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UNISON ACTIVE!

MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE



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FROM VICTIM TO REP

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**DAVE PRENTIS**
GENERAL
SECRETARY*Dave Prentis*

HOW FAR WE'VE COME!

In UNISON, we're not very good at celebrating the incredible achievements of our union and our members. Instead we tend to work hard, reach our goals and then move onto the next thing. In many ways that's admirable, but it means we often miss a chance to properly celebrate our union's achievements.

Ours is the union that led the fight for a national minimum wage, against opposition from employers and even some in the trade union movement. We

won that fight – and now we lead the fight for a real living wage for all.

It took years of hard work – but we are the union which won the historic employment tribunal fees case at the Supreme Court. Thanks to UNISON, all working people have better access to justice.

Likewise on equal pay, UNISON – with over a million women members – fought for and won equal pay for all public service workers. We've helped tackle pay discrimination and will keep on

doing so until there's a genuinely level playing field for everyone. And we've repeatedly taken on the government over Universal Credit and tax credit changes – winning improvements for low paid workers worth thousands of pounds.

These are just a few of the incredible achievements of our union. These are just a few of *your* incredible achievements. And as we strive each day to win further victories, it's worth taking a moment to savour just how far we've come, together.

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

The Sodexo staff were robbed

The privatisation racket continues to enrich companies at the expense of UNISON members and the services they provide to our communities.

If anyone was still in any doubt about the way private companies plunder the public purse, the behaviour of Sodexo in Doncaster and Bassetlaw makes it all too clear.

Despite making £1 billion profit last year, Sodexo is refusing to pay 75 NHS catering staff the nationally agreed pay rise.

The women earn between £17,000 and £18,000 a year and the company's refusal is costing each worker around £1,000 a year.

In other parts of the country Sodexo has paid its employees the agreed NHS rise but in Doncaster they seem to think they can

deprive staff of what is rightfully theirs.

So our members have voted overwhelmingly for strikes, because that is the only course of action they have left.

These attacks on our members have been happening ever since the Tories ramped up the privatisation agenda and punished us all with a cruel and economically disastrous austerity regime.

But UNISON has always stood up against such disgraceful employers and remains totally committed to fighting injustice wherever our members are threatened.

That is why our power and influence continues to grow, in this region and across the whole country. [Page 4 - Strike](#)



STRIKE VOTE AT SODEXO

Angry NHS catering staff in Doncaster and Bassetlaw were due to walk out as Active! went to press after an overwhelming vote for strikes.

The UNISON members, most of them women earning between £17,000 and £18,000 a year, have been denied a nationally-agreed NHS pay increase.

Their jobs were transferred to private company Sodexo which is refusing to pay up – costing members around £1,000 a year.

Out of the 75 workers balloted, 65 returned ballot papers and all registered a vote in favour of industrial action.

Regional organiser Sue Cookman said striking was a last resort, but members were forced into it. “We raised this issue eight months ago with Sodexo but there has been no movement to resolve the dispute. This is a company that last year made almost £1 billion in profits,” she said.

In south Manchester Sodexo paid a lesser amount direct into pay packets in an attempt to buy off workers. It was thought they were about to do the same at Doncaster and Bassetlaw, but Sue said UNISON members were resolute. Sodexo has paid the full award to colleagues in other parts of the country.

Musician and political activist Joe Solo has written a song dedicated to the strikers who are asking the public to boycott Sodexo during the strike.



Sue Cookman

DON'T SIGN UP TO PAY CUT, SAYS UNISON

UNISON has joined forces with other education unions to fight plans by an academies trust to tear up nationally agreed sick pay terms for its staff.

The Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust – which runs 17 primary and secondary schools across the city – says it can save £500,000 a year by cutting the nationally agreed 26 week sickness arrangements to 13 weeks.

The trust says the cut will only affect people who are going through sickness and disciplinary proceedings.

But regional organiser Ashley Harper said the move is the thin end of the wedge which could set a precedent

and allow the trust to tear up more national agreements.

He said: “We have advised our members not to sign the new contracts, which the trust

has sent out to them, which include agreeing to the sickness pay cut.

“There may be a few people who try to abuse the sickness system but this cut affects every

genuine employee right across the board.

“We are exploring all possible avenues – including the legal one – to challenge the trust on its proposals.”



GOVERNMENT IN £197M FUNDING CON

The Government's offer of £197 million in extra funding for struggling councils in Yorkshire and Humberside over the next six years compares with a billion pounds axed from their budgets between 2010 and 2017.

And not only that - none of it is new money, according to the politically independent Institute of Fiscal Studies. So it will have to be stripped from other cash-strapped public services.

Both UNISON regional convenor Wendy Nichols and Karen Loughlin, regional head of local government, described it as "an insult".

Karen said: "Theresa May is offering a small amount of money over a period of years which nowhere near matches the scale of the cuts they have inflicted.

"The cuts have had a devastating impact on all essential services including schools, housing and social care. Throughout the region the cuts have had a cumulative effect in creating the disjointed society which the Government has wanted to create from the start of austerity. The money they have offered is a bribe but it is hopelessly inadequate."

Wendy said central government had deliberately forced poor,

northern local authorities to pick up the austerity bill.

She said: "UNISON members have taken the brunt of central government cuts, and the communities they serve are being cruelly deprived of the resources needed to deal with the most vulnerable in society."



Wendy Nichols: cruel funding cuts

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(Please note there will be a £2.75 transaction charge on all ticket bookings)





Consulting editor **Mary Maguire** takes a sceptical look at the recent obsessions of the media and the political shenanigans - both inside and outside Parliament

Brrrrrr...exit. There's no hiding place. Whether we're now in or out, Brexit, and the weather, have dominated the news scene.

When Theresa May returned from Brussels triumphantly clutching a 599-page piece of forest, plus explanatory appendices, the media feeding frenzy erupted. The withdrawal document was dissected, digested, regurgitated, analysed, criticised by opposing forces and the usual pontificating suspects were enlisted to bore the pants off the nation.

Our TV screens were livened up, however, by the resourceful and inventive For and Against armies with their inflatable props, who regularly camped outside Parliament.

Every editor compiled a list of questions allegedly on everyone's lips. And then answered them themselves. Although questions like: Will Brexit accelerate climate change? Could a hard border be placed south of the Humber? What happened to all the cards we were holding? Will the backstop replace the dead ball line? ... continued to baffle the pundits.

Theresa May went on tour to sell her deal - answering readers' questions in the regional newspapers, including the Yorkshire Post, most of whom seemed to run businesses.

Union leaders, concerned about jobs, workers' rights and the rights of EU citizens in the UK, trooped in to tell May the facts of non-EU life. Leading the charge, our own Dave Prentis urged May to "step back from the brink...of a no-deal Brexit". (BBC North, ITV, Calendar News, New Statesman, Mirror).

With Parliament at loggerheads, the pound poorly and tempers frayed, it was looking ugly. Thankfully, the weather rode to the rescue - for

a time - as the knock-on impact of the polar vortex brought the usual travel chaos.

Yorkshire folk became more exercised by the routes between Yorkshire and Humberside made "impassable" by blizzards, than by whether the channel tunnel border should be in the middle or at both ends. The Wakefield Express published pretty pictures of complete white-outs. And the Telegraph & Argus led with a picture of a snow-covered car and, just in case the reader was in any doubt on timing, ran the caption "A snow covered car this morning".

Snowmaggodon was the new headline of choice, giving rise to amusing tweets with mocked-up pictures of catastrophic conditions. Typical was @YorkshireSlang who showed a photo of a man in a snowmaggodon blizzard at an ice-cream van asking for "99 wi' a flake luv!"

But it wasn't only snow that caused travel chaos. A small object weighing just one pound avoirdupois, measuring seven inches by six inches, wreaked havoc for two days, closing Gatwick airport and affecting flights all over the world. We'd all been warned about the spying capacity of drones but not their travel-disrupting abilities.

Drone stories surfaced all over the place. The YEP reported a near miss at Leeds/Bradford airport as a Boeing 737 made its approach. Doncaster opened its arms to a flight from New York diverted to Robin Hood (Doncaster Free Press).

This was followed by incredulous harrumphing letters to the Times and Washington Post about the authorities' inability to deal with the crisis. One wag counselled putting up another drone to spy on the first drone to find out the owner's identity and also to shoot it down. (Cloud Cuckoo Land Times).

And the next big battle looming: What will become of the Government Department for Exiting the European Union? ■



DRONE
STORIES
SURFACED
ALL OVER
THE PLACE

Mary Maguire



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INTO THE ABYSS

After a lifetime in journalism on The Times, The Observer, the Independent on Sunday and the Mirror, **Paul Routledge** has never known a more volatile situation

This magazine goes to press before we know the final shape of our Brexit future.

In a lifetime in this game, I've never known the situation more volatile. We could all be back in the polling booths before long. But for what? A general election, or another referendum on Europe?

Theresa May offered to lay down her premiership for her party, but mulish Tory MPs still rejected her EU withdrawal deal. The House of Commons temporarily seized control of the Brexit process but rejected every Remain or Leave compromise.

As I write, the Cabinet is in emergency session to make a last-ditch appeal to Brussels. Speculation is rife about a snap election, a vote of confidence - even a bid for intervention by the Queen.

Mired in their most vicious civil war for two centuries, the Tories are clearly unfit to govern. Labour has moved ahead in the opinion polls, and the party is preparing for battle.

This could be Jeremy Corbyn's year if Labour can go to the voters as a united party that delivers a deal with Europe and a genuine end to the years of austerity at home.

The prospect of an election put the wind up Tory MPs, who fear annihilation under Mrs May's leadership and a possible split within the party if she is succeeded by Boris Johnson. Neither prospect is appealing to voters.

A snap election still won't be a walkover. The most optimistic polls only give Labour a single-digit lead. The chances of winning a Commons majority were dealt a blow by the defection

of nine Europhile MPs now calling themselves the Change UK party.

Looking beyond the Eurofarce, ordinary life goes on. Not even botched Brexit can stop all the familiar issues returning centre stage: the NHS, social care, pay and pensions in the public services, job security and outsourcing.

The first big test of the Tories' campaign to win back public confidence will come on May 2, in the council elections.

It's a chance to offer a national verdict not just on Europe but on the Budget statement that supposedly marked the end of austerity yet perpetuated tough limits to public expenditure.

Chancellor Hammond had to make good his pledge for an extra £20 billion a year for the NHS,



LABOUR IS MOUNTING A HUGE EFFORT TO MAKE MORE GAINS IN THE COUNCIL POLLS



but there was precious little for other cash-starved services, particularly schools and local government.

That's fresh pressure on jobs, more moves to outsourcing and – if he thinks he can get away with it – a shift to regional pay rates in the public services. And that's a clear attack on collective bargaining.

Labour is mounting a huge effort to make more gains in the council polls, capitalising on Tory divisions and public discontent over the handling of Brexit. In most authorities, only a third of seats are up for election.

In our region, the big target is York, currently run by a rickety alliance of Tories and Lib Dems, where all the wards are up for grabs. Calderdale could also fall to overall Labour control.

Winning seats is only half the battle. It's getting harder and harder to provide public services – and keep the jobs, because despite loud ministerial claims to the contrary, the age of austerity isn't over.

Following the May poll comes the all-important Government spending

review, due in the summer or autumn. With the economy slowing down, experts say Hammond has very little room for manoeuvre.

Historically, the more Labour and more northern the council, the bigger the government spending cuts. From 2010 to 2018, the axe fell like this: Barnsley, down 40 per cent, equal to £688 per person, Doncaster, 31 per cent, Wakefield 30 per cent, Hull 23 per cent, Kirklees and Sheffield 22 per cent, Bradford, 16 per cent and Leeds 12 per cent.

These figures are from the Centre for Cities think-tank, which accuses the Tories of singling out the economically weak areas for cuts “which cannot continue”.

Oh yes they can. The pain isn't over. Bradford council plans £13.5 million cuts in 2019-20 and £19.9 million the year after – on top of £262 million enforced savings since 2011.

Suffering a total of £272 million cuts in the decade to 2020, Doncaster council is looking at a black hole of £21 million in the coming year and a further £13 million the year after. Tory-controlled North Yorkshire



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THE JOBS

isn't exempt. Spending is down 34 per cent. The county council has had to make savings totalling £157 million.

There are also elections for the European Parliament next month, but not for us unless we're granted a very long extension of Brexit withdrawal. Until now, the UK has sent 73 MEPs to Strasbourg, currently including six from Yorkshire and Humberside, two of them Labour. – Linda McAvan and Richard Corbett, who have fought hard for workers' rights and the environment.

Extremists on the populist far-Right expect to make gains in the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Germany, Hungary and France, putting liberal democratic values at risk across the Continent. If we are excluded from the Europoll by Brexit, the UK presence in Strasbourg will be sorely missed.

But this is no time to give up the fight. On the day Labour's numpty nine MPs defected, I agreed to be Labour candidate next month – for Glusburn ward of Craven District Council in north Yorkshire. Fourth time lucky? ■

Paul Routledge





Credit: John Jones

WHO CARES? SARAH DOES

Sarah Littlewood and her campaigning branch have won Hull Council's backing for the Ethical Care Charter - joining York, Sheffield and Leeds. **Ryan Fletcher** reports

When Sarah Littlewood was 15, her mother, Anne, asked her to volunteer at a care home in Hull. Little did Sarah know that it would be the first step in an adult social care career that would see her change conditions for carers and clients across the city for the better.

"My mam was working at the home and she said 'these older people are disabled and struggling so it would be nice if you went to talk to them and help out'. So that's what I did," UNISON convenor Sarah explained.

When she left school a year later, Sarah went to work at the same care home, before joining Hull City Council (HCC) as a



WE SEE
PRIVATE
SECTOR
MEMBERS
WITH
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BOOKED
AT THE
SAME TIME

home carer at 18. Over the next two decades Sarah's career at the council took in domiciliary care, residential care and social work – first-hand experience that aided the successful initiative by her campaigning branch to have HCC adopt UNISON's Ethical Care Charter.

The charter is a set of commitments that councils and care organisations

make which fix minimum standards that protect the dignity and quality of life for those who need care and the workers who provide it. The campaign to get councils and service providers to sign the charter began in response to the social care crisis afflicting the UK. More than 30 local authorities across Britain have signed the charter, including York, Sheffield and Leeds.

The charter's commitments include basing care calls on the needs of clients rather than on tasks or times, improving working rights and conditions for care workers and the eventual implementation of the proper £9 an hour living wage, as opposed to the Government's so-called living wage of £8.21.

Sarah said: "When I started my career, most social care services were council run. Staff were paid a little bit better, there was comprehensive training and good rota management. Carers would be paid travelling costs and be given a patch instead of having to zig-zag between appointments. There were no 15 minute care calls and there would be time to chat and ask how a client was and if there was anything else they needed.

"Now the vast majority of services are outsourced. We see private sector members with three calls booked in their rota at the same time. The reality is that carers don't have the time to do their jobs how



**I'M A
HESSLE
ROADER
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THERE**

they'd want because of the pressure to get to the next call. The quality of care has gone down, because the carers are constrained by the time and resources available to them. If a rota says the last call will finish at two then many carers will only get paid until then, even though they might have to work for two more hours after that to finish all their appointments."

Councils that sign up to the charter are obliged to ensure that the care providers they contract also abide by its commitments, such as paying travel time and expenses and tackling zero-hour contract exploitation. Sarah and her branch struggled for three years to get HCC to agree to the charter, in part because making sure care workers are actually paid what they are owed and pledging to introduce the living wage will have implications for the council's budget, which by 2020 will be 55 per cent lower than in 2011.

Sarah, however, is no stranger to fighting for what's right. Growing up on Hessle Road, once the beating heart of Hull's fishing community, she was surrounded by "strong characters" who were never afraid to speak out against injustice. Sarah's father, Trevor, was a fisherman, as was her granddad Frank; before he left seafaring to run a Hessle Road pub with Sarah's nana, Jennie.

"Lillie Bilocca, who famously campaigned to improve safety on the trawlers, used to drink in

my nana's pub and my grandfather was one of the small pocket of fisherman who stood up for his rights. I wasn't very politically aware when I was younger but I knew to vote Labour and I've always been a trade union member and attended meetings," said Sarah.

"It wasn't until 12 years ago that I became a rep. A colleague said to me 'you should become a rep because you do it by default anyway'. I was basically the gobby one on the team that people came to with their problems. I wasn't scared to raise issues in team meetings. I'm a Hessle Roder and there's always been strong women down there."

In fact, the campaign has been so successful that HCC has promised to initiate a council-wide working group on ethical procurement for all its outsourced services. While there is still a long way to go before concrete progress is made, Sarah won't give up until she sees results there too, said UNISON area organiser Brendan Cafferty. "Sarah is an inspiration," says Brendan "The signing of the Ethical Care Charter, which challenges the race to the bottom attitude we've seen when it comes to our members' terms and conditions and the commissioning of services, is a real achievement and Sarah and the branch deserve enormous praise for the work they've done." ■



NEED FOR CLARITY

Unions should have a central role in policing new employment rights envisaged by the Government in its 'Good Work Plan' - such as they are - says Thompsons lawyer **Jo Seery**

The Government, in its 'Good Work Plan' published on December 18 last year, claimed it was committed to enhancing workers' rights - not merely maintaining them. The plan is the Government's response to the recommendations of the Taylor Review published 18 months earlier.

The Taylor Review was commissioned because of a huge shift to zero hours contracts where workers are deemed to be self-employed which means no guaranteed minimum hours and therefore no certainty of being paid.

As Britain's exit from Europe looms it is imperative that employment protection is introduced to ensure that workers have decent terms and conditions, effectively enforced. Unions have a

central role in achieving that in the workplace.

In its plan, the Government recognises that clarifying employment status is at the centre of redressing the current imbalance, together with encouraging "high levels of employee engagement" and better enforcement, but does it deliver?

Some of the proposals for reform have been set out in draft regulations, although these will not come into force until April 2020, including:

- The right to a written statement of employment for all workers, not just employees, from the first day of their employment. The statement should include their normal working hours; the days of the week they are required to work; whether or not the hours

or days vary and, if so, how; and any other paid leave and benefits (such as entitlement to sick pay and maternity leave and pay).

- Repeal of the so called "Swedish derogation" in the Agency Workers Regulations 2010, which was aimed at providing agency workers with pay between assignments but which, in practice, meant they lost the right to claim equal pay with those directly employed by the hirer.
- An increase in the penalty employers have to pay for aggravated breaches of employment rights (where a tribunal claim succeeds) from £5,000 to £20,000.
- An amendment to the Working Time Regulations 1998 so that holiday pay is calculated for workers who have



A HUGE
SHIFT
TO ZERO
HOURS
CONTRACTS

been employed for 52 weeks, to be calculated over a period of 52 weeks instead of 12 weeks.

- A reduction in the number of employees required to request information and consultation arrangements on a wide range of employment-related developments under the Information and Consultation Regulations 2004 (ICE) from 10 per cent to two per cent (subject to the current minimum of 15 employees).

There are other proposals for reform, but there is no draft legislation and there is a distinct lack of detail as to how they will be implemented.

Significantly, the Government has failed to set out clear proposals for clarifying the law on employment status, which is the gateway to most employment rights. Currently, there are three categories of employment status: employees; independent workers who have their own business; or workers who can be self-employed but carry out work as part of someone else's business, as opposed to their own business.

It plans to bring forward detailed proposals to bring into line the different tests for establishing employment status for the purposes of employment rights and tax, as well as legislate to limit the ability of businesses to avoid their responsibilities by misclassifying or

misleading staff. But there is very little detail about what the proposed legislation will be.

The Government has also commissioned independent research "to find out more about those with uncertain employment status." This smacks of a Government afraid to make bold decisions any time soon.

In response to the consultation on employee status earlier this year, Thompsons Solicitors proposed a single universal definition of employment status that would apply to all workers and attract employment rights from day one.

This would provide much-needed clarity for workers and businesses, and create greater stability in a post-Brexit labour market. It would also codify the thinking of the courts in the recent cases.

There are also a number of key recommendations set out in the Taylor Review which the Government does not propose to implement such as a higher rate of National Minimum Wage where workers are required to work non-guaranteed hours.

The proposals fall well short of meeting the Government's stated commitment to improve work quality and encourage better worker engagement, particularly given the failure to ban zero-hour contracts and unpaid internships. There was also the key failure to give trade unions a right of access to workers or

workplaces.

Another crucial omission is the failure to include any proposal to ensure good employment practices and quality jobs are considered as part of the procurement process along the same lines as the Welsh Government's Code of Practice on Ethical Employment in Supply Chains.

Ultimately, the success of any employment legislation depends on effective enforcement, which means that trade unions must have a central role.

After UNISON's landmark victory in the courts led to employment tribunal fees being scrapped, the Government must also give a clear and unequivocal commitment not to re-introduce employment tribunal fees so that workers in the future will not be denied access to justice.



THERE IS A DISTINCT LACK OF DETAIL



Jo Seery - Thompsons employment lawyer

OtherProposals

- The right to continue to accrue employment service where there is a gap in employment of four weeks, making it easier for employees to accrue some employment rights such as the right to notice pay
- A right to request a more stable contract for those who have 26 weeks service and work variable hours;
- A requirement to provide agency workers with a statement of key facts which would include information about the type of contract, minimum rates of pay, how they will be paid - and if paid through an intermediary company - any deductions or fees that will be taken
- A ban on employers making deductions from staff tips



Photo: Mark Harvey

THAT ‘OMG’ MOMENT

One of Katie Hodgson’s first acts as a shop steward was to save the job of a colleague whose face didn’t fit. From then she was hooked as a rep. **Mary Maguire** reports

If you live in South Yorkshire and spot a woman wearing blue flowery wellies being taken for a walk by a tiny pug and a large French Mastiff, a Dogue de Bordeaux to be precise, that will be UNISON activist Katie Hodgson.

Or you may find her out campaigning for the Labour Party in Ed Miliband’s constituency, working to put the case for a government that will invest in public services.

Mostly, though, Katie, 57, can be found in action representing members in the five NHS clinical commissioning groups in South Yorkshire. For the past seven years Katie has been full-time staff side co-ordinator for Sheffield, Doncaster, Rotherham, Bassetlaw, Barnsley and Wakefield CCGs. A job that she “loves every bit of”.

Katie joined UNISON in 2000 when she started work at South Yorkshire health authority as an administrator. Work wasn’t plain

“
BULLYING
MAKES
YOU
QUESTION
YOURSELF

sailing. She was bullied. Her lorry driver husband, a union health and safety representative, would “come home and tell me all sorts of stories around health and safety. This got my interest, and with the bullying at work, prompted me to become involved. So I became a UNISON health and safety steward”.

Although Katie never formally raised a grievance because the individual bullying



Left: Katie with her assistants

Katie was born in Leeds and went to Crossgate school, the family then moved to Boston Spa where she went to the local comprehensive. After school, Katie tried different types of jobs including making electronic circuit boards for submarines.

At that time, she lived in Tadcaster with her husband, when she became pregnant with the first of their three children. They sold the house because they couldn't afford the mortgage and rented accommodation for a couple of years, losing out massively on the housing boom. They landed in Doncaster in 1990.

It was there Katie discovered her organising skills – the local play group was closing down and she recognised a real gap. So Katie and her best friend set up a play group and got funding from a local business. Her next job, working at the local newspaper, awakened her interest in local issues, and soon she was working for the health authority.

APPEAL

As a UNISON steward, one of the first cases Katie dealt with was a member threatened with dismissal. She recalls:

“It was complicated. And there was something that didn't ring true about management's case. By digging through all the evidence, I found that the investigatory team had only included all the negative things about her, the detrimental things, but none of the positives.”

Katie believed that the member had been set up because management didn't like her. So she did some more digging, put in an appeal and succeeded in getting her reinstated. Katie recalls:

“It was one of those OMG

moments – I did it – I got her reinstated. This was a woman who had lost so much, and losing her job would have had a massive impact on her life. So to get her job back was worth its weight in gold.”

Katie was well and truly hooked, she added:

“I knew then that this was something that I wanted to do. That detective work and making a difference was so worthwhile.”

Renowned for her honesty – Katie never raises false hopes. The trickiest part of the job, she says, is sometimes getting the full story from members and getting them to face up to difficult decisions. She added:

“It's hard to represent someone and tell them that you won't be able to get them off. I'm not afraid to have difficult conversations and I use my coaching skills to help them face up to and reflect upon their situations.

“If I get a member off on a technicality, I try my best to get them to learn from it so they don't get into that mess again.”

Katie believes part of her mission is to support and mentor young members to build the union of the future.

“We talk about the NHS having an ageing workforce, but UNISON has an ageing membership, so we need to recruit and grow to plan for the future.

“I genuinely try to enthuse members to become involved and take over. It's not about being precious about your own role or where you fit in, it's about developing people and recognising when to step down and let in new blood”.

While that new blood is developing, there are loads of UNISON members, and large dog breeds, who are grateful that Katie is around for them. ■

“
TO GET
HER JOB
BACK WAS
WORTH
ITS WEIGHT
IN GOLD

her left. She did get a result:

“I got an apology. They recognised that I was bullied and apologised for not doing anything about it. That was worth its weight in gold. It didn't change what happened to me, but acknowledging that it happened was hugely empowering. It made me determined it wouldn't happen again, and, if it did, I would do something about it.

“Bullying makes you question yourself. It erodes your self-confidence. But UNISON gave me back my confidence and developed me as a person, made me think differently – and opened up new ideas”.



Photo: Mark Harvey

ON THE FRONT LINE

Naomi Robinson faced frightening violence and a death at work but says she failed to get the serious counselling she needed - when she needed it. **Helen Hague** reports



UNISON
WAS
THERE
FOR ME
FROM
THE START

In mid-August last year, Naomi Robinson stopped a man bleeding to death in a car park after he'd been stabbed in the gut with an eight-inch kitchen knife. Just before Christmas, she wrenched her elbow while pinning down a very drunk man on a stairwell. He'd just punched her colleague hard and was trying to lash out again.

Both incidents happened at Bevin Court Hostel in Sheffield,

while Naomi was working on the night shift. She'd worked at the hostel "four times spanning thirteen years", but she left in early February, swapping a full time job on nights for an insecure fixed term contract elsewhere. She vowed never to return to Bevin Court.

Naomi had suffered post-traumatic stress from an earlier incident at the hostel and says that her employer failed to give her the support she needed. In contrast, UNISON was "there

for me from the start".

Her problems at work date back to Christmas Eve 2016, when a young man with alcohol and mental health problems died of a drug overdose. Naomi, who specialises in substance abuse, was one of the last people to see him alive. "We mistook his comatose state for being drunk. And left him to sleep it off. The next morning he was found dead."

A year later, in the run-up

Left: Naomi – building a career despite the trauma

to Christmas 2017, the hostel was “horrendously busy” and Naomi, who is of Jamaican and white British heritage, was receiving abuse, including racist abuse, every day from a particular client “for six weeks solid” – and he didn’t get evicted. She felt stressed and unsupported.

MELTDOWN

Then, in January 2018, she attended a “reflective practice” session at work, exploring past experiences to see how traumatic situations could have been handled differently. This prompted Naomi to go into “meltdown”, overwhelmed by feelings of guilt that she had not done enough to save the client who overdosed.

She was off work for two months, but St Anne’s - the charity that runs Bevin Court - said her sickness was not work related. She appealed and won. But her sick pay was halved in the second month, fuelling fears that she wouldn’t be able to pay the rent.

Naomi received basic occupational health counselling through work – but was told she would have to wait until the summer to get counselling on the NHS to address her deeper trauma.

When she returned to work in April, St Anne’s allegedly refused her request for more counselling. “They said occupational health counselling is only to get people back to work not to support them in it”, says Naomi. And the trauma counselling she eventually got through her GP was cut short because she was thought to be so preoccupied with money worries she couldn’t focus.

There was more to come. In August, as Naomi staunchly

the deep knife wound in the car park, the scene which started this story, she had another “meltdown.” Two clients had been fighting – they both approached her covered in blood. She was off sick for another two and a half months. “I might have coped better if I’d had more counselling”, said Naomi.

Her sick pay was halved in the second month fuelling fears that she wouldn’t be able to pay the rent, forcing her back to work before she felt ready. She finally got more counselling in late October after returning to work.

Meanwhile, five per cent bonus payments for working with people with complex needs had been axed while she was off sick. Naomi is not afraid of speaking out, which she believes has not gone down well with management at St Anne’s. She’d pointed out “how ironic it was that a mental health homeless charity like St Anne’s was causing me to face homelessness.”

CRITICAL

Naomi says she was able to cope with the elderly drunk man attacking her colleague on the stairwell because she had, at last, got access to the additional counselling she’d long been asking for. Backing from UNISON activists Tracy Brown and John Hepplestone was critical.

UNISON regional organiser Dean Harper said: “It’s not unreasonable for people to go to work and expect to be safe. Employers need to take the necessary steps to safeguard their staff’s health and wellbeing.” He urged employers to sign



WE
MISTOOK
HIS
COMATOSE
STATE
FOR BEING
DRUNK

up to UNISON’s charter (see panel below).

FRUSTRATION

Regional manager Karen Loughlin said there needed to be greater protection for frontline workers. “The scale of these attacks on local authority staff and charity workers is being compounded as a direct result of the chronic underfunding of the public sector, which has led to high levels of frustration being taken out on staff.”

Active! contacted St Anne’s for a comment, but none was forthcoming by the time the magazine went to press.

Meanwhile things are looking up for Naomi. With a first degree in psychology and a masters in applied psychology she is now intent on putting her own traumas behind her to build her career. Helping those struggling to free themselves from the horrors of substance abuse could well feature. Not to mention championing the mental health of both clients and colleagues under strain. And of course, speaking out against violence – physical, verbal and psychological- wherever she sees it. ■

UNISON Charter

Management must sign up to:

- A written policy on violence and aggression at work
- A senior manager responsible for that policy
- Measures to prevent staff working in isolation
- Staff encouraged to report all violent incidents
- Collection and monitoring of data on violence
- Union safety reps consulted with access to the data
- Risk assessments for staff in vulnerable situations
- Support for victims of violence
- Training to deal with threatening situations
- Availability of independent counselling



'I LOVE THIS JOB'

Karen Loughlin is not your typical public school product.

Brought up in a single parent family in Gateshead, she was officially classified as being from a socially deprived family at the age of 11 and was awarded a scholarship to attend King Edwards Witley, a private school in leafy Surrey.

By the time she reached the fifth form however she was convinced that she "wasn't one of the posh kids".

Says Karen: "I was not part of the upper class elite – and was never going to be. I've not kept in touch with anyone since I left."

While the ruling class was deprived of a much-needed infusion of intelligence, the union movement has profited.

Karen went from King Edwards to Gateshead technical

college where she did her A Levels, subsequently studying full-time for an HND at a college in Norwich. At the age of 20 she joined British Gas while studying for a part-time degree in business studies from Northumbria University, later completing a postgraduate course in equality studies.

Some 28 years ago Karen joined the membership department at NALGO, one of UNISON's three predecessor unions. Later she became an organising assistant at UNISON, eventually becoming head of local government in the northern region as a regional organiser. During this time she worked part-time for the union for 19 years after the birth of her first child.

In May last year she was promoted on a temporary basis to regional manager in Yorkshire and Humberside,

Karen Loughlin is completing her first year as a regional manager in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Barrie Clement

meets a highly regarded union official with a surprising background

responsible for members in local government, police and justice. "There are many challenges facing our members in these sectors with massive cuts to funding," says Karen, "but we must protect our members and ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect."

Since then she has won an enviable reputation among colleagues in Yorkshire and Humberside for being a straight-talking and intelligent union official. "I hope I bring a fresh pair of eyes to the region and I try to be challenging in a non-confrontational way," she says.

She has certainly been kept busy in her first year which coincided with the bitter Kirklees bin strike.

Karen lives in Leeds during the week and spends the weekend at her home in Whitley Bay with her husband Trevor who is a regional manager in UNISON's northern region. Her daughter Megan is 19 and at Belfast University, while her son, 17-year-old Nathan, is studying for his A levels.

Her approach to the job is based on trust. "I want people to be the best they can be. I want people to get active in the union and maximise their potential," she says.

What does she think of her job so far? "I love negotiating and I love the strategic element of it. Basically I love this job."



I WANT
PEOPLE
TO BE
THE BEST
THEY
CAN BE



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

UNSUNG HEROES

Photo: Jim Varney



Hospital housekeepers like mum of six and grandma Mandy Grey are “among the lowest paid and hardest working people in the NHS”. Reporter **Helen Hague** caught up with her

For Mandy Grey, it's the chats with patients isolated in their own rooms that help make her job rewarding. That and the fact that “every day on the ward is different”.

Mandy is a longstanding member of the housekeeping team on the infectious diseases ward at St James's hospital in Leeds.

The housekeeping team, based in the kitchen or out cleaning rooms on the ward, are well aware of crucial safety protocols. What must

be worn before entering each room is clearly spelt out – for both hospital staff and visitors. Gowns, aprons, and different kinds of facemask can feature.

“We always check on what's written on the door,” says Mandy, who has worked at the hospital for 16 years, on both kitchen and cleaning duties, sometimes dealing with individual en suite rooms for patients who have been diagnosed with infectious disease or are in for tests.

Patients can be in days or weeks - though a few years back, a patient spent nine months on the ward, Mandy recalls. The arrival of a lunch or a cup of tea, delivered by a housekeeper - properly kitted out, of course - can help lighten the day.

Mandy reckons she must have washed her hands “many many thousands” of times on shift, “right up to the elbows, water on first”. This regular rigorous ritual is the bedrock of good ward hygiene.



EVERY DAY
ON THE
WARD IS
DIFFERENT

Left: Mandy – proud to work in the NHS

On the day Active! caught up with her, Mandy and other staff on her morning cleaning shift had been issued with masks covering both mouth and nose, because of reports of flu.

Even before she started working at St James's, Mandy knew a fair bit about housekeeping. She already had four children; cooking and cleaning for a growing family in "a very busy house".

PROUD

When she first started working, she used to "skip" to work for her housekeeping shifts between 2pm and 6pm – swapping between kitchen and cleaning. "I'd been a stay-at-home mum", she says; keen to get out to work, and proud to be working for the NHS in a much-loved local hospital. She has since had two more children – and is now grandma to four.

She then worked for around ten years as a cleaning housekeeper on the ward, swapping back to a mix of cleaning and kitchen duties last year. The 7.30 to 1.30 shift she now works is the longest Mandy, now 50, has ever done – 'I should be slowing down, not speeding up!' she jokes.

Mandy is proud to work in the NHS, and cherishes the free care it offers to the local communities, "Where would we be without it?" she says. It's an enthusiasm she's passed on to her children. "As I say to them, I hope it's

still here when you lot get older."

Like all NHS workers, Mandy has experienced first hand the pressure the service is under. Wards are short staffed more often than they used to be and new duties have been brought in or roles reassigned.

Cleaning wards has become harder in recent years, she reckons. Take curtains. When a patient moves out of a room, it is now the housekeeper's job to take them down for washing and put up fresh ones. It takes two people and is a very necessary task – especially in rooms on the infectious diseases ward.

Life on the kitchen housekeeping team is very tightly scheduled. Food is not made on site, but has to be heated, drinks distributed, plates collected. Patients isolated in their rooms are often, understandably, keen to chat, says Mandy, who is keen to engage. Time can be tight, but never too tight for a quick word and a smile.

FIERCE

As John Ingelson UNISON branch chair at Leeds Teaching Hospital says, the housekeeper role has got "much harder since the Tories came in, in 2010". Housekeepers are "among the lowest paid and hardest working people within the NHS" and have had "to adapt to new practices and many changes to their role."

He reckons ward



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SLOWING
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NOT
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UP

housekeepers are 'the cornerstone of both our NHS trust and our health branch.' He finds them "committed, frequently vocal with their views and knowledge", and "fierce in their defence of their wards, departments and local hospitals".

Mandy also enjoys the union's Return- to-Learn courses. She signed up to a ten week Women's Lives course in 2017 after seeing a leaflet. Highlights included learning more about the Suffragettes, and watching Hidden Figures, a film based on the true story of three young black women mathematicians working on the US space programme in the early sixties.

VITAL

Like much else on the course, it "really opened my eyes", says Mandy – who would love her 11- year- old daughter Tayvia to see it. There's still time to take her on a weekend residential course – children under 14 can sometimes go with parents. Mandy has already enjoyed a Making a Difference course over a weekend.

The housekeeping team plays a vital, often-unsung role in the smooth running of wards. A friendly face and a chat when receiving lunch or a cup of tea in bed can make a massive difference – especially if you're confined to a single room. As Mandy – and the patients she's served over the years – well know. ■

GRABBING ATTENTION

Halloween outfits, 80s fancy dress and rousing sing-songs gave the strike at the University of Bradford massive media attention. **Barrie Clement** and **Danny Marten** report

It came as something of a bombshell.

University of Bradford staff had already suffered “the mother of all restructuring exercises” in 2017.

It had been traumatic, with some employees turning up for work in tears, unsure what job they were meant to do. But they thought they’d seen the worst of it.

Then last summer UNISON branch reps were called into a meeting with the vice-chancellor and the head of human resources and were told the university was in financial trouble and another 250 staff had to go.

“It was a bolt out of the blue,” says 33-year-old branch secretary Patrick Dennehy. “They said they were in financial trouble and needed to pay back part

of a loan by the end of the year. Up till then we’d been able to work together and negotiate a way through job losses but it appeared they were in a far worse situation than they’d let on - and they were determined to push the changes through.”

All previous restructuring exercises had made things worse, says ex-journalist Patrick, an admissions officer seconded to the marketing department. Staff were overworked and underpaid and felt their voices were not being heard. Many of them were doing the jobs that four or five people were doing a decade ago.

Clearly there was no chance of UNISON reps at the university conducting a full consultation among members on this new management “plan” and then

negotiating an agreement by the end of the year.

Given deep concern among members and the limited time available, in July the branch committee started organising a strike ballot. Easier said than done. It is a complicated procedure dictated by the deliberately obstructive Conservative Trade Union Act.

A consultative vote indicated strong support for industrial action and in a full ballot 64 per cent voted for strikes and 89 per cent in favour of action short of a strike. The 61 per cent turnout was unusually high. Backing for UNISON’s position showed itself with support from the students and the UCU and Unite unions. UNISON membership rocketed from about 250 to nearly



IT WAS
A BOLT
OUT OF
THE BLUE

Left: Ex-journalist and UNISON activist Patrick on the picket line

400, almost a third of the administrative workforce.

Following the result UNISON held an open meeting and invited representatives of the HR department who said there was no need for industrial action because management would try to ensure there were no compulsory redundancies. And yet there was no guarantee.

One UNISON member suggested that based on the assurances they should limit the action to a work to rule. But the HR representatives warned that those taking such action would still have their pay docked. (Of course there was no question of the £250,000 a year vice-chancellor taking a pay cut to ease the situation).

Management misread the mood of the meeting. "The members' response was, if they are going to dock our pay anyway, we may as well go on strike," says Patrick, pointing out that it is unlawful to cut the pay of someone who is working to contract.

Drawing on her experience as a union official in Australia, regional organiser Leonie Sharp told the branch it needed to ensure that the action attracted as much attention as possible. Leonie called for "colour and movement".

The branch was stumped for ideas, but then the newest steward on the committee Nazia Jabeen pointed out that the first day of a four-day strike would be Halloween.

"We jumped into action and placed flyers round the university, encouraging staff to attend picket lines

Members wrote to the vice-chancellor to explain how awful working at the university under his leadership had become



in Halloween fancy dress," says local organiser Danny Marten.

Despite planning until the small hours of the morning, no one knew whether the strike would be a success, says Danny. But on that first day the region's press were all over the story. BBC Radio Leeds ran the line: "Staff at the University of Bradford are going on strike today dressed in Halloween costume, to highlight the horrors they face."

That day 60 UNISON members were on the picket line, 50 of whom had never before taken any form of industrial action. Many of them were the lowest paid female workers. The university campus was eerily quiet as many more staff stayed home.

Then the picket line took on a life of its own with lots of songs and laughter. There were different themes on succeeding days often involving outrageous fancy dress. One day there was a

1980s theme which really caught the imagination of social media.

As the final day of the strike came, so did a management announcement that 70 employees, including some on the picket line, had taken voluntary redundancy. Gone was the party atmosphere that came with defiance. In its place, tears. But the final day saw more members take part in the picket than any other.

The industrial action has been suspended. But as Active! went to press, no-one has been forced out. Ex-journalist Patrick points out that the strike – and the media interest it attracted – clearly paid off.

Says Patrick: "I'm a strong Labour Party member and I regard myself as politically savvy, but this was something very different for me. It was majorly stressful. But it made me feel really proud of the members and I felt as if we had done something worthwhile." ■

“IT MADE ME FEEL REALLY PROUD OF THE MEMBERS

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Sharron Atkins was partially disabled in a bizarre accident, but it hasn't stopped her becoming a support worker or training to be a shop steward, says **Peter Carroll**



Sharron has devoted her life to the vulnerable

At three-years-old, activist Sharron Atkins was playing Cowboys and Indians with a group of other pre-school kids when the pretend gunplay got deadly serious.

One of the little boys they were playing with went home to get his big brother's air rifle, came back and shot Sharron in the head.

The bizarre accident put her in a coma for two weeks and when she emerged she had to learn again how to walk and talk.

The incident has left her with impaired fine motor skills and has affected her walking, but it has not dampened her passionate commitment to helping others.

When we meet, Sharron, 49, is in regional headquarters Commerce House attending a stewards' training course because she wants to be an equalities rep. at Dimensions, an adult social care company in Sheffield.

Sharron said: "I joined the NHS in 1988 as a support worker and joined the union straight away.

"Now I am part of a team which supports people with learning difficulties so that they can stay in their homes.

"That involves helping them to make their own appointments for healthcare, showing them how to shop and cook for themselves and to find employment wherever possible."

At the moment Sharron

and five colleagues are responsible for two people, both with learning difficulties, one of whom needs 24-hour support.

They work shifts to make sure the necessary support is always provided.

When she started work, it was in a much bigger unit where former Rampton patients, and others with serious mental illnesses, were being rehabilitated.

"It is very rewarding work and I love doing it," she says.

"I remember being very pleased that we managed to get people with illnesses and disabilities to eventually live in the community. It is such important work."

The daughter, granddaughter and niece of Barnsley miners, she and her family were in the midst of the 1984 miners strike.

Her late mother was a friend and comrade of Anne Scargill in the Women Against Pit Closures group. They ran soup kitchens in Barnsley, attended marches and spread the message in their community and far beyond.

That powerful sense of working class solidarity runs in her veins and she has devoted her life to helping the vulnerable and improving their lives.

Last year she re-introduced a client, who was suffering from dementia, to his family. He had lost touch with them for eight years.



IT IS VERY
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"I sent a letter to the man's brother asking if he could send some family photos for him to see as it might help him with his memory problems," she says.

"I got a 'phone call from his brother and he was in tears because they hadn't been in touch for so long.

"I arranged to meet him in Sheffield and the two brothers were re-united.

"Now they go out together to play snooker and I go with them to make sure they are OK. It is a very happy outcome."

SATISFACTION

Another client with learning disabilities had not left the unit for ten years before Sharron and a colleague encouraged him to go out for the first time to a local shop.

They went with him and he bought a Mars bar and a can of beer. He now ventures out and still manages to get to the shop when he wants to.

"It was like he was let out of prison," says Sharron.

"I take great satisfaction in helping people like this. Little things can make a massive difference to people's lives."

Married for 26 years to Stephen, Sharron has three children, Liam (24) Megan (20) and 13-year-old Kimberley.

And last year she made a big difference to her own life by losing four stones in weight following a Slimmers' World diet plan.

She said: "It worked for

me, I have more energy. I feel mentally stronger and I know I can do things and change things.

"I think I've always been quite strong but I'm stronger now!"

And she is putting that energy into UNISON courses, including learning more about technology, maths, branch organising, and speaking with confidence. Next March she goes on a Women in Leadership course.

She is a champion of Return to Learn and wants more people to step up and do the stewards' training so they can be really effective activists on behalf of UNISON and its members.

"It really gave me confidence on the courses to see that other people were struggling with some things and it wasn't just me," says Sharron.

"We all need to be active because that makes UNISON stronger and ensures we have a powerful voice.

"You'd be amazed at how good it is and what you can do.

"And the best thing about it is the friends that you meet. You learn so much from people who you can share experiences with and who can open your eyes to new ways of thinking about and understanding the issues which we all face in the workplace.

"Your knowledge and confidence in how to do things grows very quickly.

"It is so amazing so please get involved because we are making a difference". ■



RITE OF PASSAGE

Photo: Steve Morgan

Craig Millward was thrown in at the deep end as leader of a refuse strike in Calderdale. Being a steward is challenging, but a brilliant experience, he told **Ryan Fletcher**

In German it's 'feuertaufe', the French say 'baptême du feu' and in plain old English it's 'baptism of fire'.

It didn't matter which way you said it to Craig Millward though, he was just not particularly keen on the idea of being thrown in at the deep end of fractious pay negotiations with his



NOW
WE'VE
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MEMBERS,
LET'S
DO THIS

employer, waste management giant Suez.

Even so, refuse worker Craig, a 42-year-old from Halifax, agreed to become a UNISON shop steward in the middle of last year's dispute, which only ended after a pre-Christmas strike was organised. Despite his reservations and lack of experience, Craig helped to secure a significant pay rise of

Left: Craig is training for his black belt in Korean Karate

a least the real living wage for his colleagues.

"I got approached in 2017 to become a shop steward but I wasn't really interested. My name was put forward again in April 2018. I didn't really want to because I'd never been involved with the union before, but I reluctantly accepted because nobody else was interested," Craig explained.

ANGRY

Pay negotiations at Suez, which is Calderdale council's contractor for bin collections, usually went through without a hitch because of the workforce's lack of engagement with the union, Craig said.

This time was different: Suez's staff, many of whom earned just 10p above the minimum wage, were getting increasingly angry about paltry pay increases that didn't reflect the arduous nature of the job or rising inflation.

Craig channelled this anger into something useful by making the case for the workforce to stick together and fight the dispute as one.

"Myself and a few other people really went all out to recruit people" he says. "It was just a matter of talking to my colleagues and saying 'we've got to get everyone in the workforce together on this because otherwise Suez are going to walk all over us'.

"Between April and August we had 80-odd new members join. We ended up with something like 75 per cent of the workforce behind us. UNISON has always been there, but never in big enough numbers to make a difference, but then it was like 'OK now we've got the members let's do this'."



**WE DID
WARN
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Over the course of 2018, negotiations went back and forth as Suez – which raked in operating profits of £607m during the first half of 2018 – came back with stingy pay offers that included caveats such as not back-dating wage increases to the beginning of the financial year.

"The first pay offer of 1.5 to 2 per cent got rejected. The revised offer attempted to mess around with back pay to save the firm money and it really annoyed everyone. We did warn them that it would put people's backs up," Craig said.

The revised offer was also put to the vote and rejected out of hand. The year progressed but the negotiations were at a standstill and eventually a ballot for industrial action was called. The turnout for the vote was 80.8 per cent with 94.9 per cent voting in favour. A strike was called for December 3 and 4.

TOUGH

It was during the preparations for the strike that things got "a bit dodgy", Craig recalled. Suez's management tabled a new two-year offer of 3 per cent and a £200 bonus and began putting pressure on individual workers to advocate its acceptance among colleagues.

"Fortunately everyone saw through it and stuck together. But there were some angry scenes and cross words. Bin men can be very straightforward to say the least – it's a tough job," said Craig, who is himself no shrinking violet and is training for his blackbelt in Korean karate.

Despite the stresses and strains common in any pay dispute, the workforce's solidarity paid off. A few days

before the strike, Suez offered a two year deal that included a 47.6p increase on basic pay rates for 2018, backdated to April 1, 2018, and a further 2.5 per cent increase from April 1, 2019. In addition, from April 1, 2019 no one will be on less than the real living wage of £9 an hour.

REMARKABLE

Craig is modest about his part in the victory, citing the support he received from his work and union colleagues throughout the dispute. He discovered that the qualities needed by a shop steward were determination, a healthy dose of scepticism during negotiations and being a "very, very good listener".

UNISON regional organiser Ashley Harper, who worked with Craig during the dispute, says he has these qualities in spades.

Ashley said: "It's remarkable that someone who had just come into the role and just completed their training, managed to achieve this win, which sees the workforce getting at least the living wage. What Craig did is old fashioned organising. He talked to his members and kept them on-board. He's great at doing that and because they stuck together they won the dispute."

Craig's initial reluctance about being involved with UNISON has now changed to enthusiasm. As well as going for health and safety and communications roles at his branch, Craig is interested in becoming more involved with the union's work at a regional level.

He said: "Becoming a shop steward has been challenging, but it's also been a brilliant experience." ■



NEVER AGAIN!

Lauramay Beynon went from workplace victim to UNISON activist via the union's education programme. **Christine Buckley** on a woman who feels 're-energised'

“
NO-ONE
IS EVER
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TO ME
LIKE THAT
AGAIN

Lauramay Beynon had enjoyed a smooth working life until one day she was badly humiliated in a clash over an office move.

It was that experience and the sharp injustice she felt which catapulted her into union activism.

Lauramay, who is a support staff worker at Dearne Advanced Learning Centre, a large secondary school in Rotherham, became

involved in a seemingly trivial misunderstanding about wall decorations.

But it led to a senior member of the school staff shouting insults at her. “She was really aggressive, shouting, calling me stupid and at that point I thought I’d never let that happen to me again and I didn’t want it to happen to anyone else.

“My line manager said to keep quiet and not start a grievance if I wanted to keep

my job, which I did, but I thought no-one is ever going to talk to me like that again.”

The senior member of staff later apologised but the incident had shocked Lauramay because she’d not experienced anything like that before in her working life.

Lauramay’s job involves dealing with information and data, and she has done that job in her present school and others for 15 years. Before that she sold insurance and prior

to that worked as a part-time waitress while she put herself through A levels, which was followed by a degree in business.

Lauramay is now UNISON's shop steward for the school's support staff with 46 members under her care. She went from workplace victim to union representative after a journey of discovery, of both the union and her own capabilities, through UNISON's education programme.

FRIENDLY

Shortly after her work incident, Lauramay signed up for a Pathways into UNISON course, an introductory weekend programme that explains how the union works and the roles members can take on. Part of the course demonstrates how union reps can help members through acting out workplace scenarios. Lauramay felt it was a really friendly introduction for union newcomers.

The course tutors stressed there was no obligation on anyone to step up to a role but Lauramay was immediately attracted to becoming a shop steward.

"I liked the idea of being a middle person, a bridge between staff and senior management. I thought I wouldn't be afraid to discuss things and raise concerns." Also, there was no shop steward at the school and she felt there were a number of issues that needed addressing.

But as there was no existing shop steward Lauramay had a sharp learning curve. Ben Harvey, Barnsley branch secretary and Barnsley council convenor, was appointed as her mentor to help her



I FEEL LIKE
I'M ME
AGAIN,
AS WELL
AS BEING
A MUM
AND A WIFE

understand the procedures in her first few formal dealings. In the first couple of personal cases Ben took the lead while Lauramay acted as an observer to learn the ropes.

Luckily there was goodwill from all parties and the school responded well to the new union dialogue. In fact Lauramay believes senior managers felt it was better to have a clear point of reference to the staff and that staff members liked having a structure for discussions rather than having to go straight to a grievance.

Now she's dealt with disciplinaries, absence issues, a whistleblowing incident and a restructuring of the school's staff.

POSITIVE

Lauramay's involvement with UNISON has also grown outside her workplace and recently she became assistant treasurer for Barnsley branch.

Along with the nitty gritty of disputes and disciplinary matters, Lauramay also acts as the conduit for the more fun things that membership of UNISON brings such as discounted trips and raffles.

She tells members at work what is going on because she believes that too many direct emails from the union itself may get ignored in crowded inboxes.

Her positive experience of the Pathways into UNISON course has led her to take up other educational opportunities provided by the union. She's completed a UNISON Women's Lives course, an informal, women-only programme looking at women at work and in society past and present.

And last November Lauramay went to the union's regional conference in Hull. "The workshops there were very good including one looking at unions in the USA," she says. "I met a lot of people from different sectors and it was great sharing experiences at work with them. It was really good networking."

NETWORK

Through UNISON's education programme, Lauramay, mum of five-year-old Henry, has met lots of different people and seen their different perspectives when discussing the news. "I firmly believe that birds of a feather flock together and you surround yourself with people who are like you. So it's interesting to network with people who are not like you and don't have the same reactions to things."

And her UNISON work has also changed the way Lauramay approaches work problems and life's general challenges. "It's changed the way I would deal with something, I look at both sides now and weigh things up." She's also been boosted by a big feel good factor: "I do like helping people so I feel good about that."

For Lauramay, the courses and her UNISON work have enriched her life. In fact it's not an exaggeration to say that her experience has been life changing. "I've enjoyed getting back into writing and learning and it makes a change from being with five-year-olds. I feel like I'm me again, as well as being a mum and a wife. It's woken me up, I really feel energised and reignited." ■



THE BIGOT IS BACK

Active! chief reporter and feature writer **Peter Carroll** sees disturbing evidence of a return of racism in his home city of Bradford - the scene of a violent race riot in 2001

I was born in Bradford and have lived there for most of my life so racism is something I have been witness to for many years.

In 2001 the city gained an unwanted place in the national and international media spotlight after thousands of young Asian men rioted in the Manningham area of the city.

The spark that started the violence - which left dozens of police officers in hospital and dozens of young men in jail - was an allegedly

heavy-handed arrest of a man by the police, during which a woman holding a baby had been jostled.

However, on the same day, the fascist British National Party had come into the city centre intent on provoking fights with anti-racist activists holding a rally in front of City Hall.

The word spread and people started to gather in Manningham to vent their anger.

What happened next was a profound shock to the city: buildings and businesses - such as a

long-established BMW car showroom - were burned out, never to return.

I was on the front-line that day with the late Bradford West MP Marsha Singh and now-retired UNISON activist Idris Bashir, helping to deal with the many journalists asking for interviews.

As the rioting and stone throwing went on, the police and politicians were holed up in the Beehive pub on Manningham Lane. All of its windows had been put through earlier that day.

A senior police officer



LOCAL
POLITICIANS
AND
OTHERS
WERE
APPALLED
BY THE
VIOLENCE

suggested to Marsha Singh that he should go with him and try to reason with the men behind the barricade.

They were back within five minutes, fleeing a hail of rocks. It was the most serious public disorder the city has experienced before or since.

Local politicians and others were appalled by the violence.

Older family members told their young men to give themselves up at the police station and spoke out fiercely against the rioters.

I remember discussing the events with UNISON Active and Daily Mirror journalist Paul Routledge (whose regular diary column is on page 32).

We discussed the lack of employment opportunities for young Asian people, which was said by some commentators to be one of the causes of the outbreak of violence.

Others blamed outsiders from other towns and cities in the North, opportunists creating mayhem so they could both establish and conceal their criminal activities behind a smokescreen.

I told Paul, who was there for the Mirror, that I believed the Pakistani community in Bradford would ensure there was no repeat of such behaviour.

It had a profoundly negative effect on the local economy and saw dozens of young men handed long prison sentences. It also, of course, sparked a rise in racist speech and behaviour.

But Bradford's communities, politicians

and local media worked together to bring a calm after the storm.

And so it came to pass. For nearly 20 years, there has been no repeat of such violence in the city.

But something serious has changed in Bradford – and I am sure many other places in the country – since Brexit started to dominate our politics.

It is now far more likely you will hear people in public openly spouting racist views.

The far-right, including Nigel Farage with his poster of thousands of refugees supposedly heading to a “soft-touch” Britain, have for years been tirelessly working to legitimise racism.

In the last couple of years I have noticed that comments which not long ago were deemed to be unacceptable have now become prevalent.

I have heard the views of people who are supposedly offended that there are no longer “golliwogs” on jam jars and that halal meat is served in Bradford's schools.

Granted, these are people who voted Brexit because they didn't like Pakistanis (I know!) and who hate Islam with the same intensity that led to mass burnings at the stake during the Reformation.

Local pubs now have a newly discovered resource – people who know all about making deals, the economic implications of leaving the customs union and the Irish backstop.



**FOR
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Their number includes a good handful of amateur theologians whose extensive study of the Sun and the Daily Mail has led them to conclude that all Muslims are religiously instructed to commit violence against non-Muslims (I know!).

The only time these people shut up about bringing back “golliwogs” is when there are actually black people in the room.

And their anti-Muslim rhetoric seems to fail them when they get their takeaway delivered (or their taxi home driven) by a Muslim.

The question is, are racists merely expressing an integral part of human nature which political correctness has outrageously suppressed?

Or are they simply dizzy with the thrill of thinking they have been liberated to spout whatever racist bile they feel like sharing – in public or on social media – like kids who are trying out new swear words they have learned?

The mind-boggling tragedy of the Nazi's Holocaust has not enlightened today's right-wingers. As we know, some deny it even happened, despite all the evidence.

Racism is always generated by those at the top of the political and economic pile. We all need, urgently, to replace them with decent human beings. ■



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

Mirror political columnist

Just a few random thoughts...

We've read far too much about Brexit and Jacob Rees-Mogg and his demented chums in Westminster. Whatever the outcome of Theresa May's self-made crisis, they'll never be able to take the timeless beauty of Yorkshire away from us. Let's forget the B word and go out and enjoy our countryside

“
NOWHERE
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COUNTY
IS FAR
FROM
BEAUTIFUL
SCENERY

WELCOME to the only column this side of Whitby that doesn't mention Brexit. Except that once...to get it out of the way.

There's more to life than Jacob Rees-Mogg and his demented pals at Westminster.

Thankfully, it's Spring again and I can get out into the allotment without a nor-wester scything through my padded gardening shirt, the one that makes me look like a phoney lumberjack.

April in Yorkshire is a godsend, not the cruellest month of the poet's sad imagination. The frosts have gone, the mercury is creeping up the thermometer and curlews are loud in the meadows.

Though I came from a pits 'n railways town, I lived most of my life in London, far from the roadside daffodils and the lambs in the fields that confirm this is a priceless place and a precious time to be in it.

Yorkshire regularly figures in the top ten places to live in the UK. Mainly, they talk about the rural areas, but you don't have to live in them to enjoy them. Nowhere in the county is far from beautiful scenery.

In less than an hour, you can be in the Peaks from

Sheffield, the Dales from Leeds or Bradford, the Wolds from York, the Pennines from Huddersfield and nature areas like the rejuvenated Dearne Valley near Barnsley. Even the muck heaps (coal tips, to southerners) have been given new life as country parks.

If you really have to get behind the wheel, the Dales road over the top from Hawes to Muker via the Buttertubs Pass was recently named the most scenic drive in England.

Personally, I'd go for Skipton to Hawes via wonderful Wharfedale, through JB Priestley's favourite hamlet, Hubberholme stopping at his favourite pub, the George.

This is the highest road in the county, through Langstrothdale and over Fleet Moss, reaching an altitude of 602 metres – 1,975 ft in old money – amid the windiest, wildest scenery.

The route is described as “a beast from either side” by cyclists. I did it once, aged 40. But I had to get off a couple of times, and Mrs R brought my mortal remains back in the car, with the bike on the roof-rack.

Just a few random thoughts to take our minds off the B-word. Whatever the outcome of Mrs May's self-made political crisis, they'll never be able to take all this away.

THIRD CLASS

To save money, it is announced, there will be fewer trains than planned on the £56 billion HS2 high-speed rail line from London to the North. And they will be slower.

What's more, when they finally arrive in Leeds, well into the reign of King George VII, they will be drawn by white elephants.

IT'S A CRIME

The Daily Mirror, for which I also write, is campaigning against the scandal of homelessness.

I had to go down to Nottingham to see what it's like there, and believe me I was shocked. Shop doorways all the way round the central Market Square full of men and women sleeping rough.

We found a similar picture in Leeds, Newcastle, Bolton, London and cities all over the country.

It really is a crisis. The official figure of 4,600 rough sleepers, and the government's claim that numbers are falling, are clearly false. To the familiar litany of lost jobs and homes, partnership breakdown and mental illness must now be added the impact of Universal Credit.

Lisa, a 42 year old woman dossing in a doorway with her



pal Naomi, blamed “changes in benefits” for her plight. She once had a lovely home and a job as a hairdresser. Now she endures freezing nights in a sleeping bag.

Of all the crimes the Tories have committed in the last decade, this austerity hit on the homeless ranks about the highest.

THIS BEER'S FLAT!

Archaeologists led by a Dr Sherlock (I'm not making this up), working on a road widening site near Cambridge have found evidence of beer dating back to 400 BC.

I think the head had gone off it, but the Iron Age brew pre-dates native ale called curmi, which the Romans found when they invaded Britain.

Irn Bru, the Scots version of Tizer, came much later, but we needn't concern ourselves with that.

VOTES AT 14

Sir Patrick Stewart, arguably Yorkshire's greatest living actor, thinks that 14-year-olds should have the vote.

He was speaking at a screening of his latest film, *The Kid Who Would Be King*, not on the set of *Star Trek*.

This would be an advance on Labour's policy of votes for 16-18 year olds. But why stop there? Why not twelve, or ten, which is the age of criminal responsibility?

Surely the first objective ought to be making the

current crop of MPs behave like adults, instead of spending all their time in the Commons on their smartphones and tablets.

POLICE STATE

An independent inquiry into the policing of the 1984/5 miners' strike in Scotland is about to make its first report.

Scottish Labour is demanding pardons for “political convictions” of hundreds of mineworkers, most of whom were sacked

If – or when – we get a One Yorkshire Mayor, equivalent of a First Minister (our county has a greater population than Scotland) I hope he or she will set up a similar investigation, as proposed by the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign.

The Tories ratted on their half-promise to hold an inquiry, and if the government won't do it, let's do it ourselves.

I still meet some of the old miners from Frickley colliery, near Pontefract, every month. Their experience of living in a police state during the strike deserves a public hearing.

BURNING INJUSTICE

On the steps of Ten Downing Street, Theresa May made a post-election pledge to fight “burning injustice” in society.

What are the facts?

- Hospital admissions for malnutrition up by 54 per cent since 2010
- Scarlet fever cases rocketing by 208 per cent to 1,321

- Whooping cough up 28 per cent to 282 cases

Modern medicine in the NHS is supposed to have virtually eradicated these Victorian diseases, but they're coming back.

SCAM SCUPPERED

In the last issue of *Active* I reported on UNISON's campaign to halt the bid by NHS managers to set up employment companies for staff.

This “internal outsourcing” at hospitals in Yorkshire was stopped in its tracks by a firm union strategy, including successful strike ballots.

So the current score is: UNISON 1, NHS privateers 0. But you can bet they will be back.

TENDER BEHINDS

Too much soft toilet paper and too many baby wipes were blamed for a fatberg the length of Nelson's Column in Harrogate's sewers.

Either they're a right mucky lot or they have very tender behinds in the posh spa town.

DON'T DO IT IN DONNY

A Romanian bowel surgeon who swore at his patients and nurses in Scarborough General Hospital was suspended for nine months.

He's now working in Doncaster, where he should mind his Ps and Qs, or Donny folk will give it back twice over. ■

FAIL AND PROSPER

David Cameron (remember him?) admits to paying £50 or more for a haircut. Judging by his greasy Barnet, he also has shares in a Brylcreem oil-well.

His sidekick George Osborne, who once claimed “we're all in this together” has just bought a £3 million chalet in the “upmarket” Swiss Alpine resort of Verbier.

He'll be a neighbour of Sir Richard Branson and the Duke of York and his ex-wife Sarah, who coughed up £13 million for a pad in Verbier in 2015.

They can all quaff champers in the resort's pub, the Big Ben. Amazing, how the rewards for political failure get better all the time.

ARE YOU AT RISK?

Are you exposed to dangerous chemicals or dust at work? Your employer has a legal duty to protect you, says senior Leeds-based Thompsons' lawyer **Paul Shevlin**

Thousands of workers are made ill by hazardous substances every year. Often, this is because employers have failed to take basic steps to prevent or control their employees' exposure to harm.

According to government statistics, 13,000 people die each year from exposure to chemicals and dust at work. Many of these deaths would have been prevented by a robust health and safety culture.

Your employer has a legal duty of care for your health and safety and that of your co-workers. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002 outline how employers should assess risks and the measures they should have in place to limit employees' exposure.

The regulations require employers to control substances hazardous to health and makes them responsible for providing a safe workplace as well as putting procedures in place to prevent or, where that isn't possible, to control workers' exposure

Before workers carry out

any jobs involving hazardous substances, employers must complete a COSHH risk assessment to determine what they should do to protect their employees.

Substances that require an assessment include, but are not limited to, dust, fumes, oils, glues, disinfectants and even biological agents such as mould, fungi or sewage.

As part of the COSHH assessment, employers should:

- Identify all hazardous substances
- Decide who may be at risk and consider how likely it is that their health will be affected
- Evaluate limiting the amount of exposure or using a safer substitute
- Plan and organise the workplace so that hazardous substances are safely stored away and waste is disposed of properly
- Review and frequently monitor the level of exposure to substances at work

If you are concerned about substances used at work or that you come across in your work, you should ask yourself these questions:

Has my employer ever provided me with any health and safety training?

Does my employer carry out regular health and safety risk assessments?

If the answer is no to either, then you or your UNISON representative should speak to your employer immediately seeking the information and training you need to stay safe.

Thompsons Solicitors has compiled a toolkit for employers and employees to share in their workplaces. Our 'Under the COSHH' toolkit is designed to make workers aware of the hazardous substances associated with their work, and provide advice on how to prevent ill-health and minimise the risk of accidents. ■

■ You can find the toolkit at www.thompsonstradeunion.law/news/campaigns/under-the-coshh

HOW TO CLAIM

If you or a loved one has suffered an illness as a result of exposure to hazardous substances at work, you may be able to make a claim for compensation. Contact our specialist team today for free legal advice on 0800 0224 224.



HAS YOUR EMPLOYER EVER PROVIDED YOU WITH ANY HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING?



Paul Shevlin

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