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UNISON ACTIVE!

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UNISON
the public service union

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A selection of 2015
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WED

Collection times
Labour Conference 2015

Day	Time
Sunday 27th September	No Collection
Monday 28th September	17:30hrs
Tuesday 29th September	17:30hrs
Wednesday 30th September	14:30hrs

Postage Mail

POST IT!

**NEW PRESIDENT WENDY URGES
MEMBERS TO VOTE IN GENERAL
SECRETARY POLL P5**

WENDY'S A WINNER P10



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**UNISON**
the public service union

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Dave Prentis

Regional Secretary

John Cafferty

**President and
Regional Convenor**

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

ASSAULT ON THE POOR

No-one willingly loses a day's pay, but sometimes when every attempt to solve a dispute has failed, there is no choice but to take strike action.

The Prime Minister told the Conservative party conference he wants an 'all-out assault on poverty'. Strange talk from a government whose tax credit cuts, due to hit low and middle income households next April, will see working families lose as much as £3,000 a year.

Days out for the children, a birthday treat, a new school uniform, the weekly shopping bill, rent or mortgage payments – all involve difficult choices for parents.

It'll mean more on credit cards, or going cap

in hand to relatives just to make it through the month.

At worst, some will have to swallow their pride and visit the local food bank, or take their chances with the neighbourhood loan shark.

Yorkshire and Humberside has the third largest number of families affected.

More than a quarter of a million working households will fall victim to the cuts as the Treasury snatches back millions from them.

This Government is so out of touch it doesn't have a clue how hard life is already for parents. Ministers are punishing ordinary working people. But they should be wary.

MPs Boris Johnson, David Davis and Guto Bebb have already sounded the alarm bell over tax credits. Their colleagues on the backbenches with small majorities will start to feel the pressure as more and more families visit their surgeries.

Two MPs in Yorkshire were elected with majorities smaller than the number of their constituents who will inevitably lose out to the great tax credits smash and grab. Write to them and watch how quickly Andrea Jenkins (Morley & Outwood) and Kris Hopkins (Keighley) realise the error of their ways.

**WENDY
NICHOLS
NATIONAL
PRESIDENT***W. Nichols*

Our spirit will see us through

The massive show of strength at the Tory Conference in Manchester made it clear to all that unions are a force to be reckoned with.

Once again, tens of thousands of ordinary working people and their families showed how effective mass peaceful protests can be.

There is no other organisation in the country that could have gathered and organised so many people like the TUC did on that day in Manchester.

That is why the Tory Government's Trade Union Bill has been drafted and why they are hell-bent on forcing it into law – they fear us.

They fear our ability to expose their lies and fabrications and they fear our pursuit of justice and fairness in the workplace.

We know from our own families and communities that cuts in tax credits will hit millions of people and their children. Again, this will have the same negative effect on local economies that massive cuts to public services have already caused.

Meanwhile millions struggle by on zero hours contracts and public sector pay remains frozen for years. And then in later life they will have to survive on a state pension which is among the lowest in Europe.

The great spirit of unity and solidarity we saw in Manchester will see us through the battles that lie ahead.



THANK YOU!



Image: NotarYES / Shutterstock

Dear Mr Prentis,
On the morning of March 19 I was told by a consultant that I was suffering from asbestosis. On returning home my wife and I decided I should contact the Kirklees branch office of UNISON (of which I am a retired member) having been a full member of both UNISON and Nalgo over many years.

Later that day I contacted the UNISON office and within minutes was connected to someone who took details and said that before the close of the working day I would be contacted by a solicitor from Thompsons in Leeds. I was interviewed by Ms Marion Voss at my home on April 1. We had a lengthy discussion and prepared application forms for an industrial injuries benefit and compensation. I was duly called for an assessment on June 12 and I now receive a weekly benefit and an amount of compensation. We are now taking a compensation claim against my employer Kirklees council.

I am writing to thank you for the excellent treatment I have received from UNISON and Thompsons. Ms Marion Voss merits our plaudits and is a constant source of support.

Unions are often portrayed as disruptive bodies. In my case I can only see them as bringers of comfort and help at a time when my wife and I were at a very low ebb.

Yours sincerely,

C. Robert Scarfe, Liversedge, West Yorkshire

Reply from Dave Prentis:

Thank you for your letter. I am grateful for your expression of appreciation for UNISON and Thompsons Solicitors.

I appreciate you taking the time and trouble to write to me during what must be a very difficult time for you. I sincerely hope your health improves.

Best wishes,
Dave Prentis

Smokescreens and con-tricks

UNISON president Wendy Nichols accused the Government of using 'smokescreens and con-tricks' to deflect attention away from the real pensions crisis.

Speaking at TUC Congress she called for state pensions set above the poverty level, with annual increases, and a campaign for universal access to decent occupational pensions. She warned delegates that far from giving more choice for workers, the Government's plans were 'bad news'.

She said: "The choice to take cash at retirement is not the answer. Annuity rates could become worse as a result for those who want income instead of cash.

"The cure to the problem of inadequate savings is to make annuity rates more affordable and good value for money, so workers have a decent retirement income." She also urged delegates not to be fooled by the Government's claim that everyone retiring after next April would get the new single state pension of £150 a week. Wendy revealed that the DWP admitted that less than half of those retiring would get that amount.

Wendy Nichols



Post you can't afford to ignore

Regional secretary John Cafferty urged UNISON members in Yorkshire and Humberside to use their votes in the election for a new general secretary.

"This election comes at a critical time for UNISON. We are faced with even deeper cuts and a Government determined to push through the most repressive trade union legislation in the Western World.

"The union must have strong leadership at such a time and I urge all members to cast their votes so that the elected general secretary has the strongest possible mandate."

John pointed out that by the time this magazine is published, members would have received ballot papers by post.

UNISON president Wendy Nichols said:



Image: imanolqs / Shutterstock

"This is a piece of mail no-one can afford to ignore. This is a vital election at a vital time," she said.

At the time of going to press the candidates were branch secretaries Roger Bannister of Knowsley; John Burgess of Barnet; Hayley Garner of

Southampton, general secretary Dave Prentis and national secretary Heather Wakefield.

The ballot runs from November 9 to December 4 and the result will be announced on December 17. All members, including retired members (but not

honorary members) who were on the union's membership register on August 9, will be entitled to vote.

● Any queries about the election should be directed to the Member Liaison Unit at the UNISON centre. Email: elections@unison.co.uk Tel: 020 7121 5399

We need more NHS fraud investigators, says Ray

UNISON is leading the campaign against fraud in the NHS, calling for more resources to prevent the misuse of trust budgets.

Regional organiser Ray Gray alerted NHS Protect (formerly the NHS Fraud Team) to the activities of the former chief executive of Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals Trust.

Ray said: "We received

a leaked report from accountants KPMG which raised concerns about proper accountability for salaries and bonuses.

"The former chief executive appointed a staff member on £60,000 a year, but her salary more than doubled to £140,000 in less than a year.

"The trust also had a director of HR who was

given £13,000 for moving house, but she never actually moved.

"When this was pointed out, she agreed to return the payment. That is just one example of what happens when there is insufficient independent scrutiny of how public money is spent."

Ray is calling for an

increase in the number of fraud investigators which could save millions of pounds desperately needed for patient care.

And he added that chief executives and trust members had nothing to fear from increased scrutiny: "If they have done nothing wrong they have nothing to worry about."

POWER OF AN IMAGE

Mary Maguire on the heart-rending photograph of a three-year-old child washed up on a Turkish beach which spurred governments into action

Snappers can be very irritating. If you're famous, they'll dog your steps until they get that picture that makes you look really daft. Ask Ed Miliband. Ask Jeremy Corbyn.

Editors love pictures. They can reduce a callous cad to a clueless clown in a nano-second. Or reduce the pompous politician to a pathetic twerp. Ask David Cameron, who became a figure of fun over allegations in a new biography. Written by Tory donor Lord Ashcroft and journalist Isabel Oakeshott, it contained allegations that gave rise to 'piggate'.

The fall-out was sensational. It created a twitter-storm that allowed editors to run the story. And gave rise to legions of ham-fisted jokes and photo-shopped pictures. One such was Corbyn facing Cameron and quipping: "I thought it was safer to keep my mouth closed than open it to sing."

Yorkshire, of course, sensibly played the whole furore down with this typical response: "Dewsbury Tories vow pig race night will go ahead despite piggate" (Huddersfield Examiner).

A really good picture can change public opinion in a flash. And, sometimes, force Governments to act. It can tug at the emotions. And end up driving the agenda.

“
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”



Mary Maguire,
UNISON's former
head of press
and broadcasting

A graphic picture of a dead child washed up on a Turkish beach did just that. It woke up the world. Aylan Kurdi, aged three, died, along with his brother Galip, five and mother Rehan, 35, when their boat capsized as they fled war and brutality in Syria.

That picture shown in every newspaper and on every TV channel changed the way the British media reported the desperate mass exodus from Syria. It forced governments to act. Before, there was snarling British disdain of the 'migrants' – with footage of the young and fit being caged, kept back, ruining British holidaymakers' Euro trips by scrambling on the top of Eurostars to get to our shores.

But that shocking picture changed everything.

DONATIONS

Spontaneous protests broke out all over Europe, including in the UK, with people brandishing placards saying 'refugees welcome'.

Yorkshire TV's Calendar news reported on the hundreds who had gathered in Sheffield to hear how to help refugees. And the Hull Daily Mail asked: "As we celebrate Freedom in Hull, can we do more to help?"

It was reporting on the Hull Freedom Festival where a rally of support was held. It asked readers to drop off donations

at the local UNISON building.

David Cameron was made to look cold and hard-hearted and was forced into pledging to take 'thousands more refugees' following 'intense pressure to act' (Harrogate Advertiser).

Councils in Yorkshire, as in other parts of the country, pledged safe havens for refugees escaping 'devastating horror with the terrible human tragedy escalating as a result of the conflict in Syria' (Yorkshire Post).

The Sun's volte-face was the most marked. It launched a 'crisis' campaign for Aylan. Its columnist Katie Hopkins, was silenced. It was Hopkins who had penned: "rescue boats? I would use gunboats to stop migrants." She had described them as 'cockroaches'.

The distressing photograph prompted debate about editors' decisions to publish. And the Guardian felt obliged to justify its decision to publish such a 'brutally arresting image' of a child unspiculated, as there was a 'strong public interest justification'.

Whatever you think, that powerful image stands along with those of a naked child running from a napalm attack in Vietnam, and the concentration camp survivors, as scenes that shocked the world and spurred leaders into action. ■

WORTH FIGHTING FOR?



DON'T LET THEM BREAK IT UP

The NHS is facing threats more serious than at any time in its history.

Services and jobs are threatened, with some employers using the economy as an excuse to attack staff pay, terms and conditions. This has an impact on patients. UNISON believes that patients come before money. Our priority is to make sure that the NHS is safe for patients and staff.



FIGHT TO THE FINISH

Active! reporter **Ryan Fletcher** meets UNISON member Jason Liversidge, an extraordinary man who is determined to live life to the full with his family despite two devastating diseases

▲ Above: Jason at home in Rise with his family

Another day, another challenge to be overcome for the Liversidge family. UNISON members Jason and Liz are sat round the kitchen table at their home in Rise, East Yorkshire, organising travel insurance on the phone. The brokers are disrupting the family's plans to visit Disney World. Jason has both motor neurone disease (MND) and Fabry disease so they won't insure him. Undeterred they set off thinking about ways to solve the problem. One of Jason's most treasured childhood memories is going

to Disney World with his parents and sister. He is determined that three-year-old Lilly and two-year-old Poppy will have the same experience with him and Liz. Because MND is a horrific and terminal condition, this is literally a once in a life time opportunity for the Liversidge family.

SUPPORT

Jason, 39, is a rare type. He was diagnosed with Fabry - a genetic condition which affects one in 117,000 - in November 2012 while working for Hull City Council. In August 2013 he

was also diagnosed with MND, which affects around 5000 people in the UK. The couple were told his was the only documented case of both diseases occurring together.

The conditions are not what makes Jason rare, however - it's the man himself. Although the former super-bike rider and skier is increasingly debilitated, he is ploughing on. Jason has raised funds for the MND Association and provides support to other sufferers who are struggling to come to terms with the condition. He has even maintained a sense

of humour - asking if someone could pop in the Hull UNISON office and pay his outstanding dues!

"If you gave me an automatic quad-bike now, I'd be off. You have to deal with it and enjoy what you can. I'm still the same person I always was. I'd like to think anyone in my position would do the same. The girls are a reason to carry on. I could sit there and get frustrated but there's no point. I have to make the most of what I can do now," Jason said.

DEVASTATED

Jason says without social worker Liz's unfailing strength things would be much more difficult.

Tragically, because Fabry disease is passed onto girls through their father's genes, both Lilly and Poppy have the life-limiting illness.

"They rang to tell us Jason had Fabry while we were at the hospital for Poppy's 20 week scan. When we had the scan and realised we were having another girl, it should have been a happy time. But I just cried. We were absolutely devastated because we realised that they both had it," 42-year-old Liz explained.

Family life is divided between doctors appointments for the kids and Jason, dealing with the increasingly devastating onset of MND, fund-raising and enjoying the precious time Jason has left. As if things weren't difficult enough there's been delays and negotiations with the NHS over obtaining a specialist 'neuro' wheelchair



I HAVE TO
MAKE THE
MOST OF
WHAT I
CAN DO
NOW



and other equipment for Jason.

"You come across these obstacles all the time. You don't know they exist until you're in that situation. You're supposed to get these neuro chairs in 48 hours and you're waiting months. It's all about cuts and funding and budgets, but people who are terminally ill don't have time to wait," said Liz.

When Liz applied for an East Riding Council disability grant to modify the house, another set of problems sprang up. The family were informed that the building work would cost £55,000 and there was only £30,000 available. They were faced with finding the extra £25,000 or moving out.

Fortunately, after hearing about their dilemma, an occupational therapist from Dove House Hospice applied to the BBC programme DIY SOS, who came and did the work for free earlier this year. After the show was aired in June, the family received a handwritten letter from Prince William offering his best wishes and saying he was touched by their situation.

SOUNDBITES

"All sorts of people have helped us. Our UNISON branch donated loads of raffle prizes for a fund raising event we did." Liz said.

Another small mercy came in the form of a new technology that will allow Jason to use his own voice to communicate, when MND removes his ability to speak.

In June, Jason travelled to a

clinic in Edinburgh, which is pioneering a new voice banking project, in order to record 400 sentences and phrases. Specialists are using the recordings to reconstruct his voice, by blending the soundbites with others from a person who has a similar dialect. When his speech deteriorates, Jason will be able to talk to his family in his own voice, using a specialised Tobii computer tablet that can register his eye movements. "A lot of phrases were quite random and didn't make any sense. Some of them were ridiculous. It's designed that way to get you to say certain sounds. It's going to help other people in the future," Jason said.

While they still have the time, the family are focused on building memories and enjoying activities together, even as their cruel situation gets in the way. ■

● To donate visit:
www.makingmemories.life

Jason's Challenges

Motor Neurone Disease is a rare rapidly progressing illness affecting the nervous system. It causes muscle wasting, severe disability and death. Sufferers are unable to move, speak, swallow and eventually unable to breathe. Life expectancy ranges from 2-5 years after diagnosis, but half die within 14 months. There is no effective treatment or cure. Fabry disease is a rare life-limiting genetic disorder which can cause renal failure, cardiac arrest and stroke. Treatments are available to ease the condition but there is no cure.



WENDY'S A WINNER

Mary Maguire interviews friend and comrade Wendy Nichols who has been elected as UNISON president in addition to her demanding job as the region's convenor

She's tough, she's gritty, she calls a spade a spade and you wouldn't want to cross swords with her, because you wouldn't win. She's Wendy Nichols, North Yorkshire branch

▲ Above: Wendy and her family

secretary, regional convenor, NEC member and now president of UNISON – the highest lay position in the union.

A familiar figure to the labour and union movement in Yorkshire and Humberside

and nationally, Wendy is and will be a great champion of UNISON and its members. I've known Wendy for the best part of 20 years and if I were in a fight, I would want her in my corner.

I caught up with Wendy at the TUC Congress in Brighton where she was leading the union's delegation and speaking in the debate calling for better pension provision.

She told me that one of her first acts as president was to authorise strike action in London and Eastern region. Normally this is done by the industrial action committee, but the new committee membership had not yet been allocated.

REWARDING

"It's a huge responsibility", she said "and a huge honour. I never thought when I became a UNISON steward all those years ago that I would end up as President."

Amongst the great variety of duties of a UNISON president, is supporting and representing the union at conferences and public events.

Wendy told me one of the most rewarding events she attended in the first few weeks was the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in Ennis, County Clare. She joined our Northern Ireland delegation – the first UNISON president in 15 years to do so. She said: "It gave me a much better understanding of the issues facing our brothers and sisters on the island of Ireland and I was proud to be part of our delegation".

And it gave her great

satisfaction to choose as her presidential charity the Bijilo School project in the Gambia. "The president's charity is a great tradition", says Wendy, "and it usually raises between £10,000 and £15,000 throughout the year.

"I thought long and hard about which charity to support and I felt it right to reach out across the world to help children get a better start in life. Our region has been raising funds for this school for a number of years. The project is run by Jim Bell, regional organiser who led the CareUK dispute.

"We've helped provide toilet blocks, cleaner kitchens and helped the kids to grow their own vegetables. It's such a success that the school is now too small for the number of pupils and needs funds to expand."

Wendy talks, too, of the need to combat racism and xenophobia in our country and push people to become more 'humanitarian'. As she says: "How can anyone turn the other way, when you see the desperate plight of refugees fleeing war and persecution?"

INVOLVED

At home, Wendy is in no doubt about the huge challenges facing the union - she is the first UNISON president to have to deal with a majority Tory Government since 1996.

"We have to defeat the trade union bill - it's the biggest threat yet to our union and the movement. Running with that, we have to do our utmost to retain our members, to



MY MUM,
MY DAD
AND MY
HUSBAND
KEITH
WOULD ALL
HAVE BEEN
SO PROUD
OF ME



protect and defend them. I see my role as bringing the membership together, getting more of our members involved in the union and encouraging a better turn-out in ballots.

"Our first important ballot is the election of our general secretary. We need to show the Government that we can have high turn-outs, so I am encouraging everyone to vote, to have their say".

Wendy believes in partnership working, whether with staff, with other unions or the wider labour movement. With a new Labour leader elected, there's a job to be done:

"UNISON Labour Link nominated Jeremy Corbyn, and his resounding victory shows just how popular his policies are. He is someone we can work with. The people of this country need and deserve a Labour Government. I want to see the Labour party effective and active, to show people what a Government should be doing for our members and the communities we serve".

Wendy's determination shines through in everything she does, but there is compassion, too, underneath that tough exterior. And that comes from her own personal tragedies and her family history with its strong trade union ethos.

Her election as president of the union is a continuation of her mum's journey who was an NEC member in NUPE, one of UNISON's founding unions. Wendy says her mum helped forge a path for other women to become involved in the

union. She adds:

"My mum, my dad and my husband Keith would all have been so proud of me. My mum in particular would have been chuffed that I'm at the top of a union that has put women at its heart; where many senior positions are held by women. And where women are driving policy."

Wendy relishes the challenges which are 'full-on'. She says: "It's intense, but my branch and the region do remain a priority. There's not much work/life balance at the moment, but I'm lucky, my children and grandchildren are incredibly proud and supportive of everything I do." ■

Curriculum Vitae

Union posts:

- 1984 - 94 Steward DJCC rep
- 1994 Member of the regional committee in the newly merged union (UNISON)
- 1996 Regional treasurer
- 1998 Regional convenor - to present
- 2009 Member of UNISON NEC - to present
- 2013 Elected vice president of UNISON
- 2015 Elected president of UNISON

Political posts:

- 1999 Member of Selby district council - to present
- 1999 Member of Selby town council - to present
- 2011 Mayor of Selby
- 2011 Member of Labour Party NEC - to present





Image: Mark Harvey

SO MUCH AT STAKE FOR THE YOUNG

Activist Robert Barker has been through the mill and knows at first hand the huge problems facing young UNISON members. **Anne Mitchell** hears his story

Robert Barker learnt the hard way about the difficulties facing so many young people in Yorkshire and across the country. At 25 Robert, co-convenor of the region's young members' forum, has had more than his fair share of trouble finding a secure job and a place to live.

Born and bred in Sheffield, Robert's dreams of working in sport did not last long. A keen Sheffield United fan and a cricketer, he is matter of fact when talking about this early disappointment: "I went to Hillsborough College in Sheffield and took sports studies. When I finished at 18

“ I REALISED AT AN EARLY AGE HOW RUTHLESS THE PRIVATE SECTOR COULD BE ”

I wanted to be a PE teacher or trainer, but it didn't work out too well – there were no jobs and I had to change direction.”

That change led to an apprenticeship with Outokumpu – a company making specialist steel products in Sheffield. “I realised at an early age how ruthless the private sector could be. I was looking after the machinery, cleaning and fixing it. I was in Unite at the time but I was made redundant along with 50 other workers. In total more than 200 people went on to lose their jobs and the work went to Sweden – it was cruel.”

With job opportunities thin on the ground, Robert joined

an agency. He found work back in industry driving heavy machinery, fork lift trucks and diggers. “With my qualifications there weren't many options but the company kept saying I would get a permanent contract. After nearly two years, they said they didn't need me anymore and that was it. They got another agency worker in – it's just use and abuse.”

ENTHUSIASTIC

Robert's breakthrough came when he got a place on an apprenticeship scheme at Sheffield City Council, but it was bitter sweet. “I was 21 – at the top end of the age limit –

and I took a massive pay cut. I took it because of the opportunities it opened up for me."

Joining Sheffield Homes - an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) - Robert says: "There were no guarantees that you would get a job at the end of it, but you could apply for any that came up. I took a BTEC Diploma in Business Administration and after a year applied for a post as tenancy management officer and got it. The work was divided into teams, each one looking at different aspects of day-to-day issues facing tenants such as rehousing, repairs, anti-social behaviour or rents - I had a patch of around 800 people."

It was change again when Sheffield Homes was TUPED back under Sheffield City Council. The separate teams were put back together giving tenants a 'go-to-person' for all their queries. Robert is enthusiastic about the benefits for tenants.

"I now look after 300 tenants but I deal with a whole range of issues - you get to work a lot closer with people and get to know them better. I am out of the office mostly, there is more variety and a lot more information to take on board but it's a lot better for tenants."

Robert is the first to acknowledge that the change has come at a price and jobs are being lost in the reorganisation. It was that 'management employee reduction programme' and changes to terms and conditions that spurred him into getting more involved

in the union.

"I have always been interested in politics and when I started my apprenticeship I joined UNISON. With all the changes going on I talked to my shop steward who told me that the branch young members' officer post had been vacant for three years. With so much at stake for young members I went for it and was elected."

VICIOUS

Robert is busy campaigning against Sheffield council's plans to reduce the apprenticeship wage drastically. "It used to start at the Living Wage, that was cut to the National Minimum Wage and now they want to make it the apprenticeship wage which is £3.30 an hour - no one can live on that.

"Government cuts are affecting everyone these days. Working in housing you see first-hand the impact of all the benefit cuts. It's a vicious circle for young

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I WANT TO
GET MORE
YOUNG
PEOPLE
INVOLVED
IN THE
UNION
”

people - the lack of jobs, the difficulty getting a place to live - I want to get more young people involved in the union and campaigning."

Robert is now a shop steward and has benefited from a number of UNISON training courses. "The training was great. But we need more help afterwards because when members ring with their problems it's down to you and that's tough. More mentoring and mini-workshops for young people would help, but I know that convenors have already got their hands full."

The responsibility has not put Robert off and as well as co-convenor of the regional young members' forum he is the region's representative on the national equivalent. Looking round at national delegate conference in Glasgow this year Robert says that there were fewer than 100 young members. He wants to turn that around - the union needs to inspire the next generation and he is working hard to do just that. ■

ComeAndJoinUs

UNISON has around 63,000 young members but we need more of them to be active in our union, writes area organiser Rianne Johnson

The region has a Young Members' Forum which meets four times a year to:

- Encourage recruitment, organisation and participation of young workers in the workplace
- Provide them with a powerful voice
- Give them the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in the union
- Plan and organise campaigns and discuss ideas and experiences

Each UNISON branch in the region is able to send up to five young members to the forum and we are looking for new members to be part of it. You don't have to hold any branch position or have ever been involved in UNISON before, you just need to be a UNISON member and under the age of 27. If you'd like to find out more, please contact me, Rianne Johnson on Tel. 0113 218 2330 or by dropping me an email at r.johnson@unison.co.uk

SHEILA'S GOT GUTS

Sheila Northedge had a stroke at the age of 32, open heart surgery a year later and spent much of her life hiding her Dyslexia. But the UNISON activist overcame it all. Sheila tells her inspirational story to **Ryan Fletcher**



Sheila Northedge is the kind of woman who looks trouble in the eye and gives it a whack. The 54-year-old Doncaster care home housing officer and UNISON rep believes life is about meeting challenges, even when they appear insurmountable. She's dealt with more than a few in her time, but with an attitude like Sheila's it's clear there's not much that could get the better of her.

"Life's about facing and overcoming your demons, smacking them in the face and saying get out of the way," she explains.

Sheila says much of her inspiration comes from "encouraging young people to get on - they are the future." When she speaks about Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai, who was just 12 when the Pakistani Taliban attempted

to assassinate her on a school bus in 2012 for speaking out on girls' rights, her enthusiasm is palpable.

"What a girl! What an inspiration! She is my absolute hero. The things she's achieved in her young life are astounding. The bravery and the courage is phenomenal. She'll change the world," Sheila tells me.

RECOGNITION

Now that her two children are grown up - Gemma, 32, a Department of Health business manager and 29-year-old football coach Carl, who is living with fiancé Amy and their son Jay-Lewis - Sheila is doing her bit to help further afield. She has joined the regional UNISON women's group, organises food bank donations and is pushing for more recognition of a problem she has spent most of her life hiding from

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AND SAYING
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people - dyslexia.

"I once read out in school and got absolutely laughed at. I was years behind on my reading. It was a source of shame for me, so I learned to use coping strategies - as many people with dyslexia do. I fumbled my way through jobs by being a very good communicator," Sheila said.

"But recently I thought 'why not speak out about it?' I've asked for a delivery of dyslexia awareness materials at work and begun discussing the condition with the people I come into contact with. It did make me wonder why I have had to get to this age to start being verbal about it? I shouldn't have had to wait so long."

The answers to that question contain more than just the issues surrounding dyslexia in the workplace. Since leaving school at 16

Image: Jim Varney

Sheila has often travelled a difficult road where the concerns of others come first.

Her teenage years were chaotic, as she dealt with the repercussions of both her mother's and brother's severe mental illnesses, becoming in the process a rock of support for the family. Later her son, Carl, was diagnosed with Tourettes Syndrome, which, Sheila stresses, hasn't prevented him from having a fulfilling life.

DEPRESSION

Adding to the stress, Sheila suffered a stroke at 32 and had open-heart surgery at 33. She has also undergone a hip replacement and suffers from osteoarthritis. Despite all this Sheila has worked her entire adult life.

"It's never stopped me, you've got to keep going," she says.

For years, however, it wasn't

just her strength that was granite-like. Sheila also bore her own concerns and problems in silence. Her reasoning made sense. Being steadfast means not only helping to shoulder the problems of others; it means hiding your own to reassure the people who rely on you that you're up to the job.

The trouble is when you put a wall up it tends to take over. For Sheila that manifested itself in depression. That was until she learned about the UNISON's Women's Lives course last September, which is run fortnightly over six months.

"I got to an all-time low, where the less I went out, the less I wanted to. Then the leaflet for the UNISON Women's Lives course came through the door," Sheila explained.

"I thought I'm going to do something now to get my brain back into gear. It's the best thing I ever did. It helped give me the confidence to speak out. I just found it empowering and liberating. I so much enjoyed listening to other people's ideas, thoughts and stories."

Since then Sheila, with the support of her husband, Garry, has dived into union work: becoming a rep, attending annual conference and undertaking equality and branch officer training. With her new found confidence Sheila is building on her role as a home choice officer at St Leger Homes.

In her spare hours Sheila tends her garden and enjoys spending time with her nine-year-old grandson and

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Malala Yousafzai

committed Everton fan Jay-Lewis. She also enjoys foreign forays with daughter Gemma.

"Gemma and I have been all over Europe. Travelling is my passion. We've been to Russia twice, Finland, Romania - you name it we've been. Gary and I have been all over as well on holiday. But when I go with Gemma I call it a trip," Sheila said.

It is no wonder that Sheila finds inspiration in Malala Yousafzai. In her own way, and for the people around her, Sheila has refused to be cowed by extreme odds and triumphed. ■

Sheila'sHero

Malala Yousafzai was just 12 when the Pakistani Taliban attempted to assassinate her for speaking out on behalf of women and for educational rights for girls. Malala boarded her school bus in the Swat valley area of north-west Pakistan on the afternoon of October 9, 2012. A gunman asked for her by name, then pointed a pistol at her and fired three shots. One bullet hit the left side of Yousafzai's forehead, travelled under her skin through the length of her face, and then went into her shoulder. In the days following the attack, she remained unconscious and in critical condition, but later her condition improved enough for her to be sent to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham for intensive rehabilitation. Three days after the attack, a group of 50 Islamic clerics in Pakistan issued a fatwa against those who tried to kill her, but the Taliban reiterated their intent to kill Yousafzai and her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai. Since the assassination attempt, Malala has taken her campaign all over the world and is the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate.



WE'LL FIGHT SHAMEFUL BILL

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis came to Yorkshire as part of his campaign against the Tories' spiteful and unjust Trade Union Bill. **Barrie Clement** reports

Tony Blair once boasted that Britain's laws were 'the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world'.

But this Government plans to take it much further - to the point where basic civil liberties are being destroyed. In the words of UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis: "No other walk of life in Britain is being - or ever will be - subject to the kind of suppression envisaged for the union movement."

In an interview with Active! Dave went on: "They are taking things so far, that Tory MP David Davis described

the proposed legislation as like something out of Franco's regime in Spain.

"UNISON and the rest of the labour movement are faced with one of the biggest challenges they have faced since the General Strike."

The Tories intend to increase the state's surveillance over unions by giving the police and the official Certification Officer more powers; make industrial action in many large public sector organisations virtually impossible and - with a degree of cynicism breathtaking even by the standards of the Conservative Party -

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FUNDING
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TORY PARTY
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try and deprive the Labour Party of its main source of income.

Perhaps the most authoritarian of the proposals by the Business Secretary Sajid Javid is the use of criminal law to ensure that a picket line is restricted to six people and that the union nominates and names a 'supervisor' who could face a fine - or worse - if found guilty of breaking the new law.

Javid also wants to enforce tight restrictions on the use of social media during disputes. Unions would be required to give 14 days' notice that they

14 days' notice that they intend to use Twitter, Facebook, websites and blogs during strikes. They will also have to set out what they intend to say in such postings and indicate whether they are going to use 'loudspeakers, props, banners etc' on picket lines. Unions would face unquantified fines if they infringed such regulations.

The intended laws would make it extremely difficult for UNISON's 200,000 members in the private sector to defend pay, conditions and jobs, especially at large enterprises. At least 50 per cent of the members have to take part in the ballot for a strike vote to be lawful.

REALITY

Industrial action in 'essential services' – largely in the public sector – will be even more difficult. Not only must half the membership participate in the vote, at least 40 per cent of that membership has to back any action. In other words where 50 out of 100 employees vote in a ballot, 40 of them have to back strikes. This will apply to workers in health, education, transport and local government among other sectors and therefore to some of the lowest paid workers in Britain. It will also disproportionately affect UNISON.

The reality in the vast majority of cases is that turnouts in the postal ballots dictated by existing legislation are low, especially at big employers where union members are counted in hundreds of thousands.



THIS BILL IS AN ATTACK ON THE VERY PEOPLE WHO COULD BE PART OF THE SOLUTION TO THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS



Ballot papers are often mistaken for junk mail and simply consigned to the bin. That shouldn't happen, but it does. Even if the strike ballot passes all the tests, the new law will insist that unions give employers two weeks' notice of industrial action, granting management ample time and the legal right to bring in strike-breaking agency staff – a tactic outlawed under current legislation.

DANGER

A four month time limit on industrial action will inevitably mean that strikes will be more intense and of greater duration before the mandate lapses. "Meanwhile employers might be tempted to sit on their hands until the strike vote becomes null and void," said Dave.

He went on: "While claiming that the new rules will 'democratise' industrial relations, ministers are refusing to allow unions to use a mixture of electronic voting, independently scrutinised workplace ballots in addition to postal balloting. The reason, of course, is that more modern methods would lead to higher turnouts – and that would defeat the object of the exercise which is to undermine workers' rights."

Javid also wants union members to 'opt in' to a union's political fund, rather 'opt out' as they do now.

If ministers press ahead with these plans, union donations to Labour, currently running at about £10 million a year are in danger of falling off a cliff. "Inevitably ministers do not

envisage any curbs on rich individuals funding the Tory party," said Dave.

In the public sector ministers are seeking to cut off unions' main source of income by ending 'check-off' – the arrangement by which employers deduct union subs from wages. Some 3.8 million workers pay their subscriptions by this method. They are also planning to crack down on 'facility time' which allows union reps time to represent their members – and solve problems before they become serious.

Said Dave: "These proposals are spiteful, unjust and unnecessary. They will make it much harder for nurses, teaching assistants, midwives and other public sector workers to strike for a pay rise or challenge the behaviour of bad employers. It's time for the Government to get its priorities right. This bill is an attack on the very people who could be part of the solution to the country's problems." ■

The Bill

- 50 per cent turnout needed in strike ballots
- 40 per cent must back strike in 'essential services'
- Members must 'opt in' to political levy
- Four month limit for industrial action after ballot
- Employers must be given 14 days' notice of strike
- More than six people on picket line a criminal offence
- Named union rep responsible for breaches of picketing law
- Agency staff allowed as blacklegs
- Authoritarian restrictions on use of social media



...AND IT'S ALL OURS

Former UNISON official **Philippa Clark** soaks up the atmosphere at the South Yorkshire Festival at the stately eighteenth century Wortley Hall... and not a single toff in sight!

Sun, socialism, suffragettes and a stately home owned by the workers. What more could you want in a weekend?

A sunny Saturday in August drew crowds to the annual South Yorkshire Festival at Wortley Hall. There was fun for the family, food and craft stalls sitting side by side with trade union stands, political campaigns - all to the accompaniment of live music.

Wortley, the workers' stately home, is a splendid eighteenth century building, set in stunning grounds north of Sheffield. Originally a family seat of the Barons and Earls of Wharnccliffe, it had fallen into disrepair. Visionary rank and file trade unionists saw the potential to create a peaceful place in the fresh air away from the smog and furnaces of industrial Sheffield where workers could meet, learn and discuss ideas and strategies to advance the causes of working people.

Brian Steele, UNISON convenor for Barnsley council (pictured right), is a member of the elected board which manages Wortley. It is a not-for-profit enterprise, so that all funds go to making it a great place for everyone, including staff, to enjoy. Brian was among the activists on the UNISON

stand at this year's festival collecting signatures to oppose the closure of nine out of 20 children's centres in Barnsley.

"Wortley Hall brings people together; trade unionists, political activists and campaigning groups," said Brian. "The annual festival is a fun day out and it also shows this Tory government that whatever they throw at us we are very much alive and ready to fight back."

EXPELLED

The previous evening the hall hosted the annual Sylvia Pankhurst lecture, delivered by Professor Mary Davis. The theme was Sylvia's opposition to the 1914 war. Sylvia was expelled from the Women's Social and Political Union by her mother, Emmeline and her sister Christabel because of her commitment to peace, trade union activity and working with the poor in the East End of London. Mary painted a vivid picture of Sylvia, not only as a suffragette but as a socialist fighting poverty and racism. Mary is campaigning too - to raise a statue to honour Sylvia. UNISON, as

a sponsor, is keen for branches to contribute to raising the funds necessary to raise the statue!

"Sylvia Pankhurst fought racism" said Brian. "In Barnsley UNISON members are very involved in opposing the BNP and the English Defence League who try to have a presence in our community."

"Sylvia was also the first to raise the issue of equal pay in 1915 as well as fighting for the right of women to have a voice in parliament. UNISON members are predominantly women, low paid and exploited because they are women. Sylvia, working with the women in the East End of London, living in abject poverty, is an inspirational figure for all of us, men, women, black, white and a statue is the recognition this socialist sister deserves".

Take a look at Wortley Hall on their website www.wortleyhall.org.uk. Please support The Statue for Sylvia campaign by contacting philippa.clark@yahoo.co.uk and find out more by visiting www.gn.apc.org/sylviaipankhurst. ■

● The fee for this article will go to the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, which is based at Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS



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IT'S AN EYE OPENER

Clinical support worker Saghir Ahmed got a new lease of life out of his return to learn course and now he's giving something back. **Helen Hague** reports

Earlier this year, Saghir Ahmed rang up Sheffield education department and volunteered to help primary school children in the city practice reading. He was soon volunteering for two hours a week at a school just down the road from his family home.

He'd just finished a UNISON return to learn course when he made that call. The two events are not unconnected. "I got a lot out of the course and wanted to volunteer, get involved and give something back," said Saghir. And he is keen to encourage others to get back to learning and seize the opportunities refreshing old skills and learning new ones can bring.

Saghir joined the course

after 'a random email' from the union, offering free places - proof that targeted union outreach gets results. "I thought 'I'd like to do that 'so I signed up'", he says. Before long he was reconnecting to English - 'grammar, punctuation, spelling' and brushing up on Maths and computer skills alongside eleven other return to learners.

The course gave Saghir not only 'more focus and a confidence boost' but also an insight into what unions can offer their members. He'd spent most of his working life in the motor parts industry - and never joined a union. "I thought unions were just

there as an insurance policy if something went wrong at work. But there's a lot more to it if you want to get involved. I didn't realise they ran free courses to help people reconnect with learning and get motivated to try new things."

In fact, Saghir had already shown he was more than up for learning new skills in a dramatic change

in career nearly three years ago. He switched from motor parts to a front line job in the health service, prompted by a health crisis in the family.

"It's destiny really," says Saghir, 42. "My mother went into renal failure. She was old and frail, and she hated going to hospital for the dialysis she needed three times a week."

He is now a clinical support worker at the Northern General Hospital's renal unit, which oversaw her care.

ENTHUSIAST

Saghir's late mother was brought up in Pakistan and though she's lived in Sheffield for many years, there was, he says still 'a language barrier and she really wanted to be looked after at home'.

Staff at the unit made that possible. They installed dialysis equipment at the family home, trained Saghir and his wife to use it, and 'mother could be treated where she was most comfortable'.

It was after caring for his late mother at home for three years that Saghir decided to make a career helping others with kidney problems. "If my mum had not fallen ill I'd never considered it," says Saghir.

After GCSEs he had taken a vocational diploma for his motor industry sales job and stayed there for twenty years. "You do your diploma, you get your job and can end up staying there for years, not really realising you are in a bit of a rut. It wasn't a bad job and the

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company was fantastic when mother had to have dialysis three times a week. But it made me realise I was ready for a change."

"The unit was really good at encouraging patients and their carers to participate in care and take ownership of it. I can see things from the carers' perspective and feel, having looked after mother, I can help other families." He is currently studying an NVQ level three linked directly to his clinical support role.

Based on his own experience, he is also a huge enthusiast for life-long learning.

"I think we can be scared to do things as we get older. It's about taking opportunities. Looking after my mother helped focus my mind – developing new skills and turning a negative into a positive. But going on the return to learn course has made me want to take things to the next level – and get involved in volunteering outside work".

SUPPORTIVE

He thinks other UNISON members who feel they could get more out of work and life should give return to learn courses a look – men as well as women.

"When I first signed up for the course, I was the only male. The lecturer thought I wouldn't come back. It didn't really bother me.

Another bloke joined later. "

Saghir is now used to working where women predominate – they far outnumber men on the renal unit. "It's a shame more men don't sign up for return to learn courses. It was a real eye opener for me, everybody was very supportive and it was good to meet people who do different jobs." On the residential weekend in Leeds – creative writing included – he was one of just three men.

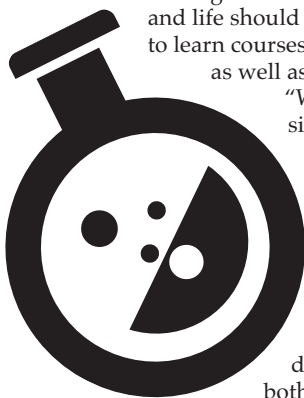
Unions are there to help members make the most of things, building on old skills and learning new ones – in and outside work. Or, as Saghir put it: "They are not just there in case something bad happens. There's a lot more to it if you want to get involved." It's never too late. You never know where it might lead. ■

Have-A-Go

Return to learn courses can help you:

- Develop self-confidence;
- Teach you about yourself;
- Become more active and involved around issues that concern you;
- Tackle change and uncertainty at work;
- Progress your career;
- Learn for fun and personal development.

To apply for a course contact your branch education co-ordinator or branch secretary. They can help you find the right course and deal with any accessibility concerns. The courses are free of charge.



YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET

Local authority workers in the region face huge changes as central government funding is slashed even further.

Active! editor **Barrie Clement** reports

Over the next few years local government employees in Yorkshire and Humberside will experience a dramatic transformation in their working lives.

Funds from central government are due to be cut back even further. Vital services will be axed - and the workers who deliver them cast out.

Local government will change out of all recognition and the most vulnerable people will go without the most basic services.

The arithmetic is frightening. On the basis of existing service provision, there will, be a funding gap of £9.5 billion by 2020, according to independent estimates. But it could be much larger, given the increasing needs of the community and an aging population.

Adult social care and children's services take up two-thirds of local authority budgets and will therefore bear the brunt of the cutbacks. The former caters for the elderly, the disabled and those with mental health problems and the latter with 'looked-after' children, vulnerable young people and those with special

COUNCILS WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO GENERATE THE CASH TO MEET THE NEEDS OF LOCAL PEOPLE

educational needs.

In 2010 around a half of local government budgets came from central government, largely through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). Local income came from council tax, car parking fees and other local charges.

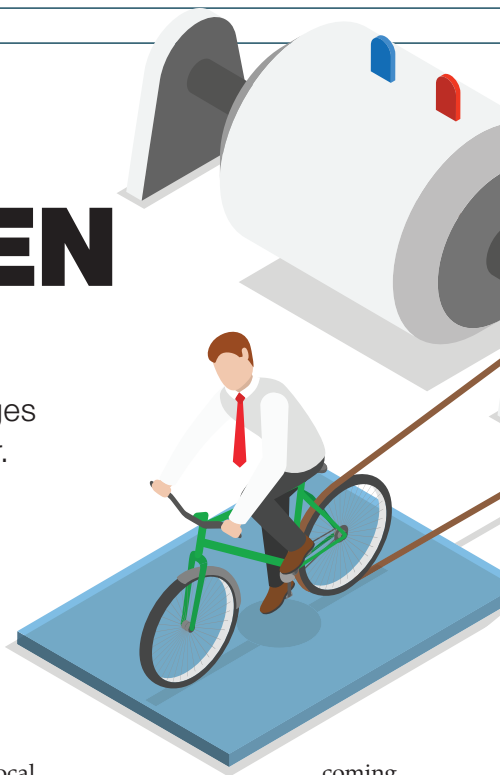
The RSG is calculated on the basis of need. It takes into account the number of disabled, the number of children receiving free school meals and so on. The higher the deprivation, the more money a council gets. Clearly under such a system Westminster would get substantially less than Barnsley.

DETERRENT

But the proportion received from central government has slumped from 50 per cent to 25 per cent.

Over the next five years that proportion will decrease further so that the amount received on the basis of deprivation will continue to shrink. Ministers would like it to disappear completely.

"The Government's emphasis will be on local councils raising their own money with little or nothing



coming directly from the Treasury," says Chris Jenkinson, UNISON's head of local government in the region.

Under the new regime authorities will keep business rates, ostensibly giving them an incentive to encourage enterprise in order to maximise revenue.

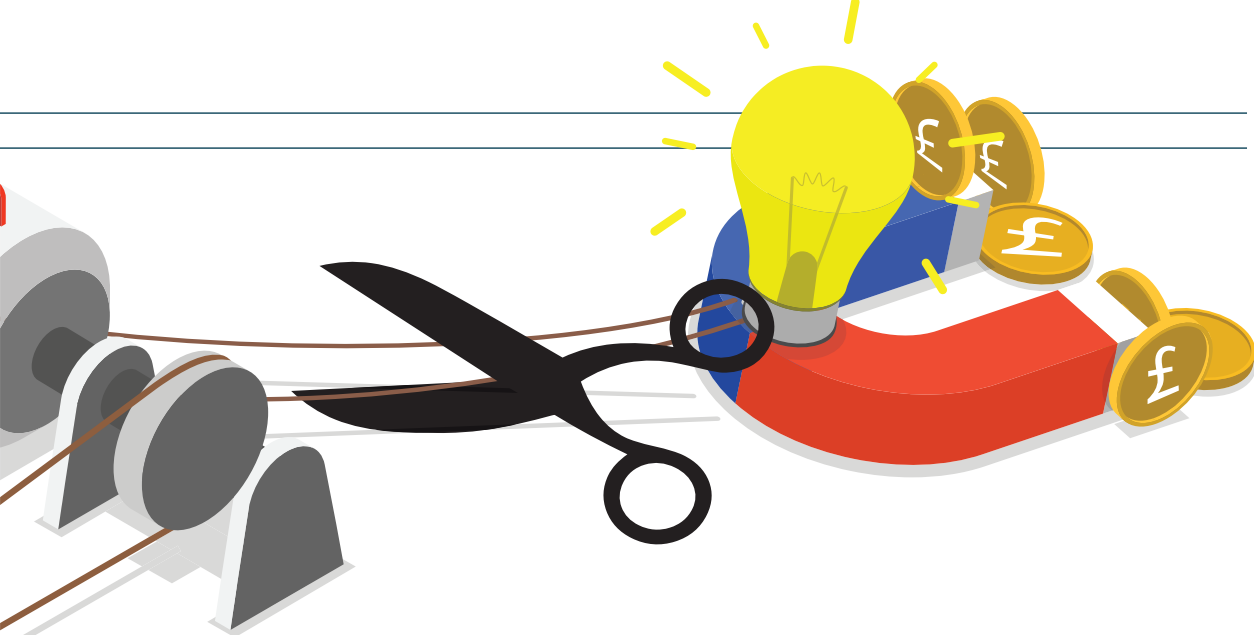
"All this sounds great, but almost all the economic development over the last 20 years has been in the South-East - and that's likely to continue," says Chris.

The massive job cuts in the public sector mean that people have far lower incomes to buy goods and services which in turn amounts to a deterrent to the creation of new enterprises. So councils won't have the increased income from business rates to make up for the shortfall in funding from central government.

"The Rotherhams, Barnsleys and Doncasters of this world are low-skilled,



Chris Jenkinson



low waged and have never been able to replace mining and heavy industry. These councils will never be able to generate the revenue streams to cope with the needs of their communities.

"Leeds and York may be able to stand on their own two feet – and Sheffield to a lesser extent – but Scunthorpe, Grimsby and Hull are never going to be able to do that. Meanwhile councils in the most prosperous areas of the South East will benefit from the retention of business rates."

The switch in emphasis has already seen increased funding per household in well-to-do suburbs like Wokingham and double digit cuts in towns like Hartlepool.

Meanwhile the private sector's involvement in the delivery of services has rocketed...but there's a lot more to come.

As we know only too well, privatisation gives rise to major questions about the quality of delivery, but it also makes a huge difference to council employees.

Pre-Thatcher local government managers were 'practitioners' such as

engineers, planners, social care specialists and so on and there was a definite promotional ladder.

SERVICES

Since the 1980s and 90s managers have increasingly been 'procurers' who don't necessarily understand the technicalities of service delivery. That trend will accelerate, says Chris.

Councils have been forced to change the way they think about services. Instead of asking the community what it might need and assessing what can be delivered; councils ask companies what they can do for a given amount of money.

Because that cash will increasingly be raised locally, councils are having to think in terms of economic 'growth corridors' rather than their local patch. For instance the M62 and the Humber, both of which span several councils, are considered to be the potential focus for economic growth. That means more collaboration between councils and increased engagement with the private sector.

Meanwhile the increased use of the internet means

that people have more contact with others with similar interests, than with people in their own localities.

A symptom of that has been the slump in turnouts at local elections, currently running at less than 30 per cent and often below 20 per cent.

Ministers are hoping to make councils more accountable through elected mayors, but increasing co-operation between local authorities and the potential for mergers to create mega councils could make local politicians even more remote.

All this presents challenges for UNISON activists, says Chris. "The union has to be the champion of local government and local government workers. The services most likely to be cut form the glue that holds our communities together. Without them everyone's quality of life suffers.

"For some it will be devastating. For many of the old and the disabled, carers and district nurses are the only people they see from one week to the next. And that could be the experience of many of us eventually. We have to keep fighting for decent services in the region." ■

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UNISON BACKS A SURE-FIRE WINNER

Fun is in short supply. There's a Tory Government; there's the Trade Union Bill that Franco would have been proud of and there's the tax credit scandal which will make millions £1,300 worse off.

UNISON will be fighting it all the way. But we also believe members should have a laugh. And that's what they did at the union's annual Doncaster raceday. It was a winner!

Photography by Louise Pollard





HE'S THE REAL DEAL



Images: Mark Thomas

Mary Maguire, who has worked closely with several Labour leaders, speaks to Jeremy Corbyn and discovers the reason for his phenomenal rise to the top job

“No-one was more surprised than me that I am now Leader of the Labour party. I joined the race to try to widen the debate and get the party to look more deeply at policy. I didn’t believe I would be a long-term contender. It is a great honour and privilege to be elected leader”.

Jeremy Corbyn was speaking to me on the eve of the Labour party conference, as I trailed him from event to event. Everywhere he went, he got a hero’s welcome.

And, having seen leaders in these situations before, he

didn’t allow himself to be handled by aides, but took his time stopping to shake hands with members or have a serious chat. Timetabling must be a real challenge for his team.

At each event, he stresses the need to reinvigorate politics, to reach out to young people, and underlines the importance of the trade unions and people’s rights at work. Typically, at the Yorkshire and Humberside evening reception, he said:

“I want to stop people falling into poverty and destitution. The Tories just don’t care. And we have a

“
I WANT
TO STOP
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INTO
POVERTY.
THE TORIES
JUST DON’T
CARE
”

fight on our hands against austerity and against the despicable attack on trade union rights.

“But we have fantastic levels of support across the country and we have seen people galvanized in the leadership campaign. I went to Bradford for a rally, but there was no hall big enough to take us so we had to take over a cricket field.”

This unlikely leader swept to power on a wave of optimism, not seen for years in the party, with a clear 60 per cent of the vote. He was the winner in all the sections and it didn’t even need to go

to a second round in the preferential voting system that the party uses.

Corbynmania took hold up and down the country. The numbers involved were - and are - phenomenal. 150,000 new members; 60,000 in the past few weeks. In Yorkshire and Humberside, membership rose from 17,000 to an amazing 32,000. Thousands more paid £3 to register as supporters, and cast their vote in the leadership ballot. His aim, now, is to get those registered supporters as fully paid-up members and increase membership to 500,000.

ATTRACTION

Young people flocked to his campaign team, sporting the by now familiar JC badges and the '#Jezwecan' t-shirts. He had 16,000 volunteers supporting him around the country. His attraction to young people who had become alienated with politics and politicians is extraordinary.

Six Labour affiliated unions nominated him, including UNISON, and he garnered support from non-affiliated unions and some socialist societies. His victory is all the more sensational because he just scraped onto the ballot paper after some MPs donated their nominations just so there could be a debate involving all shades of opinion in the party. To understand Jeremy Corbyn and his appeal, you have to understand what has happened in British politics over the past 10 years and how it has become a turn-off for many.

Reciting achievements and

policies, didn't cut much ice with those voters who said politicians were all the same.

This rebel with many causes, managed to cut through that fog and offer something different.

Many of the policies Jeremy espouses resonate with UNISON and that explains his support among the unions. A champion of public services, he wants to see an end to austerity; he wants free schools and academies to be brought back under local councils; he wants tuition fees scrapped, an end to privatisation and PFI in health and the introduction of rent controls. This is all good news for union members.

He said: "I want to create opportunities for everyone, not just the privileged few. I reject the notion that austerity is a necessary evil. More job opportunities will cut the welfare bill and increase tax receipts that will help grow the economy. That will give us the money to fund decent, quality public services".

There were a few banana skins in the first week - announcing shadow cabinet appointments one by one, leading to criticism of the number of women; pulling out of the Andrew Marr show and walking silently past a row of broadcasters seeking to interview him.

He didn't sing the national anthem, but then said he would in future and he was pictured with three young women draped around him. These things seem trivial, but can become crushing if not nipped in the bud.

The day of his election, he was pictured on most front

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”

pages wearing an outfit that most politicians wouldn't be seen dead in. I heard two young women in the street talking about the picture. "Doesn't he look daft," said one. The other said: "I don't care. I like him."

And that may well be the crux of his success. People like him. He is the genuine article. He is an uncompromising conviction politician. He isn't like the polished politicians we are used to seeing on our screens. He has declared that he will bring in a 'new kind of politics'.

Whatever you think of the Corbyn phenomenon, if we as a union could recruit and enthuse as many people in such a short space of time, we would be very happy with that. ■



Corbynmania

As a result of the Corbyn phenomenon, Labour party membership in Yorkshire and Humberside has risen from 17,000 to 32,000. Overall Labour has attracted 150,000 new members; 60,000 in the past few weeks. Thousands more paid £3 to register as supporters, and cast their vote in the leadership ballot. Jeremy's aim is to persuade those registered supporters to become fully paid-up members. With more than 350,000 members, Labour is now more than double the size of the Tories. It is a party with almost as many new members since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader as the Lib Dems have in total. Jeremy's target is to increase membership to 500,000.

PRIDE AND PASSION

Melanie Starkey is determined to challenge stereotypes. The first female and the first disabled chair of UNISON's Yorkshire gas branch, she has had to battle with a series of serious illnesses. **Christine Buckley** tells Melanie's inspirational story



Image: Jim Varney, Aberration Films Ltd

Think of the gas industry and it's most likely that a male and quite traditional picture will come to mind. Power generation, like heavy industry, has its roots in an older world of work.

But Melanie Starkey is determined to challenge such pre-conceptions.

A committed feminist and campaigner for social justice, Melanie is the first female and the first disabled chair of the union's Yorkshire gas branch. And she is proud too that the 1500-strong branch is female-

▲ Above: Singing from the same hymn sheet – Melanie (right) and colleagues

led with women filling the roles of both branch secretary and assistant secretary.

Melanie, who this year celebrates 25 years of working in the industry, is a network assistant supervisor at Northern Gas Networks, the transportation and storage business that moves gas around the north of England. And in working for her employer and for the union, it is not only pre-conceptions that Melanie has to battle with. She is also challenged by her health problems of cervical spondylosis, a condition that

causes neck and arm pain among other things, and epilepsy. Her health has curtailed some of Melanie's aspirations, particularly in education, and has necessitated much medical treatment.

RELEVANT

But she's not one to let health problems easily derail the political passions that drive her union work. Recently Melanie attended a lengthy Women's Lives course run by UNISON despite the fact she'd recently had two operations on

her arms that left her temporarily unable to write or even hold a pen properly.

Other women on the course helped her with form filling and notes. "I felt useless when I first went there. But they did everything for me. Even though they didn't know me they were quite happy to help."

Women's Lives is a ten-week course that looks at issues relevant to women; helps apply experience at work to other areas of life; and develop new skills.

Melanie's course looked at the lives of girls today; what advice you could give a 16-year-old girl; how women have changed in the last century and focused on major figures such as Emily Pankhurst. She says of the latter part: "That was my favourite section. I've always loved social history and feminism so it was brilliant."

Participants also had to interview a working woman who might inspire others. Melanie chose a female engineering supervisor at the gas network, a woman who goes out into the field to make sure the engineers (most of whom are male) are doing their jobs properly.

The supervisor, from York, was originally pushed towards a career in tourism by her school but she knew that wasn't for her. She joined British Gas through an agency, then worked in customer service and then began work in engineering. Melanie explains: "I could have spoken to the head of HR or someone similar but it's not unusual for women to be in that type of job and I wanted to highlight someone who didn't fit the norm."



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Along with the educational element of the course, many of the women shared personal stories and challenges. Some had contended with violence at home. This chimed strongly with Melanie - it was the trauma of witnessing violence at home that galvanised her early political thoughts. "It first started when I saw how badly my granddad treated my grandma. I knew I wouldn't let that happen to me."

She says of the stories that the women learners shared: "Things like that put my issues into context. I felt honoured that they could talk about it with people they didn't know."

CONFIDENCE

And she was delighted that the course really seemed to make a difference personally as well as educationally for the women with difficult issues. "Through courses like this the union does so much to help women build confidence. You could see people changing along the way. It was like they needed to get something off their mind and then after that they really blossomed."

Along with Women's Lives, Melanie says she benefited greatly from a UNISON return to learn course. She is also an avid learner through work and has completed a B-Tech in business and finance with her employer and hopes soon to do a degree in social history.

Such is Melanie's interest in social history that it flows into her free time and she and her husband Andrew, who works in gas storage, are often to be found in museums that have a strong social slant.

When they're not browsing

in museums you will probably find them aboard a cruise ship. Melanie thinks they have worked their way pretty much around the world on cruises and long-haul trips.

Back in Yorkshire and on union business, Melanie makes education a key part of the branch's work. The branch has two lay tutors and officials stress the availability of training and mentoring through the union.

The Yorkshire gas branch is fortunate that it has a good number of active stewards and good attendance. But Melanie attends union management meetings that often look at ways to invigorate branches and make them inclusive for newcomers.

At branch meetings she speaks - with a good deal of passion - about her learning and how learning through the union can help change lives for the better. ■

Women's Lives

The course is open to all members and offers a wide-ranging look at

women's issues and their place in the world and in history. It is targeted particularly at women who have been away from learning for a while. Through a regular study group, it aims to boost life and work skills with a strong emphasis on writing; investigating and research; and analysing and problem solving. It is run for UNISON by the Workers' Educational Association, a charity that is the country's biggest voluntary sector provider of adult education.



PIGS IN A POKE

Oxford graduate **Peter Carroll** casts an incredulous eye at the antics of toffs at his alma mater. But they always knew they were going to run the country



The Daily Mail's claim that the Prime Minister had engaged in an initiation ceremony at Oxford - involving a dead pig and a private member - was greeted with widespread revulsion.

But the problem is not just the unpleasantness of the image created in the popular imagination by the Mail's revelation (and as I write, no picture of the 'Piggygate' incident has been published to disgust and delight us even more).

Most of us are also surprised and shocked that exclusive upper class

drinking clubs at Oxford University even exist - and that their drunken, snobbish and often violent members can end up, as they do, running the country for their own greedy interests.

I was a student at Oxford from 1976 to 1979, at a time when the university was making serious efforts to admit more pupils from comprehensive schools.

Most of my fellow students were from public schools and wealthy families, but most of them were also broadly left-wing and liberal in their outlook. It was a time just before Margaret Thatcher came to power, when

working class students got grants, and equality and social justice were in the air.

But, all those years ago, the Bullingdon Club, the Piers Gaveston Club and, for all I know, the Hell Fire Club were roaring, and roistering their way to high political office.

One evening I was sitting in a friend's room when there was a knock on the door. In came a lanky teenager carrying a bottle of sherry and three glasses.

"I thought you two would like a small aperitif before dinner," he said.

He was called Piers. I haven't print his surname as



**Peter Carroll –
Amazed by
by posh Piers**



“
I THOUGHT,
THIS IS
THE REAL
DEAL –
A GENUINE
BERTIE
WOOSTER
CHARACTER,
AN UPPER
CLASS TWIT
”

he was involved with the army and might have me killed once he reads this.

So we drank the Tio Pepe and chatted.

“I tell you what makes me bloody furious,” said Piers. “Bloody vandals! I saw a bus shelter on the Cowley Road today which was smashed to bits and covered in graffiti.

“Sometimes when we go out, of course things can get out of hand and things can get broken, like when you build a champagne fountain and it collapses. Things like that.

“But we never leave the place without handing over a cheque to cover the damage.

That’s the correct thing to do. But these vandals have no intention of paying for the damage they do and that is totally bloody wrong.”

I thought, this is the real deal – a genuine Bertie Wooster character, a real-life caricature of an upper class wit!

I was amazed, and I have quoted his comments almost verbatim, even after all this time. I realised he genuinely did not understand that there was anything offensive in making moral judgements about young people who behaved just like him – but who didn’t have a trust fund account at Coutts Bank.

I have no doubt that Piers had taken part in weird initiation ceremonies. As well as his drinking club, Piers was also a member of the Christ Church Beaglers, a breed of hunting dog, so I’m sure he went through it on a couple of occasions.

BROTHERHOOD

The psychological impulse to create secret and exclusive societies, whose members are bound by mysterious rituals, is exemplified by the Freemasons.

To join that particular organisation, the candidate is blindfolded and then led round the room with a rope around his neck. A sword is held to his bared left breast as he makes the secret oath of loyalty to the Brotherhood, just to remind him that he is now a member, on pain of death.

These practices invariably involve pain and humiliation. Like training soldiers, the rituals strip away dignity and

self-esteem in order to replace them with a powerful sense of camaraderie and group loyalty.

It is a process of infantilising individuals, making them dependent and obedient. The aim is to create a group of people who think as one and who will always put each other’s interests above all other considerations.

And as we all know to our cost, this is a highly successful strategy.

Look at the Tory Party’s big beasts, Cameron, Osborne, Boris Johnson and the rest. All of them Bullingdon Club men who have fully expected, since they were mere boys, that they would one day run the country.

I can only think that Lord Ashcroft, who blew the gaffe on Cameron’s youthful debauchery in the rabidly Tory Daily Mail, was never in the Bullingdon Club.

If he had been, he would by now have been found hanging under Westminster Bridge with a mackerel nailed to his forehead for breaking his solemn oath of loyalty.

Already the media commentators are slowly but surely dismissing the story as an irrelevance. We were all young once, they say. Who has not done things in their youth that they would now regret? Doesn’t it just show that the Prime Minister is human and in many ways just like us?

This is a man who boasted to colleagues that he was born ‘with two silver spoons in my mouth’ and married a Baronet’s daughter. Not very like us at all. ■



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

Active! political columnist

Working poor hit by 'Orrible Ozzie

Ministers will fight tooth and nail against the European court ruling that mobile workers should be paid for travelling time. And benefit cuts are going to make millions of the working poor worse off despite the Government's so-called National Living Wage

“THE UNION HAS NEVER BEEN MORE VITAL TO THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE”

It stands to reason that mobile staff who don't have a fixed place of work should start earning as soon as they leave home for their first job of the day. This isn't your own time. You can't be doing anything for yourself. You're already doing the task set for you by the employer.

Managers don't see it like that, of course, because they want to pay as little as possible for as much profitable work as possible.

So they squealed like rats in a trap when the European Court of Justice handed down a verdict that the working day begins when mobile staff without a fixed office leave home for their first appointment, and ends when they return from their last.

This ruling should have an enormous impact on casualised spheres of employment like home carers, cleaners and other public service workers operating from home.

As UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis points out: "This case rightly demonstrates that workers must be paid for all their working time."

I say 'should' have an impact, because you can bet your life that employers and their friends in the Government will fight this ruling. It flies in the face of their demands for a totally unregulated labour market, where workers have no protection from exploitation.

Chancellor George Osborne claims that his so-called National Living Wage will sort out everybody's problems. "We are on the side of working people," he blethers.

This is a brazen lie, as even his own ministers and MPs admit. 'Orrible Ozzie's cuts to benefits for families will hit the working poor hardest from next April. The respected Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that 8.4 million working households will lose an average of £550 a year. Employers will not

make up the difference between low pay and lost benefits. And with support from the likes of Osborne they will resist the European Court award of pay for time spent travelling to appointments. They are already warning that it will cost jobs.

As if that isn't happening already! Public service workers have borne the brunt of Tory job cuts – 17,000 across councils in Yorkshire alone since Cameron got into power. The pay of those remaining has fallen, and I doubt if morale could get any lower.

Overall, public sector employment in Britain has fallen by an astronomical 381,000 since 2010, and the Government's Office of Budget Responsibility calculates that a further 800,000 jobs will go before the next election if the Chancellor sticks to his austerity programme.

The union has never been more vital to the interests of working people. That's why the Tories are bent on further anti-union legislation. It's a grim prospect, but as a famous general (so famous I can't remember his name) once remarked: "Let's see who can pound the longest."

DEEP-MINED PUDDING

As claims to fame go, Yorkshire Pudding Capital may not be up there with The Big Apple or The Eternal City (Rome, of course).

But it's better than nowt. Barnsley lays claim to this prestigious title, after the local Asda sold 80,000 last year, eight thousand ahead of the competition. That's an awful lot of pudding, not to mention gravy.

And to our credit, Yorkshire took three of the next four places: Glasshoughton, near Castleford, Killingbeck in Leeds and Rotherham. Only Boldon, Tyne and Wear, could hold a Bisto-kid jug to the Tyke record-holders. Interestingly, most of these places are





former mining communities, where the Yorkshire was always eaten before Sunday dinner to take the edge off your appetite before tucking into the roasted joint. Old habits die hard!

LOSS OF POWER

So much for the Government's so-called Northern Powerhouse. Eggborough and Knottingley power stations are to close next March, with the loss of hundreds of jobs.

Hatfield colliery, north of Doncaster, has shut, and Kellingley, the last deep-mined pit in the country, stops production next month.

The closure of these landmark industrial sites – you can see them for miles – marks the virtual end of Yorkshire as a generator of electricity for homes and industry. Only Drax remains, and that will rely on biomass and imported coal. The Department of Business stands by and does nothing while this once-great industry goes to the wall. Northern Powerhouse? Northern Workhouse, more like.

'APPY ARRYGATE'

Harrogate is England's 'Happiest Place to Live' for the third year running! It beats York and even London – for home owners.

Really? Who says so? A survey by Rightmove, the property people.

A bit of a giveaway, that. Look at their website, and homes in 'Appy' Arrygate start at a top figure of £2.8 million. The first thirty cost more than a million and the cheapest home is £155,000 for a tiny flat.

Harrogate may be OK if you can afford sky-high house prices, but if you do an ordinary job of work you're priced out of the market.

I'd sooner live in Barnsley. At least you can be sure of a decent Yorkshire pudding.

LIES, DAMNED LIES

There are 52,873 men and women on zero-hours contracts in Yorkshire and

Humberside. Officially. I bet the real figure is much higher, but even if it's correct, it's shockingly high.

The Government doesn't give figures for how many workers voluntarily opt for so-called 'flexible working'.

Nor do they say how many workers would like more hours than their employer will give them. Nor do they tell us how many are on the proper Living Wage rather than the National Minimum.

There are lies, damned lies and Tory statistics.

THE RIGHT LINES

The new Westgate station in Wakefield is a faceless, modern shack. But the revitalised Kirkgate station, once described (by a Labour transport minister) as 'the worst in Britain' is a joy to behold.

Built with a classical stone façade in 1854, and Grade II listed, it's been restored at a cost of £5.6 million, and you can get to London (if you so wish) by Grand Central trains in two hours and 10 minutes.

Not everything old needs to be torn down and replaced with gimcrack metal sheds. Victorian railway stations are part of our architectural heritage.

COME OFF IT LOVE!

Care workers in a Yorkshire home for adults with learning disabilities have been told by inspectors not to call residents 'love'. And not sweetie, or darling, or handsome, either.

If they go over the border into Notts, they'll hear everybody calls you 'duck' whether or not you have webbed feet. In Wales, I believe it's 'cariad'.

The Care Quality Commission says such language could be demeaning.

They mean well, I know. But life in these homes should be as much like family life outside, surely. A sensible degree of friendly intimacy helps make the world go round.

Poor in private

Two nations Britain. In posh Tunbridge Wells, Kent, a foodbank called Nourish offers doorstep deliveries for those who find it degrading to queue at the store. What, and miss the gossips?

EE by gum

A Yorkshireman ordered a religious epitaph for his aunt, to read 'She Was Thine'. But when he inspected the grave, the headstone said 'She Was Thin'. He remonstrated with the stone mason about the missing 'E' and next time he went to lay flowers, it had been amended. To 'E, She Was Thin'.





TIME TO CHANGE

Despite opposition from the Tory Government, the law on travelling to and from work has changed for the better courtesy of Europe, says **Joel Smith**

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled in September that the time spent travelling to and from home by those whose place of work changes daily, can count as working time rather than 'rest time'.

This ruling has a direct impact on many UK workers, not least UNISON members – particularly care workers.

The court's decision follows a dispute involving employees of Spanish-owned company Tyco, which installs and checks anti-theft devices. Tyco closed its regional offices centralising its Spanish operation. Previously, Tyco technicians had travelled to a regional office at the start of each working day where they were allocated that day's appointments. Under the new regime, Tyco technicians were issued with appointments electronically and had to travel to them directly from their homes.

The impact for the technicians was that they were required to travel in some cases up to 100 kilometres, or for over three hours. Tyco refused to pay its employees for the time they spent travelling to and from their first and last



HOW
EUROPEAN
LAW CAN
BE USED
TO PROTECT
WORKERS'
RIGHTS



Joel Smith
of Thompsons
Solicitors
Leeds office

appointment of the day arguing that these were 'rest periods' and not payable as working time. Incredibly, ever eager to protect bosses at the expense of workers, the UK government chose to intervene in the case to argue that paying workers for travel time would leave Tyco vulnerable to employees abusing the system.

PRECEDENT

Tyco's argument was given short shrift by the European Court of Justice. In its ruling, the court emphasised the importance of ensuring workers had proper rest and firmly rejected the argument that travel time for mobile workers was just rest time. The court also noted that the method and arrangements for work were determined by the employer and so were largely out of the worker's control, and that the clients' locations could not be classed as the place of work. The ruling sets a precedent. It is employers, not employees, who should bear the costs of travel time. And time spent

travelling to or from a customer, where that is integral to the job, must be regarded as workers performing their duty and therefore as 'working time'.

UNISON members working in the care sector should take particular note of this ruling. For many years, UNISON and Thompsons have fought to ensure employers pay care workers their legal entitlement of the national minimum wage. Too often employers have refused to pay for driving from home to the first client or from the last client home again - and even for trips made in between. We believe that this new ruling will add weight to the case that every care worker should be receiving full and proper payment for their travel time and a fair wage for every hour they work.

This judgment is another positive step towards ending the cycle of bosses trying to save a few pounds at the expense of their most important asset, their employees. The failed intervention by the UK

government to try and short-change workers shows how the European law can be used to protect workers' rights. ■



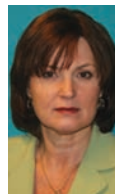
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