionately in the north. Since then more and more money has been siphoned from the north and directed to the south.

For example instead of funding being distributed equally, as happened before, local authorities where more new homes are being built are allocated more. Most of that money has gone south to authorities experiencing a robust economic climate.

The same thing has happened with business rates. Once a centralised tax that was wholly redistributed according to a needs based formula, now only 50 percent is divided up fairly, with the remaining half being kept by the local authority.

Again areas such as Barnsley have been hit hard, while areas such as Westminster grow fat. Under a new Tory government these disparities will only get worse, says Chris.

"This is exactly what the Tories want. A small state, deregulation, privatisation, tax cuts for the rich and the creation of an underclass. We need a change of government," Chris said.

"We're absolutely clear, unequivocal: Labour is the only other party that represents a realistic chance of forming the next government and we're asking people to take that into consideration when they vote." ■



John Cafferty



Chris Jenkinson



AT THE SHARP END

UNISON rep Emma Schofield never fights shy of a tough job. **Anne Mitchell** speaks to a young woman who daily deals with life or death situations

At only 30 years old Emma Schofield has a tough job as a despatcher for South Yorkshire Police. When a member of the public dials 999 or 101 she makes sure that all the details get to the right officer, in the right place to deal with the emergency - fast. Despite her age Emma has 'form' working in demanding jobs - firstly as a prisoner custody officer, then a neighbourhood warden and more recently as a police call handler.

Barnsley born and bred, Emma lives and works in the city and knows the area like

“AS A CALL HANDLER YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO GET NEXT”

the back of her hand. A former pupil of Elmhurst High School in Worsbrough Dale, she left school at 16 with plans to go into social work. She studied advanced health and social care at Barnsley College but the job that caught her eye was as a prisoner custody officer for G4S - she was just 19 at the time.

“Being young I thought why not? It was very hard work - imagine a nineteen-year-old girl transporting mostly male prisoners - I got a lot of stick initially. But I enjoyed it, taking prisoners up and down the country between courts and prisons

and working closely with the police. No two days were the same and I got to see a lot of the country. Part of me still regrets leaving.”

When on occasions fights broke out Emma, had to restrain prisoners and she sustained a number of injuries over her four years with G4S.

“On one occasion I was handcuffed to a prisoner who nearly pulled my arm out of its socket damaging all the ligaments. It was a bad injury and I was recovering at home when I saw an advert for a Neighbourhood Warden with Barnsley Council. It was

based in a police station working closely with officers and Police Community Support Officers and I saw it as a route into the force. It also meant working with people before they got arrested and I was definitely interested in that."

UNCERTAINTY

Emma became part of the Safer Neighbourhood Scheme working closely with police officers and liaising with residents, councillors and MPs. Based on a council estate in Barnsley, the job involved visiting elderly people needing reassurance, dealing with antisocial behaviour, helping youngsters to stay out of trouble and sorting out disputes between neighbours, fly tippers etc.

It was a job Emma enjoyed but there was no guaranteed funding for the project after three years. At that time Government cuts were hitting Barnsley hard as in councils across the region. With so much uncertainty hanging over her, Emma spotted an admin post with South Yorkshire Police. She admits to being a bit apprehensive about applying because she had never worked in an office, but saw it as a way of getting a foot in the door.

She started by arranging non-urgent appointments for police officers or PCSOs with the public. However, she quickly moved into a more high pressure job in the communications team as a call handler dealing with 999 and 101 calls.

"As a call handler you never know what you're

going to get next. One minute it could be a robbery, a missing child or even a murder and the next something really trivial. It can be stressful with people screaming down the phone or in a real panic and you have to keep calm and get all the information you need to send help quickly."

PRESSURE

Around this time staff at South Yorkshire Police started to feel the impact of the Governments' cuts on the force. Jobs were slashed and districts merged and Emma was redeployed as a dispatcher. She relays calls for help taken by the call handlers to officers on the street. It is another high pressure, round the clock job. Despite cuts in staff the centre is increasingly busy - they dealt with more than 4000 calls on Boxing Day alone.

The pressure of the cuts on staff and the small number of UNISON reps in the communications department, persuaded Emma to become more active in July last year.

"We've lost 500 staff in

“IT CAN BE
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various departments and stress levels are rising. People are struggling and there are a lot of issues like sickness, capability and fairness at work to deal with. As a rep UNISON has arranged for me to go on various training courses and I have been accepted on an on-line employment law course run by the TUC. There is a lot to do and learn.

"Lately I have been involved in a project looking at staff morale focusing on the comms section. We put in a report before Christmas with recommendations and are waiting for a response.

"I have changed my mind about becoming a police officer. I am happy where I am and I enjoy the job I do. I work shifts, day and night and I couldn't go back to a 9 - 5 job. My partner Darren has been a police officer for 14 years so we are used to it.

Despite the difficulties and current pay dispute Emma describes South Yorkshire Police as "A good place to work, certainly challenging and where every day is different." ■

The Agreement

UNISON police staff in England and Wales voted to accept a pay offer following an 87 per cent vote in favour.

The Deal

- A 2.2 per cent or £400 increase, whichever is greater, on all pay points from March 1, 2015;
- A 2.2 per cent increase on standby allowances from the same date.
- It will cover the 18 months to August 31, 2016 and UNISON hoped the increase would be in March salaries.

Members rejected a 1 per cent pay rise last summer and strike dates were set for December 22 and January 23. The action was suspended to allow further talks.

DON'T TRUST UKIP

WENDY'S WARNING

Ukip pretends to be the workers' friend, but in reality it's right-wing, racist and 'all over the place', says regional convenor Wendy Nichols. **Barrie Clement** reports



▲ Above: Wendy
- They're playing
on people's fears

Regional convenor Wendy Nichols believes you can trust Ukip. "You can trust it just about as far as you can throw its leader Nigel Farage," she says.

As the general election nears, Ukip is trying to be 'all things to all people' in a desperate effort to win votes, says Wendy.

"In the middle class shires of southern England it portrays itself as an ultra-Thatcherite organisation: the only party capable of keeping the workers down and carrying the political torch of The Blessed Margaret.

"In the South, it emphasises its crusade to leave the European Union, cut taxes and rid the country of red tape - or basic employment rights as we call them.

"In working class areas of Yorkshire and Humberside,

its activists tell people that they are on their side; the great defender of public services, particularly the NHS.

"And it plays on people's fears over unemployment and low wages, blaming immigrants for all the country's ills. The reality is that it was City bankers like Farage who created the economic mess we're in, not immigrants. Basically Ukip is a multi-headed racist monster that has got too big for its boots."

FASCISTS

In a hard-hitting interview with Active! Wendy pointed to Ukip's general election candidates in Yorkshire and Humberside, who are often from the Thatcherite wing of the Conservative party and who think the Tories have gone too soft.

"And then there are the fascists sailing under a flag of

convenience because they know the openly violent racism of their former parties holds little appeal for the electorate," she says. In fact the membership of many neo-Nazi and fascist groups has plummeted to a 20-year low with many finding a safe haven in Ukip, according to campaigning organisation Hope Not Hate.

Farrage's ramshackle outfit has even attracted some disgruntled Lib Dems and Labour members - and people without any discernible politics whatsoever.

There are some who have hopped from party to party. Wendy gives the example of Amjad Bashir, MEP for Yorkshire and the Humber, who left Ukip to join the Conservatives in January amid allegations of irregularities. The Respect party says he had once been

“
YOU CAN
TRUST
UKIP
AS FAR
AS YOU
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NIGEL
FARAGE
”

one of its members and that he had told them that he had previously been an active member of Labour.

"Most local and county councillors – of whatever party – will tell you that Ukip councillors are all over the place. Many of them have no idea about their party's policies – and when they do, they disagree about them."

As to being defenders of the NHS, Wendy points to footage which emerged recently of Farage saying he would feel more 'comfortable' if Britain's healthcare system was opened up to the 'marketplace'.

Speaking to UKIP supporters just two years ago Farage said: "I think we are going to have to move to an insurance-based system of healthcare." That would make Britain like the USA, where the healthcare you receive depends on your bank balance.

WEAPONS

Another loony policy, which would make us more like America, is the legalisation of handguns, a deranged resolution passed by Ukip at its conference last year in Doncaster.

Farage reckons the present ban on such weapons is 'ludicrous'. The Ukip leader criticised the 'kneejerk' restrictions on handguns imposed after the 1996 Dunblane massacre in which Thomas Hamilton killed 16 schoolchildren and a teacher before shooting himself.

Says Wendy: "The murder rate in the USA is nearly five times worse than the UK

according to United Nations figures – and Ukip wants us to be more like the Americans. Has Farage taken leave of his senses? Well, yes he has."

To make Britain even more like the USA, Farage wants millionaires to pay less tax. Someone currently being paid £1m a year would receive a £43,150 windfall from all the tax changes proposed by Ukip at its Doncaster conference. Meanwhile someone in the bottom 10 per cent (with pay less than £6,284) of pay would receive nothing.

"Farage is desperate to pose as the 'worker's friend' to win votes outside the gin and tonic belt in the Home Counties – and there are some on lower pay who will benefit from Ukip's planned tax policies – but the real winners are those at the top," says Wendy.

"Ukip would widen the massive and growing gap between rich and poor even further. Its plan to scrap inheritance tax, which raises £3.3bn a year, will make it even worse.

"I've tried to find out about their policies on employment rights," says Wendy, "but unsurprisingly, UKIP focuses on leaving behind the 'regulatory burdens' of Europe."

That would put an end to laws on working time, redundancy and sick pay among scores of other essential rights. Amid the present mania for contracting out and privatisation, the TUPE legislation which protects workers' terms and conditions when they are

“
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”

transferred into the private sector, would also go.

And for good measure, Searchlight magazine, which investigates the far right, has uncovered an emerging scab union with close links to Ukip and which seeks to poach members from legitimate unions like UNISON.

"Working people should think very hard indeed before placing their cross by the Ukip candidate," says Wendy. "They are not on our side". ■

HopeNotHate

The campaigning organisation Hope not Hate keeps an eye on Ukip and far right groups like the British National Party. The aim is to provide a positive antidote to the politics of hate. It combines thorough research with community organising and grassroots action to defeat hate groups at elections and to build community resilience against extremism.

It says: "Hate is often the consequence of a loss of hope and a political articulation of despair, but given an alternative, especially one that understands and addresses their anger, most people will choose HOPE over hate. Our job is to expose and undermine groups that preach hate, intolerance and division whilst uniting communities around what they have in common."

To affiliate your UNISON branch to Trade Union Friends of Hope not Hate, please email Jean at tradeunions@hopenothate.org.uk



IT'S LIFE OR DEATH

Senior activists Ann Moses and John Campbell warn of deadly consequences for the National Health Service if the Tories get back in. **Peter Carroll** reports

Deputy regional convenor John Campbell is frighteningly clear about the consequences of another Tory-led government after the General Election.

John says it would mark the death of the NHS as we know it.

UNISON's joint branch secretary at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Trust, says Government budget cuts, wage freezes and the failure to train enough medical staff have already caused a crisis in every part of the country.

Health services are in chaos as most people - not least members of the coalition government - knew they would be when the Health and Social Care Act was passed.

This situation has provided the very opportunity right-wing politicians desired - to be able to argue that complete privatisation is the only way to rescue the NHS.

John said: "It is a scandal that some MPs who loudly support 'reform' of the NHS - meaning privatisation - are also directors of private companies and will directly

benefit from it.

"We must remember that this is all public sector money that they are helping themselves to. We are seeing something similar to the massive lobbying in the USA against Obamacare, which was designed to provide health care for millions of Americans who currently have none.

"These companies also have their eye on the NHS as they seek to strip its assets and feed the profits to their shareholders. We must not let them destroy our most treasured public service.

"But the only way we can prevent it is to get rid of this Government in May."

HYPOCRISY

UNISON members had endured more than four years of pay freeze, leaving them struggling just to meet the ever-rising cost of food, housing and heating.

The Government had refused to implement the one per cent pay rise recommended by the Independent Pay Review Body but eventually backed down.

Yet MPs had all taken the 10 per cent rise that the same body recommended for them.



“WE MUST NOT LET THEM DESTROY OUR MOST TREASURED PUBLIC SERVICE”

This hypocrisy is not lost on UNISON members.

As a branch activist at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals, John has close experience of what is happening to front-line services.

He said: "To take one example, on a recent day in Sheffield there were 150 patients in A&E and fifty waiting to be admitted. That is what the staff are having to cope with.

"This is the impact of cuts to the NHS and to local authorities who have had to close care homes which provide after-care for patients



Image: John Jones

charging hospitals £1,760 a day for their services is part of a huge problem of retaining medical staff.

The cost of agency staff to the NHS rose by 22.9 per cent in a single year from £2.1 billion to £2.6 billion in 2013/14.

At the same time, evidence of appalling mismanagement and huge financial payments to senior staff at the Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals Trust has prompted UNISON to refer the matter to the NHS Fraud Team.

And at Barnsley Hospital, a Freedom of Information request from UNISON has discovered non-executive directors have awarded themselves thousands of pounds in pay rises while preparing to cut front-line workers' pay.

This behaviour undoubtedly contributes to the fact that the proportion of NHS trusts in the red has soared from 10 per cent in 2012/13 to 80 per cent last year.

After 35 years as a nurse in acute medicine in coronary care, Ann Moses is in no doubt that the Health and Social Care Act is nothing more than a 'racket'.

Ann, UNISON branch secretary at Grimsby and Goole health branch, NEC member and chair of the national nursing sector, is appalled at what is happening to the NHS.

She said: "I think the pressures on nurses and support workers has increased at least ten-fold in the last five years.

"In our trust alone they are spending £5 million a year ►

discharged from hospital.

"Instead, far too many have nowhere to go for care and so spend far too long in urgently needed hospital beds.

"People paid national insurance so that they could receive care when they need it.

"But through no fault of their own they are not getting those services. We need a government that will properly invest in health and social care.

"Nurse recruitment is falling and in the next five to ten years there are going to

▲ **Above: Ann**
- new Health Act
is just a racket

be more nurses retiring than there are coming in through NHS training.

"We are ever more reliant on taking overseas medical staff, damaging their emergent health services.

"And with pay so low and work pressures so high, people are put off from going into those professions. They read all the negative headlines about the NHS and turn away. This problem must be urgently addressed."

APPALLING

The shocking revelation that senior A&E specialists are



Image: John Jones

► on agency staff. This is a racket and a tragic waste of money.

"NHS managers never used to be paid the astronomical salaries they get now.

"Our members have had no pay rise for four years but the chief executive of our trust took a £40,000 pay rise last year.

"It is sickening that these managers - who admit they are running multi-million pound deficits - are giving themselves massive rises while our members suffer endless cuts to their pay."

FRAGMENTED

Ann now works in the community care sector for

“
RIGHT-WING
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WANT
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IF WE
LET THEM,
MANY
PEOPLE
WILL DIE
”

◀ Right: John
- NHS is in crisis
all over the UK

the elderly in Grimsby. Like many others, she sees that the failure to link health and social care in an effective and coherent partnership has caused chaos.

And she believes that community and health services are now so fragmented that 'no-one knows who is providing which services to whom'.

She welcomes the Labour Party's pledge to repeal the Health and Social Care Act to address these issues - but realises great care and planning are needed to turn back the tide of funding cuts, privatisation and the haemorrhaging of trained staff into retirement or for better pay overseas.

Ann said: "I don't know precisely how the Labour Party would bring all the services where they need to be, back under one roof.

"But unless we are to continue wasting vast amounts of money creating widespread confusion which only leads to poorer services, they must be brought under one roof.

"The North Lincolnshire and Goole Foundation Trust has 14 vacancies for nurses. That does not include

vacancies for the other professional and support staff.

"The increasing insistence on targets, paperwork and data collection audits all take front-line staff away from patients.

"New rostering is now generated by computers, which obviously have no practical, human understanding of health care.

"Some members are therefore being forced to work 60 hours in one week and the next week they work just 16 hours.

"Some staff regularly work 13 hour shifts. There is absolutely no work-life balance in this system and many medical staff recruited from abroad are leaving because of this.

"If we don't get out there and vote this Government out, I am very distressed about our future.

"If the Tories get back in, I genuinely fear that that will be it for the NHS.

"The right-wing politicians want to impose a private insurance-based health system. If we let them, many, many people will die as a result." ■



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Image: Andy Paraskos

Leeds paramedic Bill Clucas was one of a highly dedicated team of medical staff who recently went to Sierra Leone to help fight the Ebola epidemic – and now he wants to return. Active! reporter **Anne Mitchell** interviews a true UNISON hero

When UNISON member Bill Clucas was asked to join the international relief effort to help people suffering from Ebola in Sierra Leone, he didn't hesitate. As an experienced paramedic working in the Hazardous Area Response Team (HART) in Leeds, he had the medical training, skills and knowledge desperately needed to help save lives.

Bill also had vital overseas experience volunteering in

▲ Above: Bill
- best way to stop
it spreading to UK



THE STAFF
WERE
ENGAGING,
WITTY AND
MOTIVATED.
THEY
FILLED ME
WITH JOY



Africa and Gaza and he had put his name on a register of people willing to respond to emergencies abroad.

"Don't get me wrong I was nervous about going. Ebola is a really nasty illness but if people are in need, I feel a moral obligation to help them and to stop the disease from spreading to other parts of the world. The best way to avoid it happening to friends and family in the UK was by going."

Before Christmas, Bill embarked on 10 days of intense training at a Ministry

of Defence base in York with 50 other medical professionals, including 15 from Norway. He describes it as really good training medically, clinically and emotionally.

The overnight flight to Sierra Leone was long and Bill's first experience of the impact of the Ebola crisis began even before he reached the terminal.

"Before we were allowed into the airport, each of us had our temperature taken and we had to use a chlorinated hand wash.

That smell of chlorine is one of my abiding memories of the country. We were always washing our hands to combat Ebola and that smell of chlorine was everywhere."

FRUSTRATING

The group split in three and Bill was deployed to an Ebola Treatment Centre (ETC) run by the aid agency GOAL. It was situated in Port Loko - in the country's Northern Province and one of the hardest hit areas. On arrival Bill found the centre still under construction by the British army with no other medical staff, no water or electricity. What they had was three tents in a field. The red zone for treating Ebola patients, the green zone for medical staff to put on/take off their protective suits and equipment and a third for administration, stores etc.

"The time from arrival to first patient was two weeks. It was frustrating but we were busy and we knew we had to get it right before we opened. We needed to employ and train a lot of new staff, wait for the plumbing, electricity, waste disposal - those were long days.

"I was training volunteers from the Congo, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria as well as local people. It's very important and very powerful that those staff can still be there to help with this disease when we are gone. The national staff were phenomenal people - engaging, funny, witty, motivated - who filled me with joy."

The ETC was designed for 100 patients but needed many



EBOLA
ATTACKS
OUR BASIC
HUMAN
DESIRE
TO GIVE
A SICK
CHILD
A HUG -
BUT THAT'S
HOW IT
SPREADS



more staff before it could begin to manage that number. It opened with 10 which quickly doubled to 20 and by Bill's final week the number of patients reached 30. The turnover was high.

"It was very hard the first week, especially for staff without a medical background, because the patients were very poorly when they arrived and many died. Ebola is a very horrible disease and has a terrible effect on people and is awful to watch. You couldn't stay for longer than 45 minutes in the red zone because of the heat working in protective clothing.

"The second week we started to get more survivors which was great. I remember seeing a grandmother, her daughter and kids coming out of the red zone and local people making a guard of honour and celebrating with musical instruments and singing."

FRIENDLY

Bill describes Port Loko as an overgrown village - very poor with mass unemployment. As more people were being treated and recovering, he found the locals relaxed and friendly and they would come out from their homes to thank him.

"It is a very tactile country with lots of parties, fetes, big dinners but you can't do that. You can't touch, can't socialise, shake hands or pat someone on the back. Ebola is so nasty it attacks our basic human desires to give a child a hug when they are ill, to comfort someone - but that is how it spreads."

His five weeks up, Bill returned to the UK just before New Year and found coming back more difficult than usual.

"The culture shock was worse and everyone was in a sort of quarantine. We had to monitor ourselves, take our temperature and ring twice a day to say if we had any symptoms. We were asked to avoid going on long journeys, to stadiums, or anywhere there could be a lot of people."

"I have asked to go back but at the moment the pressures on the NHS come first - I understand that. I was lucky to have a collection of skills and experience that allowed me to go over. I would say to UNISON members - think about volunteering. It is not suitable for everyone - but use your skills and experience to help other people. It is really fulfilling and I can't recommend it enough." ■

HowToHelp

Ebola is devastating and Sierra Leone will take many years to recover. The outbreak will have cost West Africa an estimated \$32.6 billion by the end of 2015.

The aid agency GOAL is proposing to turn the treatment centre in Port Loko into a 'centre of excellence' for the training of clinical staff, upgrading its laboratory and opening a care centre for vulnerable and orphaned children nearby.

You can donate to GOAL on their website goalglobal.org

LABOUR IS BEST BET

There's only one party for working people and that's Labour. In an exclusive analysis for Active! senior Mirror columnist **Paul Routledge** issues a call to arms

No wonder political pundits hesitate to predict the outcome of the general election.

It's shaping up to be an Alice-in-Wonderland race – only in reverse. Everybody loses and nobody wins prizes.

That's what will happen unless Labour supporters and union activists work to prevent it. Every vote counts on May 7.

And regional secretary John Cafferty points out that the election is absolutely critical for members of UNISON and other unions. "The Tories are destroying public services and have almost brought the NHS to its knees. They've cut wages and benefits for the poorest, while giving tax cuts to the richest. Worse, they intend to do more of the same if they get in again."

The Tories also want to smash the organisations which protect working people. John warns that the Conservatives are proposing to end employers' ability to deduct union subs from employees' pay and to make it much harder to take industrial action.

With their freshly-found, fake enthusiasm for 'The North', the Tories are putting big resources into the region.

If they win here, they will win the country.

But there are grounds for

“
THERE
ARE
GROUNDS
FOR
HOPE,
IF THE
WORK
IS DONE
”

hope, if the work is done.

So let me introduce the key runners and riders.

It should be all change in Bradford East, where the controversial Lib Dem incumbent David Ward with a wafer-thin majority of 365 votes, is highly vulnerable to Imran Hussein, deputy leader of Bradford City Council.

Next most promising for Labour is Dewsbury, where Paula Sherriff, a healthcare worker and Pontefract councillor, is battling to overturn a Tory majority of 1,526. After working for the police in victim support, she moved to the NHS where her job was privatised. So she's experienced coalition cuts at first-hand.

In Pudsey, my union lawyer friend Jamie Hanley is seeking to regain the seat lost to the Tories in 2010 by only 1,659 votes. This is Jamie's second bid to bring the constituency back where it belongs and he's mounting a big campaign with a lot of help from trade unionists.

The same goes for Keighley and Ilkley. Whoever wins this constituency usually forms the next government. John Grogan, former MP for Selby, a seat that was abolished, is Labour's man against Kris Hopkins, the former Tory leader of Bradford City Council.

APPALLED

The laws of libel prevent me from saying what I think of him, but his own fellow Tory MP, Nadine Dorries, called him 'one of Parliament's nastiest, slimiest MPs'. He appalled parliamentarians with crude remarks about disabled people and the bedroom tax.

Even so, his majority of 2,940 will be a tough nut to crack. John Grogan, who campaigned for agency workers' rights and helped get a memorial in Whitehall to the role of women in World War Two, deserves all the support he can get.

Down the road in the outskirts of Leeds, the constituency of Elmet and Rothwell has been held by Tory Alec Shelbrooke since it was established before the last election.

JUSTICE

But not for much longer, if Labour's Veronica King, a campaigner for the Alzheimer's Society, has anything to do with it. She's the daughter of local teachers, and with several former mining villages to look after, she's also active in the Miners' Campaign for Truth and Justice about policing in the miners' strike.

Down in Lincs, Peter Keith, husband of Cleethorpes' former Labour



Paul Routledge introduces the runners and riders



NUDGE

HOLD

MP Shona McIsaac is contesting the constituency, while in Brigg and Goole, local lass Jacky Crawford, a qualified nurse and social worker and campaigner for the NHS, seeks to retake the seat lost in 2010 by just over five thousand votes.

Up in the Pennines, local lad Josh Fenton-Glynn is chasing down a Tory majority of 6,400 in Calder Valley, and next door in Colne Valley, international aid worker Jane East bids to overturn Dodgy Dave Cameron's man whose majority is only 4,800.

Labour's biggest challenge from Ukip is in Grimsby, where UNISON regional organiser Melanie Onn is Labour candidate. Born and raised in the constituency, she's defending a majority of just over 700 votes bequeathed by retiring

veteran Austin Mitchell.

Melanie has negotiated living-wage agreements with councils in York, Doncaster and North East Lincs, and campaigns tirelessly against the iniquities of zero-hour contracts. As I wrote in the Daily Mirror last May, "This is a woman who gets it. The people of Grimsby would be wise to get her."

Labour is in with a strong chance to take – or retake – most of these seats.

We also have to defend some of our high-flyers, most notably Ed Miliband in Doncaster North and Ed Balls in Morley and Outwood.

The Tories would dearly love to 'decapitate' the party – but it's the Lib Dems who should fear this most.

IMPOSSIBLE

Their vote is collapsing throughout the region, and

▲ Above: It's odds-on Labour

Labour is eating away at Nick Clegg's majority in Sheffield Hallam. It's a tough call, but in the last opinion poll, Labour candidate and UNISON member Oliver Coppard was just three points behind.

UNISON's regional secretary points out that if the Conservatives get in they intend to change constituency boundaries to make it nearly impossible for anyone else to beat them in future general elections.

"UNISON is therefore encouraging members in key seats across the region, but particularly in Bradford East, Cleethorpes and Grimsby, to register to vote if they haven't already done so and to vote for the party that can make a real difference to the lives of working people and that is the Labour Party." ■



John Cafferty –
Vote critical for
union members

CLOSING THE CIRCLE



Image: Andy Paraskos

Pam Johnson left school with minimal qualifications, but took advantage of the opportunities provided by UNISON and NUPE. **Barrie Clement** reports

At UNISON there's no reason why activists or admin staff shouldn't reach the most senior levels of the union.

Pam Johnson, who is retiring from UNISON after 26 years, is a case in point.

Pam started work for Nupe as a telephonist/ receptionist, having left West Leeds Girls High School with three O levels and a couple of CSEs. By seizing the opportunities provided by the union, she eventually became head of learning and organising services at UNISON's headquarters in London,

returning to Yorkshire in 2011 as a regional manager.

Pam has never forgotten how she started her career and she's keen that both activists and admin staff feel able to tread the same path as her.

It was a path built on the foundations of education and training provided by NUPE, the first union she worked for, and then by its successor UNISON.

"I left school with very few qualifications, but the union provided me with the help I needed. I took the chances that were available and I'd like to think I made the most of them," she says.

“
EDUCATION
IS A
LIBERATING
FORCE.
IT HELPS US
TO MAKE
DECISIONS
ABOUT OUR
OWN LIVES
”

The education provided by the union enabled Pam to enrol on a part-time basis at Leeds Polytechnic where after two years she got a diploma in politics and history, an A level equivalent.

In 1985 she went to Newcastle University to read politics and East Asian studies, graduating in 1989. And in 2002 she took an MSc in adult continuing education at City University, London. Not bad for someone who left school at 16.

Pam points out that she had to leave a full-time job with the union in order to go to Newcastle University. "You

don't have to do that now," she says. Pam commends UNISON's Return to Learn courses as a good starting point and the Open University as a means of entering further education without physically going to university.

"I am proud of the work NUPE did and UNISON continues to do, to provide education for our members. Education is a liberating force. It helps us to make decisions about our own lives and to influence the decisions of others."

A strong theme in Pam's career has been her commitment to women's issues. She learned her feminism the hard way. When Pam started work at a building society at the age of 18, a young man joined the same day on higher wages. That was before the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts and it was perfectly legal. "That experience of discrimination made me think that things could and should be fairer," she says.

DIFFERENT

The battle is nowhere near won. "Virtually every policy of the coalition government has been detrimental to women. Men have been hit hard too, but women have suffered most in terms of pay, redundancies, zero hours contracts and benefits."

Pam takes issue with the oft-repeated mantra that politicians are 'all the same'.

She says: "Labour offers a completely different vision. Labour sees women as equal members of society. The Conservatives see men as the breadwinners and women as

housewives and child carers."

Pam hopes a new Labour government will resurrect equality measures they were working on before they left office.

"The country appears to be slipping back as far as equal pay is concerned," she says. Pam believes compulsory equal pay audits would force employers to be transparent.

She points out that Labour has committed itself to resuscitating the Sure Start programme which provides childcare, early education and support to young families. It has been decimated by the coalition government.

Pam also points to Labour's pledge to repeal the Health and Social Care Act which has led to a massive increase in the private provision of public services to the detriment of patients and clients.

She believes the coalition has had a deeply harmful impact on Britain. "This Government has undermined the fundamental ethos of public service and damaged provision for the most vulnerable people. Many elderly and disabled people no longer have access to support to keep them in their own homes."

"Providing support for vulnerable people is what makes us civilised. It is one of the most fundamental principles of our society."

"UNISON members have shown that they are prepared to make sacrifices to protect the services they deliver. When they were needed they stood up and were counted right across the public services despite the pressure they are under. I was proud to stand on

“
UNISON
MEMBERS
HAVE
SHOWN
THEY ARE
PREPARED
TO MAKE
SACRIFICES
”

the picket line with them."

Having worked for NUPE and UNISON in London for nearly two decades, Pam is glad to be back. Despite her 'retirement', she will remain active in local politics. She lives in the Keighley constituency which is one of Labour's target seats. And when she is not being politically active, she will keep constituents entertained with her ukulele band.

"It was the right time for me to leave the union. I leave it in good hands. The organisers are doing a fantastic job, particularly with recruitment. Coming back to Yorkshire was basically closing the circle for me. I've had a fantastic working life. Now I'm home." ■

Curriculum Vitae

- 1970 Worked in a building society and then West Yorkshire County Council where she joined NALGO and then NUPE.
- 1981 Went to work for NUPE in Y&H divisional office as a telephonist then secretary. Got involved in newly established divisional women's committee. Volunteered as adult literacy tutor.
- 1989 Short stint at Leeds City Council housing benefits.
- 1989-1991 Researcher, trade union studies information unit in Newcastle.
- 1991-1993 Constituency officer for Jim Cousins MP (Labour, Newcastle Central).
- 1993 Equalities researcher at NUPE head office, Woolwich.
- 1996-2002 Education officer, UNISON's national activist education unit.
- 2002-2011 Head of learning and organising services (LAOS). Then head of new unit incorporating UNISON open college and LAOS.
- 2011-2014 Regional manager, Yorkshire and Humberside.



WELL-OFF WILL PAY

UNISON activists won a personal assurance that university staff won't pay the price for Labour's cut in student fees. **Barrie Clement** and **Lorraine Fitzsimons** report

You ain't seen nothing yet. When the Tories and their little chums in the Lib-Dems whacked up students' fees to £9,000 a year we all thought that it was disastrous for working class kids who wanted to get a university education. And it was.

These days students graduate with personal debt of £44,000 – courtesy of David Cameron and his bag carrier Nick Clegg, LibDem MP for Sheffield Hallam.

Well, now the Conservatives have got a little surprise up their sleeves. They are to increase student fees to £16,000 – making university education the preserve of the elite, says Liam Byrne, shadow minister for universities.

In a meeting with UNISON activists and officials in

Leeds, Liam set out Labour's plan to cut the cap on fees from £9000 to £6000. More than half of students would also get the maintenance grant which would be lifted by £400 to £3,800 a year.

Just as importantly, Liam explained exactly how it would be funded.

University vice chancellors have warned that the policy would lead to cutbacks at universities and UNISON members were naturally concerned that they would pay for the policy with their jobs.

Speaking to the meeting, called by Alex Sobel, Labour's parliamentary candidate for Leeds North West, Liam categorically assured UNISON reps that the initiative would be fully funded.

Liam confirmed that the shortfall would be covered by

“
VERY FEW
CAUSES
ARE AS
JUST AS
THE LIVING
WAGE



Liam Byrne



Leonie Sharp
– universities run
like corporations

reducing tax relief on pensions for those earning more than £150,000 a year. The commitment to cut fees would be non-negotiable in any post-election deal.

Addressing the meeting, UNISON's Leeds Beckett University branch secretary James Appleby spoke of the massive differentials between vice chancellors on £300,000-£400,000 a year and the lowest paid. Some VCs had total packages worth £1m.

“And yet many universities still refuse to pay the Living Wage. What can Labour do?” James asked Liam.

Mobina Begum, assistant branch secretary at Leeds Beckett, spoke of the lack of transparency about pay and over the deliberations of remuneration committees.

“Student money funds salaries but students have no

input into the process," she said. Mobina pointed out that living costs for students were increasing, and most of their money went on accommodation.

Liam replied that Labour would take action not just on tuition fees but on maintenance grants. There was a shortage of accommodation and sometimes students had to pay months in advance. People were 'taking liberties' and that needed to be addressed.

SECRETIVE

On the wages of university staff, Liam said it was not acceptable to pay less than the Living Wage, while awarding a 8.1 per cent average pay rise to vice-chancellors.

"Hats off to UNISON for its Living Wage campaigning," Liam said, adding that there should be pay transparency, not secretive discussions behind closed doors.

"It's unacceptable that unions have to use Freedom of Information requests to get information on salaries. It is tax payers' money."

One of the student representatives at the meeting asked how Liam would keep up the pressure on VCs on the issue of the Living Wage.

He replied that if Labour wins the election, he would personally ask why VCs were not paying the Living Wage. "Very few causes are as just as the Living Wage," he said.

Few students would disagree and they had the right to voice a view on how their fees were spent, said Liam. "It's a shame you haven't got a government to



**HATS OFF
TO UNISON
FOR ITS
LIVING
WAGE
CAMPAIGN**



Liam Byrne

back you up at the moment," he told the students.

Terry D'arcy, also an assistant branch secretary at Leeds Beckett, said outsourcing and zero hours contracts, were causing misery and hardship for many staff.

EXORBITANT

Regional organiser Leonie Sharp said universities were being run like major corporations setting up tax avoidance schemes, employing staff on zero hour contracts and refusing to pay the Living Wage to their contract cleaners and catering staff.

She added: "These universities are funded through students and public funds and it is critical they are accountable and paying back into the public purse not simply siphoning off public money for exorbitant packages to those at the top while paying the minimum to those who really serve our students."

Liam said that under a Labour government exploitative zero hours contracts would be abolished.

He stressed that the General Election would be

extremely important for young people, although on current predictions around two million of them may not vote.

Ironically the younger generation had borne the brunt of the Government's austerity measures and were worse off than previous generations.

There were eight seats in the UK where students had the power to sway the result, said Liam. One of those – Leeds North West – is held by the LibDems – the very party which broke its promise and backed the increase in university fees. Another was Sheffield Hallam, the LibDem leader's constituency.

Labour had a plan for higher education reform that would benefit everyone and was deliverable. The party couldn't offer free higher education and wouldn't make false promises – but Labour would reduce fees and improve students' grants.

He was aware that some students were drawn to the Green Party, but he pointed out that in reality students, like everyone else, had a choice: Ed Miliband or David Cameron. ■

► **Right: Reps
and officials
meet Liam Byrne**



A RIGHTS RIP-OFF

Five years of Tory government have been a disaster for workers' rights. The number of sex discrimination cases has plummeted by 90 per cent. And there's more to come if the Conservatives get back in, says Thompsons' **Tristram Sterry**



Image: Africa Studio / Shutterstock.com

Squeezed living standards, savage public sector cuts, attacks on health and safety laws, unions bashed and ordinary people priced out of the justice system.

Five years of a Tory-led government (ably assisted by the Lib Dems who we must never forget voted for every cut and every vicious change in the law) has been a disaster for workers' rights.

The Conservatives have repeatedly shown that they are on the side of big business and nothing must stand in the way of their friends

making money.

One of the most dangerous aspects of the Government's attack on workers' rights is the introduction of employment tribunal fees, which risks making access to justice the preserve of the wealthy rather than a democratic right for all. As predicted by everyone but the Tories, fees of up to £1,200 are proving to be a major barrier to thousands of workers and claims have dropped by more than 80 per cent.

According to research by Citizens Advice, more than four in five people having problems at work are put off

making a claim at an employment tribunal due to the upfront costs. That means people who may have been unfairly dismissed, suffered discrimination, had their wages withheld can't afford to access justice and bad bosses are getting away with running roughshod over their rights.

Alarming Ministry of Justice figures show that the number of sex discrimination cases at tribunals has plummeted by 90 per cent.

Citizens Advice says that nearly half of people would have to save for six months just to get to a position where



Tristram Sterry
of Thompsons
Solicitors, Leeds

they could even start to afford the fees. For many families, this is six months in which they will have to scrimp and save while the injustice they are suffering continues and their negligent employer enjoys a grace period in which to build their defence.

LIABILITY

It's not just tribunal fees that are causing misery for ordinary working people. The Conservative – Lib Dem government has also taken the opportunity to attack health and safety laws that have been in existence since the Victorian era. They've brought an end to 'strict liability' which since the time of the Crimean War has forced employers to proactively ensure that the potential for accidents is kept to a minimum. Getting rid of it has ushered in an era which forces workers injured through no fault of their own to have to prove the employer was at fault.

With personal injury, the guilty party no longer picks up all the bill for their negligence. To help their mates in the insurance industry, the Tories have seen to it that the polluter doesn't pay. Injured people who aren't in a union have to pay up front for things like medical reports and court fees and don't get 100 per cent of their compensation if they win.

Court fees are also being drastically increased. Since March 9 the maximum fee for claims lodged at county or high court - including for workers seeking compensation from their bosses for injuries at work -



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soared to £10,000. Depending on the value of the claim, some will jump by more than 600 per cent.

For many lower value claims, fees will increase by more than 200 per cent, hitting working people hard.

These dramatic increases are clearly designed to make the Ministry of Justice money rather than improve the legal system. They constitute another huge barrier to justice for workers.

RESTRICTIVE

Most work-related accident cases are complex, and often require investigation and reports, but with lawyers now facing no payment if they don't win (no-win no-fee) and very restricted fixed costs if they win, people not in a union are finding it harder and harder to get a solicitor to act for them. That means employers take more risks because they know that many workers will be unable to find a solicitor to pursue a claim if they're injured.

Workers need strong trade unions to safeguard their rights and prevent the economy slipping into a situation where it only serves big business. But the Tories are determined to undermine the trade union movement.

The right to strike is enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, but this Government has shown no inclination to respect that, or any of the international supervisory bodies who have long condemned the UK's industrial action laws for being overly restrictive.

Quite the opposite in fact, ministers have talked of

requiring 40 per cent of all eligible union members to vote for a strike before industrial action can happen. This is a bit of a cheek given they gained only 37 per cent of the vote at the last General Election and have as many as 34 MPs elected on less than 40 per cent of the vote!

They claim it's a sign of their commitment to democracy. But if the Tories were really committed to democracy in the ballot box then they wouldn't continually resist making electronic voting available to unions. The fact that they do shows that their real motive is to straitjacket unions and undermine workers' rights.

From tribunal fees to health and safety to union rights, workers have suffered an onslaught against their rights. Making sure a Labour government is elected is the only way to stop the erosion of vital workers' rights before it is too late. ■

Tory Attacks

- Fees of up to £1200 for taking employment tribunals cases, making access to justice the preserve of the wealthy.
- Court fees for claims at county and high court rocket by more than 600 per cent.
- Weakening health and safety legislation which has been in place since the Crimean War.
- A new rule in personal injury cases, which means the guilty party no longer picks up all the bill for their negligence.
- A new Tory government would insist on a 40 per cent vote to authorise industrial action.

UNCLE KNOWS BEST

Active! reporter **Peter Carroll** says we need to listen more to older people and make sure we vote to preserve the public services they fought so hard to build



Two men are sitting side by side in a ramshackle old people's home watching a flickering TV in the corner. One of them turns and says: "Do you realise that if we'd spent our time smoking, drinking and chasing women, we'd have missed out on all of this?"

The cartoon made me splutter on the first dripping

and pork belly jumbo baguette I've had since the Millennium, having just read in the papers that the long-standing medical advice about fat has been wrong all along.

The scientists are now saying fat (milk, butter, eggs and cheese etc) is not only not bad for you, it is positively beneficial to health! I was delighted to hear it.



Peter Carroll - older people are a priceless asset

Of course the very next day other scientists disagreed and repeated the 'dangerous fat' alerts they issued 20 years ago, and I for one am more confused than ever.

But the cartoon does raise questions about what the future holds for the increasing number of people who now reach great old age.

Improved health and

longevity are both key indicators of humane and far-sighted societies which place a high value on health care for all.

The average life expectancy in the 19th century was 48, partly due to huge levels of infant mortality and partly because of appalling exploitation, poverty pay, poor diet and lack of medical care and sanitation.

Today, the average life expectancy is 77 for men and 80 for women. This is startling progress in such a relatively short space of time.

There's no more compelling evidence than these statistics of how properly funded public services, decent pay and medical care transform both individual lives and whole societies.

We should celebrate this as a great triumph of the people, over many generations, to create a better way of life for themselves and those who come after them.

But now we are told that these great steps forward are actually a big and growing problem: the old are too expensive to care for through national insurance and taxation. They don't make profits and they are a drain on scarce resources.

FAILURE

My uncle John is 90 this year and is as vocal as ever about the need for people to register to vote.

I don't think he's paid too much attention to Russell Brand and others urging people, especially young

“
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THE
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CENSURE
”

people, not to vote.

He believes it is the very failure of young people to vote which allows Tory-led Governments like the current one to destroy the hard won services we have all created together over many years.

When he was three John badly damaged his ankle while playing in the street. His mum and dad (a cleaner and a pick-and-shovel navvy respectively) were told by a doctor that they would have to operate to shorten the injured leg, and that their son would be fitted with a surgical boot for the rest of his life.

“They asked if there was something else that could be done and were told ‘possibly’ but it would be expensive and they might prefer the cheaper option,” he said.

“So they did a different operation and the ankle has been fine ever since.

“But every Friday evening, a man would knock on the door to collect the two shillings a week they owed for the treatment. He didn't stop coming until I was 15. It took 12 years to clear the debt.”

That is why he and many other older people, whose memories of the days before the NHS are so vivid and shocking, cannot believe young people are not fighting to save it.

BILLIONS

At the last General Election, 65 per cent of the population eligible to vote, did so. But that dropped to only 44 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds – with only 39 per cent of

women aged 18-24 voting.

Yet these are the very people who will in future pick up the bill for the billionaire tax dodgers and party funders revealed in the HSBC scandal.

There would be no ‘budget crisis’ if the countless billions in unpaid tax were collected and ploughed back into investment in democratically accountable services.

Stories of tax-evading Swiss bank account holders picking up bricks of used notes to buy property for cash have not yet produced the outrage whipped up against benefit ‘crooks’ by the Tory press. Somehow the wealthy are above both the law and any moral censure.

Lord Mandelson has now warned Ed Miliband not to run a campaign of ‘us and them’ saying: “You should never use language, not even body language, that you are for or against any section of society.”

So not only must you say nothing to the greedy bullies ruining our economy for their own vast gain, you mustn't even look at them in a wrong way.

Our older generation fought against fascism and built trade unions and public services for all.

Like in the cartoon I mentioned, our old people are still making good jokes and, mostly, still voting on the issues that really matter.

They are not a net cost to society, they are our priceless inheritance and we need to listen to them carefully. ■



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

Political columnist on The Mirror

You've got to believe in it to save it

The crisis in the NHS is the most pressing problem of our time. Independent watchdog the King's Fund says billions of pounds have been wasted on Cameron's misguided reforms. We need a government with a gut feeling for the NHS to ensure its survival

THE NHS is in crisis virtually everywhere, and the Government is in denial over it. Eighty per cent of hospital trusts are in the red, despite more than £1 billion of bailouts from the Department of Health.

In the year to March 2015, six of Yorkshire's 15 hospital trusts are reporting losses. The combined total exceeds a staggering £100 million.

Other trusts – and remember they are supposed to be profit-making organisations controlling their own destiny – will only break even by raiding cash reserves or getting windfall payments.

Coalition ministers have promised an extra £2 billion emergency funding for next year, but this is a drop in the ocean and Yorkshire will see very little of it.

This is what happens when you turn the NHS into a business, with the cavalier ethics of the market and virtually no political control of a £100-billion-plus a year budget for the nation's health.

David Cameron's £3bn revamp is largely to blame for the mess, says the King's Fund, an independent watchdog. "Billions of pounds have been wasted on those misguided reforms," it says.

Astonishingly, the Department of Health remarks "We know the NHS is busier than ever. Every NHS service knows that financial discipline must be as important as safe care and good performance."

There you have it. Money comes before getting sick people better – and they still can't balance the books. Health experts say that without urgent agreement among all political parties on funding, "the NHS will reach a point at which finances could

collapse quickly."

This is a terrifying prospect, exacerbated by an increasing reliance on agency staff in hospitals. The NHS spent £2.6 billion on outsiders in 2013/14, a dramatic 22.9 per cent rise on the previous year. In some A&E departments, half of all consultants, doctors and nurses are from agencies.

Margaret Hodge, influential chair of the Commons public accounts committee, says these are 'mad figures', pointing out that it costs £400,000 for the NHS to train a consultant but some disloyal docs walk off the job and come back to earn £1,800 a day.

She argues that consultants should be obliged to commit themselves to the NHS for 5-10 years after qualifying – like the Army.

I say Amen to that idea but it only scratches the surface of the problem. The crisis in the NHS is the most pressing problem of our time, and only a government that genuinely believes in it can save it.

ETON WALL GAME

Cack-handed Chancellor Osborne came to Yorkshire to try his hand at drystone walling for the TV cameras. He'd make a better Freemason than a stonemason.

DIRTY HALF DOZEN

Six private sector employers in Sheffield, Leeds, Barnsley, Wakefield and Ossett were fined and forced to pay more than £12,000 wages owing after being 'named and shamed' for failing to pay the national minimum wage.

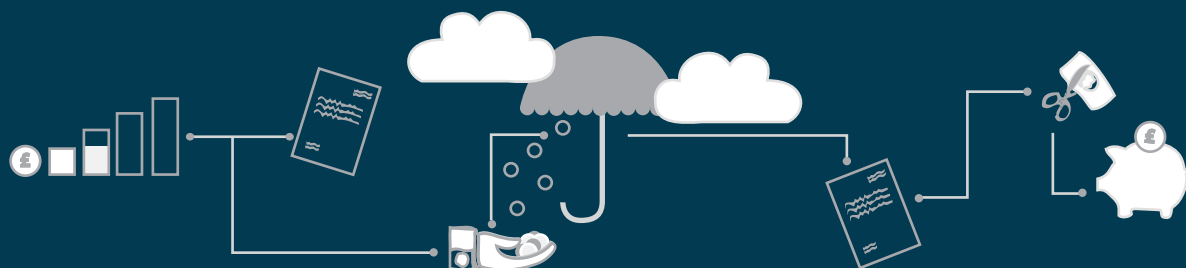
It's a fair bet the workers had no union, but like all employees they can access the HMRC Pay and Work Rights Helpline.



EVERY NHS SERVICE KNOWS FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE MUST BE AS IMPORTANT AS SAFE CARE



Health Department



Better still, if they are in employment covered by UNISON, they would have the strength of the union behind them. UNISON has launched a campaign to 'name and shame' care firms who are exploiting workers by paying them less than the minimum wage.

An estimated 220,000 workers are missing out on their legal rights as they work split shifts and don't get paid for travel time.

UNISON has set up an on-line petition to get justice for these workers. You can sign on <http://bit.ly/1tLFuWi>. Go to it!

PEAKY BLINDERS

Police in West Yorkshire are giving up the traditional bobby's helmet for peaked caps after officers complained they are 'impractical'.

Impractical for what? I recall they once proved very useful for hiding a rugby stalker's tackle (wedding, not rugby). And they distinguish cops from traffic wardens, chauffeurs and suchlike.

Of course, top officers have always had peaked 'uns, to show off their silver braid. Maybe lowly PCs will also now have swagger sticks, like chief constables. Not so much a uniform, more a fancy dress.

WELL-PLACED

An eight-foot-high bronze bust of Iron Lady Maggie Thatcher has been unveiled on the Falkland Islands, 7,913 miles away. Very wise positioning. Any lower, or nearer, and it would have been vandalised, like the one in Westminster.

BUS FARCE

Sometimes it's the little things about the Coalition cuts that bring home what's really happening.

South Yorkshire Transport bosses are scrapping paper timetables for buses, shutting information centres and reducing the cleaning of shelters.

These measures might sound trivial, but they affect millions of passengers in Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster.

People without computers to find schedules will be hard hit, and I don't suppose travellers will be happy standing knee-deep in rubbish at their local shelter either.

The changes follow a 10 per cent - £7.6 million - cut in the 2015/16 budget of the transport executive made in the dying days of the Coalition. A vicious sting in the tail of Dodgy Dave's five-year love-in with Nick Clegg.

For the public, this is a damned inconvenience. But for the workers involved it's much worse. About 50 jobs will go, halving staff levels of four years ago.

The big picture is truly devastating. Leeds City Council is slashing 450 jobs after a £45m cut in the annual budget. Labour leader Keith Wakefield says "Leeds, Huddersfield, Bradford and Wakefield are all at the brink of financial meltdown."

If Cameron gets back in, Things Can Only Get Worse.

I SNUB YOU SIR PAUL

'Sir' Geoff Boycott, as his fans call him, felt snubbed at not being given a real knighthood in the New Year's Honours List. He'll just have to make do with the modest title of Greatest Living Yorkshireman.

Quite why anyone needs a handle to their name is mystifying. Recognition for doing a job, doing it well and getting the proper rate for it, should be enough.

Thankfully, a knighthood will never come my way. Thankfully, because after a slight, face-to-face contretemps with Her Majesty over the miners' strike in 1985, she might 'accidentally' behead me with the sword of investiture. ■

Fancy a jug?

They're creating a mile-long jogging loop in Bradford's City Park, for the delectation of local people and visitors. I'd prefer to see a jogging loop round the city pubs. It might prevent so many of them closing.

Scroping the Barrel

Atten-Shun! Peter Scrope (no, I'd never heard of him either), a 'top businessman in telecomms', has been appointed Vice Lord Lieutenant of North Yorkshire.

I don't suppose this has anything to do with the Vice Squad. Maybe he just holds his boss's sword while he goes to the toilet.

Whatever. One thing is certain: this gold-braided boloney, this farcical fol-de-rol, this dressing-up for numpties, is a waste of your money and mine.

DEATH TOLL RISES

Lawyer **Amanda Dixon** of Thompsons' Leeds office says ministers have failed in their duty to road users and may be making the huge accident rate even worse

From our experience of working with victims of road accidents we know they can cause long-term, severe, physical and psychological injuries.

Take the case of UNISON member Jane Cannan, a civil enforcement officer (traffic warden) from West Yorkshire. She was walking down a road in Otley when an elderly man, who was parking his Land Rover, lost control and mounted the pavement. He hit her front on, pinning her against a wall.

Jane was taken to hospital with injuries to her lower back, hip and severe bruising across her midriff. She developed a serious haematoma, a solid swelling of clotted blood, that covered the right side of her lower back to the top of her right leg. The swelling took several months to improve. When she returned to work eight months later her back was still swollen.

FLASHBACKS

For months after the accident she was almost entirely house-bound, only leaving to go to physiotherapy sessions. In addition to the physical injuries, Jane was left with flashbacks about the accident.

She was forced to reduce her working hours, which had an impact on her finances. Despite the pain she

“
MORE THAN
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FOR
CYCLING
”

was determined to continue working. Thompsons were able to secure Jane the compensation she deserved for her injuries and loss of earnings.

HEARTACHE

The figures for road traffic accidents in general are disturbing. In the year ending June 2014 there were 1,760 reported road deaths, a three per cent increase from 1,713 in the previous year.

At the same time, the Government has overseen a 12 per cent drop in the number of officers policing the roads. These statistics hide the tragedy and the heartache behind them and are a stark reminder of how this government has failed in its duty to make a difference for all road users.

Take cycling. Despite a clear boom in its popularity, funding from this Tory-led government is nowhere near the level it needs to be.

Nick Clegg made a lot of noise when he announced £214m of investment in cycling infrastructure, but this is just a drop in the ocean. The Government will spend £24 billion on road infrastructure by 2021! Cycling infrastructure investment in the UK still stands far below £10 per person, the minimum amount that Parliament's transport select committee

says is needed.

When more than half of British adults believe roads are too dangerous to cycle on, serious questions must be raised about a government that talked big but has failed to respond to the epidemic of cycling accidents.

In fact, this government's policies risk causing even more injuries and deaths on Britain's roads. Not only has it overseen falling traffic police numbers, it is also foolishly determined to increase the speed limit for HGVs on single track roads. ■

SafetyFirst

Road accidents blight lives. But real (not phoney) political commitment can help reduce the suffering. A good start would be:

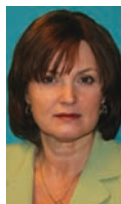
- The introduction of Labour's road safety targets (scrapped by the Tories and the Lib Dems);
- Tough new rules proposed by Labour to make sure HGVs are fitted with safety devices to protect pedestrians and cyclists alike;
- Making sure all new road schemes are assessed for cycling safety. Every injury and death on our roads is a tragedy and government can and must do more to make the roads safer for everyone.



Amanda Dixon
- disturbing
accident figures

The team is happy to assist Branches with recruitment activity and support recruitment events. We can also arrange:-

- A Branch visit or workplace visit
- Offer a presentation to or 'exhibit' at a Branch meeting
- Provide promotional literature and materials



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