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P10 A WOMAN IN DEMAND

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UNISON ACTIVE!

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE



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AN EXAMPLE TO US ALL

**KINSLEY STRIKE HEROES
MEET THE LABOUR LEADER P22**



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UNISON

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

WE'LL BE HIT HARDER

Theresa May entered Downing Street promising to do things differently.

She claimed she was going to stand up for working people. She claimed she was going to be on the side of ordinary families. It's a trick new Tory leaders often deploy, but it's never long before they show their true colours. So now we see May – who just months ago was in favour of remaining in the EU – offering not just 'hard Brexit' but the very harshest of Brexits.

She's planning on raising the

metaphorical drawbridge and waving goodbye to the jobs, trade and economic growth that are part of our European Union membership. And while her 'Great Repeal Bill' (which doesn't do what it says on the tin) at least ensures that EU law will be incorporated into the law of the United Kingdom once we leave Europe, it provides no long-term security for rights at work.

We should all be incredibly sceptical about those who claim to lead a

'workers' party' but who also supported the Trade Union Act, or who think the best way to get people onto a living wage is to rebrand the minimum wage rather than simply pay people more.

This may be a new Prime Minister but it's the same old Tory government.

So we'll see more austerity. More brutal pay freezes. More tax cuts and benefits for the better-off whilst the hardest hit are hit even harder.

This is the reality of a Tory government. This is what we're up against.

An end to local democracy

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

In the next four years, councils in this region will see their funding from central government slashed by up to 50 per cent.

And from 2020, central government revenue support grants will cease, to be replaced by income raised from local business rates and council tax revenues.

For many of the poorest towns and cities in the North, this will effectively bring an end to democracy and local government in their communities.

They will simply not be able to raise enough to provide essential services like homecare support, social services, teaching assistants and many others.

The Government knows its continuing austerity drive will both increase levels of poverty in this

region and depress any chance of local economies, including their small private sector businesses, surviving - let alone recovering.

At the same time the NHS is struggling on a massive scale because of insufficient funding, with the private health insurers already circling it like sharks.

We know that despite all their cynical rhetoric about governing for everyone, the Tories are still ruthlessly continuing their ideological attack on public services.

All this needless misery is being deliberately inflicted on our communities. We will fight it at every turn.



Green keepers

UNISON is backing families campaigning to save a care home for people with dementia.

Leeds City Council announced the plan to close The Green in Seacroft to save around £100,000 a year, writes *Peter Carroll*

The decision was made by the council's executive board and referred on to the scrutiny board which recommended the home should stay open for at least two years – after which its future would be reviewed again.

But the executive board chose to ignore that decision – an unprecedented event.

A number of councillors have 'called in' the executive board's decision so that the scrutiny board can make a further recommendation.

In the midst of the

political wrangling, residents, their families and their MP have made a video of life at the home to show how important the service is.

UNISON regional organiser Dean Harper said: "There is great concern over the potential loss of such a

valuable service.

"We all understand the savage government cuts to the council's budgets are bound to affect services, but this home really should be kept open as a priority."



QUICK QUIZ

Look at the clues below and see if you can spot well-known Yorkshire places or land-marks

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 P _ _ _ _ _ _ _ C _ _ _ _
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 H _ _ _ P _ _ _ P _ _ _ _ H _ _ _ _

LOOK AND LEARN

UNISON members interested in these course should contact their branches.

For further information contact Tanya – email: t.shearer@unison.co.uk or telephone: 0113 2182330.

COURSE TITLE	COURSE DATES	VENUE
Organising Steward - Online Version	17 Jan 2017 - 6 March 2017	Distance Learning
Organising Steward	30-31 Jan 1-3 Feb 2017	Northern College
Health & Safety Representatives	6- 10 Feb 2017	Northern College
An Introduction to Public Sector Pension	6 Feb 2017 - 28 April 2017	Distance Learning
Building Confidence in Women	11, 12 Feb 2017	Crowne Plaza, Leeds
Your Skills Your Future	22 Feb 2017	Commerce House
Further Representation Skills	27, 28 Feb 2017	Commerce House
Organising, Representation and Bargaining	2, 3 March 2017	Commerce House
Negotiating Skills for Activists	6-10 March 2017	Northern College
Making the most of the Internet	13 March 2017	Swarthmore CTR, Leeds
Confidence Building (Power to be You)	15 March 2017	Commerce House
Dyslexia Awareness at Work	20, 21 March 2017	Commerce House
Organising Steward	27-31 March 2016	Northern College
Mental Health Awareness (Open University)	24 March 2017	Commerce House

STRIKERS WIN DEAL OVER HOURS



Mental Health support workers in Bradford have won their fight against management plans to impose unfair changes to their working hours.

The 39 UNISON members were transferred from Bradford Council to the not-for-profit provider Creative Support.

The employer was proposing wholesale changes to shift patterns

which would have meant members could be called in to work at any time between 8 am and 10pm, seven days a week.

That would have made it impossible for staff with children or who look after elderly or disabled family members to juggle their caring responsibilities at home with their caring responsibilities at work.

UNISON regional

organiser Gary Cleaver said members had been 100 per cent supportive of a two hour strike in October. A packed rally was held in Bradford City Hall's council chamber and the media reported the event widely.

Gary said: "The vote to take strike action was unanimous, even though it was a very last resort for our members."

"We asked the employer to enter serious negotiations with us to ensure proper consideration was given to the circumstances of individual employees."

"The employer did enter negotiations at that stage and we have made a binding agreement with them over shift patterns so that our members are able to plan their lives."

The agreement includes an undertaking by Creative Support to provide four week rotas in advance wherever possible.

And management will provide 48 hours' notice to staff if they are required to move to another service in Bradford. It also says it will support members who want to organise shift swaps.

Gary Cleaver said: "We are happy with the outcome of this dispute and grateful for the support and solidarity of our members."

ACTOR TRACY WINS JO'S SEAT

Actor and script writer Tracy Brabin (right) was elected Labour MP for Batley & Spen, previously held by Jo Cox who died in June after being shot and stabbed.

After the by-election last month, Batley-born Tracy, who appeared in both *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, said: "Tonight is a bittersweet occasion for me. That this by-election had to take place at all is a

tragedy." Thomas Mair, a 52-year-old with links to neo-Nazi groups, has been charged with Jo's murder.

All major parties decided not to fight the election out of respect for Jo, but there were nine other candidates, largely from the far Right.

"This was a victory for decency," said UNISON regional convenor Wendy Nichols. "It was a victory for hope, for

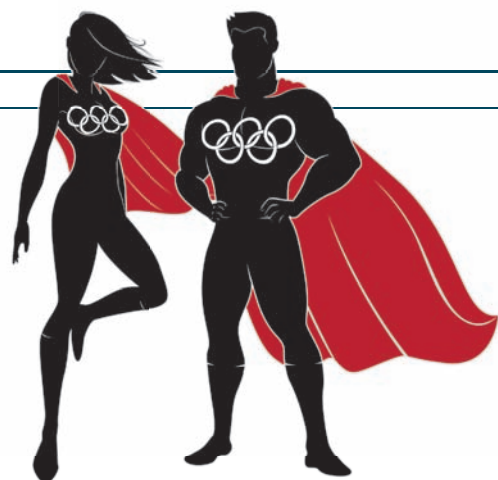
a better future for all of us, whoever we are and wherever we're from. It was a great tribute to Jo."

Regional secretary John Cafferty added: "We wish Tracy all the best. I'm sure she'll be an excellent representative of her home town. It was great to see the candidates from National Front, the BNP and the English Democrats lose their deposits."



REAL-LIFE HEROES

Mainstream media took ownership of Yorkshire's sporting celebrities, but one national paper celebrated the Kinsley Three, says **Mary Maguire**



“
NEWS
... AND
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FABULOUS
LEGS
”

All the world loves a hero. And this summer we had heroes by the bucket load. They jumped out of our screens, dived across our front pages and served up a Twitter storm.

I'm not talking of the all-action woman who rescues a dude in distress, kills the bad girl and saves the world.

I'm talking of sporting heroes. Olympians and Paralympians. Despatched from these shores to Rio for gold and glory (and a bit of sun).

This was an editor's dream. Ready-made news and reams of it. A running story with fabulous legs. The biggest human interest stories ever heard with tales of derring-do, self-sacrifice, fantastic feats, obstacles overcome, tears of both disappointment and joy. Plus the chance for loads and loads of puns and pictures.

'From zeroes to heroes' proclaimed the Sun, in telling the story of 'Britain's amazing Olympic transformation'.

It wasn't just a national story with TeamGB winning more medals than in the London games in 2012 – it was as local as you could get. Every town and city wanted a piece of the action – someone to claim as their own. And Yorkshire athletes obliged.

FLUFFY

Big names like Nicola Adams, Alastair Brownlee, Katie Marchant and Hannah Cockroft MBE provided acres of column inches and hours of airtime.

The BBC previewed six Yorkshire Paralympic hopefuls, delving into their lives, training regimes, family and background. The Pontefract and Castleford Express was typical of the newspapers taking ownership of the heroes, with 'Yorkshire athletes going for gold in Rio Olympics' and 'two young athletes will head to Rio to represent TeamGB in the Paralympic Games' – Wakefield's Sophie Carrigill and

Normanton's Jamie Stead.

The paper set up a fan page and splashed with the tale of five Chihuahua puppies, rescued by the Leeds Dogs Trust, who were named after the city's TeamGB medal hopefuls. Cue pictures of cute fluffy puppies with the legendary comment: 'Let's hope they winalot'.

And they did. The expectation of medal success turned to ecstasy as reported by the Mirror: "Eeh Bah Gold ... Yorkshire is leading the Great British medal charge yet again."

Whether it was diving's Jack Laugher, or sprinter and cyclist Kadeena Cox, Yorkshire folk did the business. And a heroes parade in Leeds was widely previewed and reported. "They flew the flag for Yorkshire and proved they were among the world's greatest athletes", said the Yorkshire Post.

GUNPOINT

But it got even more local for the Halifax Courier: "It was another amazing day for Calderdale paralympians ... as the gold rush continued. Hannah Cockroft won her second gold". Leeds city hall was lit up in her honour. And the Grimsby Telegraph followed the progress of Cleethorpes javelin thrower Hollie Arnold who also won gold.

Of course, some of the other national teams did get a look in. The Guardian demonstrated the global nature of coverage and moved us to tears as we followed the 10 athletes of the Refugee Olympic Team.

Everybody celebrated the 'gold rush', except perhaps the Mail which dredged up the bad news stories with a typical selection of headlines being: 'worst injuries', 'dreams crushed', 'gunpoint robbery'.

So now that's it for the next four years, we have to find new heroes. I didn't have to look far. In the pages of the Morning Star I found Leslie Leake, Marice Hall and Karen McGee, three cleaners who went on strike at Kinsley Academy in protest at cuts in pay, holidays and sick pay. Real-life heroes. ■



Mary Maguire



A UNISON GIANT

Dave Ellis was known as 'Mr UNISON' at Kirklees College. **Active!** pays tribute to a totally dedicated trade unionist who held a union meeting as he lay on his death bed

Dave Ellis was an extraordinary man with a truly exceptional commitment to UNISON.

On his death bed he called in UNISON colleagues to discuss who they would elect to replace him as chief steward at Kirklees College.

He knew he was dying but, typically, his primary concern was how UNISON would organise its activists once he was gone.

Dave, who died in July of cancer, was one of the most well-known and well-regarded UNISON activists of his generation.

Dave was caretaker at Kirklees College where he was known as 'Mr UNISON'.

A staunch socialist and long-time Labour Party member, he was an AUEW activist at Huddersfield engineering firm David Brown for more than 12 years, before moving to the college where he became chief UNISON steward.

In 2005, Dave hit the

headlines during a 13 week strike over re-grading at Huddersfield College. He refused to leave the picket line while the strike was still running and ate his Christmas dinner outside the building. The stunt caught the imagination of the local media and, ultimately, UNISON won the dispute.

Back in the 1970s Dave was one of the leading campaigners against the fascist National Front, notably coming face to face with them in Huddersfield's Old Sparrow car park.

EXPENSES

UNISON colleagues describe him as an inspirational figure. In 15 years as a steward he never claimed any expenses from the branch, even for the local government service group annual conferences.

For meetings in London, to save on expenses he would travel on an overnight bus from Huddersfield to London Victoria. He would then walk to UNISON HQ and walk back to Victoria to catch the bus back.

“
STUBBORN,
CHARMING
FUNNY
AND
TENACIOUS
”

Friends and colleagues have described him as principled, cantankerous, stubborn, charming, funny and tenacious.

He was a regular at the Durham Miners Gala and he always carried the branch banner, proudly displaying images of his heroes Bob Crow and Tony Benn.

He really wanted to go to the gala on the branch bus on July 9 this year, but he died the day before.

A replica of the Underbank Rangers rugby league shirt he regularly wore with the logo 'Racism – tackle it!' emblazoned on it was placed on his usual seat on the bus and friends displayed a picture of him in the window.

POPULARITY

Dave, who leaves a son and daughter, was a giant of a man, both physically and as an activist.

The Kirklees branch liaised with his family to ensure that his wishes about commemorating his life are carried out.

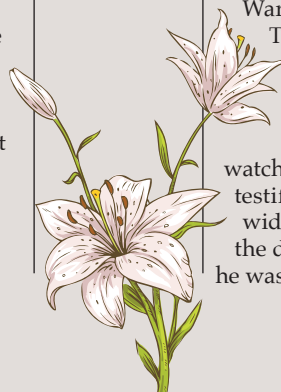
His picture will be painted on the branch banner and a memorial event was being planned to celebrate his life.

More than 250 people attended his funeral.

Members of his branch marched to the crematorium behind their banner, but there were other banners from UNISON branches in Bolton, Tower Hamlets and Camden. The UCU, Stop the War and Huddersfield

Trades Council were also represented.

The crematorium was packed and some were forced to watch on a screen outside, testifying to Dave's widespread popularity and the deep respect in which he was held. ■





IT'S AN EYE-OPENER

Kim Turner hated school but found the union's courses gave her the confidence to unburden herself and whetted her appetite for learning. **Helen Hague** reports

Kim Turner thought she would never really be able to express her deepest feelings about a dark moment in her life.

But Kim surprised herself by writing about her own experience of breast cancer. It was part of an exercise at one of UNISON's Return to Learn courses and helped her get over her illness.

She was diagnosed five years ago and discharged by the hospital last year. "It was very cathartic to write it all down.

"It was horrible and frightening at the time. I've

come out the other side and lived to tell the tale. I think I'm a better person - now nothing frightens me. I never thought I'd be writing and talking about it. But if it can help other women going through the same thing, I'm happy with that. Breast cancer affects so many women".

Kim's interest in the union's education courses was sparked last year when an email from the union popped up in her inbox. It offered taster classes in returning to learn. She hadn't studied anything for years and decided to go along.

“
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”

CONFIDENCE

"It was very spur of the moment", said Kim, who went, liked what she found and signed up to a course in Women's Lives. "It was free, at a college near where I work, and just one evening a week. It seemed do-able. And it didn't sound too brain taxing."

Now, with a certificate in Women's Lives under her belt, she is keen to spread the word and encourage others to return to learning. The course - and others encouraging people to get back to learning after a big gap - can boost confidence, bolster skills and refresh a tired looking CV.



Photo: Jim Varney

RECONNECT

But, as Kim found, it can also be 'a lot of fun' too, as students share experiences and bond over group discussions and presentations.

Like many UNISON members, Kim, 52, a clerical officer in the NHS, 'just hadn't realised' the union runs courses to help members reconnect with learning.

Her experience of the classroom will be familiar to many. "I hated school and couldn't wait to leave," she says. She did so with three GCSEs to her name and joined the army as a stewardess straight after.

It proved a good move though not, maybe, in lasting career terms. She met her husband-to-be Kev, they married and he got posted to Cyprus soon after. "There was no army post for me –

but we had two and a half fantastic years out there."

Then Kev was posted to Germany, where the couple's two children were born. Kim's career was on the back burner as she raised the infants.

Three years later they were back in Britain in army housing near Beverley. Kim worked in supermarkets evenings and weekends - and even then showed an appetite for beefing up her skills.

When the children were at school she gained a diploma in business office technology, studying for two years at Beverley College. The course was aimed at those wanting to learn new skills to return to the jobs market. "It was 10 to 3 each day so it suited me well"

Kim has worked as a clerical officer in radiology at Castle Hill hospital in Hull for the past twelve years. Before that she worked as an auxiliary nurse at a smaller hospital. She's now been working within the NHS for 19 years and the course has given her a personal boost.

"I'm quite a confident person. I learned so much on the course - I think we all did. People who seemed quite shy at the start ended up taking the lead. It was very good to be with other women who were returning to learn."

PERSONAL

The group discussed poetry – 'It was quite eye-opening to hear other people's interpretations.' Each student had to research a topic and interview a contemporary woman for one module. Kim chose a work

“
IT'S NEVER
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”

colleague who is training to be a Deacon, drilling down to whether women can play a leading role in the church. The answer was a resounding 'Yes'.

Then, for one assignment, the group was asked to write about their own personal experience. It was then that she found herself able to write about her battle against breast cancer.

The group had a 'fantastic' workshop weekend in Leeds, with Return to Learn groups across Yorkshire. Each gave a presentation – the Hull team did a lively take on multi-tasking. It ended with the team throwing hats in the air, in a piece celebrating the many 'hats' women wear: worker, wife, mother, student, friend.

INSPIRING

Kim's daughter Jade, now 26, is proud of her mum getting back to learning - knuckling down to her homework, researching on the internet, ordering thoughts in written pieces. "It's quite inspiring," says Jade, who works in an opticians.

When I spoke to Kim she was planning to meet up with women from the Hull Women's Lives course for "a drink and a meal". Kim was also due to resume her studies having enrolled on a Return to Learn course running through to next May.

That's the thing with returning to learn. People seem to get the habit once they start. "I'd certainly recommend it," says Kim. "It's never too late to learn". And, as she found, "It can be a lot of fun too". ■

Photos: Mark Harvey

SHE KNOWS WHO YOU ARE!



The increasing fascination with family histories means the services of Barnsley Museum archivist Gillian Nixon are in demand. **Mary Maguire** reports

“

I COULD HAVE FOLLOWED MY DAD TO THE GLASS FACTORY

”

Once upon a time the word archive conjured up an image of fusty old documents stored in a dank, dreary cellar. Forgotten, unloved and, largely, unwanted.

Today, that image is fast disappearing as people country-wide start the quest for their ancestors – who they were and how they lived. Genealogy search engines and on-line guides are growing in popularity. And the crashing of sites by millions when the latest historical census goes on-line is evidence of this growing

desire to know who you are.

Those old fusty documents are now at the heart of this fast growing pursuit and their custodians, people such as Gillian Nixon, are in demand.

A love of art, particularly pre-Raphaelite, family history and a desire to stick out for a job she really wanted, led Gillian to Barnsley. For the past 27 years she has been archives and local studies assistant, now based in Experience Barnsley Museum's Discovery Centre.

Gillian, 53, was born and brought up in Doncaster,

attending Armthorpe comprehensive school. Surprisingly, although surrounded by mining families, none of Gillian's family worked in the pits. Her dad worked in the local glass factory and her mum was a residential social worker, having 'worked her way up from being a cleaner'. Gillian told me:

"I left school with no qualifications whatsoever and I didn't really have a proper job until I started this one. I had loads of temporary jobs, did some voluntary work and took part in youth training schemes. I could

have followed my dad to the glass factory, but I wanted to stick out for a job I really wanted to do."

With the growing interest in uncovering the past, a stream of people – from academics, students, local historians, community groups – seek Gillian's help. A 'people person', she finds it fulfilling to help individuals find out about their family history. A fair few were adopted as children and are looking for information about their birth parents. It can be quite emotional as Gillian uncovers the truth. She says:

"You learn to be sensitive about the information you uncover, how you divulge it and the impact that will have. It is emotional, but it is so rewarding knowing you are helping an individual's quest."

She told me of one woman in her 60s who had been told by her adoptive parents that her name had never been changed. When Gillian uncovered her birth record, she found that they had changed her name. Such discoveries, says Gillian, can be a huge shock. Luckily, the woman took it well and a few weeks' later returned to introduce a new-found relative to Gillian.

CELEBRITY

And if you are one of the six million people who regularly tune in to the BBC TV series *Who Do You Think You Are*, you would spot some of Gillian's research work. She says:

"Who Do You Think You Are producers visit our archives, pose questions about certain periods

and people and look for documents, but never say for which celebrity. We help where we can. So of course we are glued to the programme. And I know that my research was used for the actress Sheridan Smith's story. That's quite exciting."

But the bit of her job where she is 'like a kid at Christmas' is when delving into archive material from Cannon Hall – a local stately home formerly owned by the Spencer Stanhope family. The family had pre-Raphaelite connections, links to the Bowes-Lyons family and the hall houses an important collection of paintings and ceramics. Gillian is the resident specialist and has blogged about it. She says:

"I was able to help an author who was writing a book about the history of port (wine). Cellar books are normally thrown away at the end of each year, but we had all the cellar books for the Hall from the 1800s onwards. And they were invaluable for his book".

PASSIONATE

Gillian's journey to Barnsley and the museum service also led her to UNISON. When she wanted to stand as branch health and safety officer, she jokes how she was 'conned' into becoming a steward instead.

She's been branch education officer and is now union learning rep. As Gillian left school with no qualifications, she is just as passionate about the opportunities for learning as she is about her job. Through

Northern College she's now qualified as a further education teacher. UNISON's life-long learning is 'brilliant' and she wants to give more people the chance to study. As she says:

"I want to make sure that all members are aware of the massive opportunities because there is something there for everyone. These courses help boost confidence – something that we all need in Barnsley. Staffing numbers have been massacred recently, with so many redundancies and privatisations, people have lost confidence. So it's great to see them gain confidence again."

"We are working with the council and have a joint mental health awareness course planned for November."

Although it seems that history, the union and education are all-consuming passions, Gillian does have other interests. She likes to watch motorsports and ice hockey in her spare time. What spare time? ■

I KNOW
THAT MY
RESEARCH
WAS USED
FOR THE
ACTRESS
SHERIDAN
SMITH'S
STORY





Photo: Zoonico/Shutterstock

...AND NOW FOR THE REAL BATTLE

The movement needs to unite and square up to Teflon Theresa in the wake of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour leadership victory. **Paul Routledge** assesses the mood

“

I'M
CONFIDENT
WE CAN
PUT IT
BACK
TOGETHER
AND TAKE
THE FIGHT
TO THE
TORIES

”

IAIN MCNICOL
LABOUR
GENERAL
SECRETARY

The political landscape has changed out of all recognition after a turbulent summer of discontent.

Cameron and Osborne gone, and good riddance. Farage gone, too – and back again while the Ukipers choose a new chief headbanger.

A parliamentary 'coup' by Labour MPs flattened by a revolt of the membership against the Westminster elite.

Theresa May exploiting the Euro-referendum as a phoney mandate to recreate Thatcher-style rule.

Politics today looks a bit like a civilian version of the Somme a century ago. Bodies everywhere, and the reputation of the old guard in ruins.

Jeremy Corbyn triumphed in his second poll for the leadership, with a 62 per cent

vote against Welshman Owen Smith, and immediately called for loyalty from his restive troops in the Commons.

"I'm wiping the slate clean," he assured his critics, and Yorkshire MP John Healey returned as Shadow Housing Minister in a revamped Shadow Cabinet.

Labour's general secretary Iain McNicol, told me: "It's not going to be easy, but it's achievable. I'm confident we can put it back together and take the fight to the Tories. Jeremy deserves the opportunity to deliver."

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said Jeremy had won because he'd captured the imagination of party members. "I'm proud that our union nominated Jeremy for leader. People are inspired by his promises to end austerity, fix our broken public services and build a different kind of

economy.

"But the scale of the political challenge facing Labour cannot be ignored. The party already faced an uphill battle to convince the British people before this unhelpful leadership contest. Jeremy must show those sceptical about his leadership that he has the ability and the ideas to win an election."

Dave's comments came at a time when one opinion poll showed that only 16 per cent of voters believe that Jeremy can win the next election. And fewer than four out of ten Labour supporters believe he will get into Number Ten.

It's galling that Theresa May is ahead when she hasn't yet shown the country any strategy for government. Four months into her premiership, all we've had is a string of meaningless slogans, like 'Brexit means Brexit'.

We're leaving the European

Union, but nobody knows when, or how, or what will follow – especially in the field of employment, despite bland ministerial assurances that EU-guaranteed maternity and paternity rights and other protections are safe.

UNRAVELLING

Nationally, we're waiting for Chancellor Philip Hammond's Autumn Statement on November 23 to see where and when the latest spending cuts and tax changes will come.

Here in Yorkshire and Humberside, Tory plans for a 'devolution revolution' are in chaos.

Proposals for elected 'metro-mayors' in west and north Yorkshire have hit the buffers and question marks hang over the deal already signed for South Yorkshire.

Teflon Theresa effectively sidelined George Osborne's phoney Northern Powerhouse project. Route planning for HS2, the high-speed rail link, is back in the melting pot, setting Sheffield against Rotherham.

Adding to uncertainty, the Government intends to

cut the number of MPs by 50 to 600 before the general election. This means probable abolition of four Labour-held seats in the region before 2020 – and changed boundaries for the rest.

Bradford, Leeds, Hull and Sheffield look certain to lose a constituency each, weakening Labour's Yorkshire presence at Westminster.

The Faragistas are in disarray after new leader Diane James walked out after only 18 days. Yorkshire MEP Mike 'Right' Hookem fancies his chances despite a fracas with chief rival Stephen Woolfe MEP who has since quit the party.

Ukip is looking for support from disgruntled Labour supporters in Northern England. But it offered no fight in Batley where former Corrie star Tracy Brabin was elected in the by-election caused by the tragic murder of Jo Cox MP.

One thing is not in doubt: hard times lie ahead for public service workers. Tough-talking Theresa is cutting billions of pounds from NHS and local authority budgets.

"These are challenging



IN EVERY CITY AND TOWN UNISON ACTIVISTS WILL BE FIGHTING TO SUSTAIN AND REVIVE PUBLIC SERVICES



DAVE PRENTIS
UNISON
GENERAL
SECRETARY

times," says Dave Prentis, "but we must remember that public services and trade unions are what pull us through challenging times.

"In every city, in every small village and town, away from the media spotlight, UNISON activists will be fighting to sustain and revive public services and communities. They are the unfashionable heroes who will help rebuild our country – and all power to them."

Amen to that!

TIGHTROPE

In this Parliament, the Government is cutting council budgets by £7 billion, before the planned ending of the grants system in 2020. Local authorities in Hull, Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford are calculating how many jobs and services will go.

Labour is in charge of most of the big authorities, but will have to do the Tories' dirty work. It's a perilous political tightrope to walk.

The NHS in Yorkshire is in a parlous state, with hospital trusts all over the county posting deficits. But Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt still demands multi-million savings in hospitals and front-line GP care as part of a national, £22 billion 'efficiency' package.

The ruthlessness with which the Tories faced down striking junior doctors shows the lengths they are prepared to go in pursuit of purely ideological goals. Only a strongly-unionised workforce can hold our public services together. ■

Inspirational but he has to show he's a winner

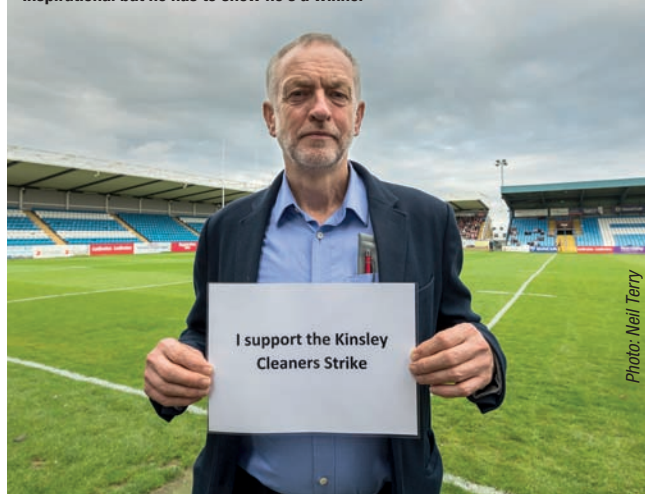


Photo: Neil Terry

HANGING IN THERE

The vote to leave the EU could trigger a race to the bottom on employment law. **Gerrard Stilliard** of Thompsons Solicitors shows how trade unions can fight it

In June, the British public voted to leave the European Union by 52 per cent to 48 per cent. So far, the most we have learned from the Government is that 'Brexit means Brexit', which is almost as good as saying nothing at all.

The EU has been instrumental in guaranteeing stronger workers' rights in the UK and there is a real risk that - if allowed to get away with it - the Tory government could trigger a race to the bottom and fail to replace the protection when leaving the EU. The loss of these rights would have severe implications for UNISON members, weakening the chances of being able to hold negligent, ignorant, or slap-dash bosses to account.

Our future relationship with the EU will not be clear for some time. The new Department for Exiting the European Union has been tasked with managing the process of invoking Article 50 and triggering, what will be, two years of negotiations.

PRIORITIES

The minister responsible, David Davis, has so far said that he is not looking to change the basis of employment rights. Teresa May made similar promises in her speech to the Tory party conference. However, pressure will be put on Davis

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Gerrard Stilliard – head of personal injury strategy at Thompsons

and others involved in the negotiations by big business, including private healthcare providers in the NHS, to let workers' rights slip down his list of priorities. A key task for the unions will be to hold him to his word.

European Union states are given a deadline to bring EU directives into their own domestic law. If this does not happen in time, you have the right to claim against the state for breach of the directive.

CALLOUS

All previous directives are currently part of UK law. It was EU directives which forced the then government to introduce the 'six-pack' of health and safety law regulations in 1992 which underpin protection for workers against bad working

conditions.

As those regulations were brought in under the auspices of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (which is domestic UK legislation), a withdrawal may not immediately affect these rights. However, if they were no longer underpinned by EU directives they could be changed or discarded entirely by a future Conservative government and there would be no chance of claiming against the state for breach of the directive as there would be if we were members of the EU.

In recent years, the Tories have consistently shown their disdain for workers. Callous and short-sighted policies such as the introduction of tribunal fees and the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013

TUC's Demands

- The Government should have a clear plan to protect jobs, industries and public services, as well as guaranteeing the continuation of all workers' rights derived from EU law.
- A national debate should be led by the Government to establish the best possible outcomes from the negotiations and how relationships will be managed with the rest of the EU and beyond.
- A cross-party negotiating team should be established which includes the devolved administrations, the TUC, CBI and organisations from civil society.
- All EU citizens currently living in the UK should have the right to remain guaranteed and the Government should seek similar arrangements for British citizens currently living in other parts of the EU.
- An agreement needs to be reached on economic and border issues between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.



Photo: Meis/shutterstock

- which removed civil liability on the part of employers for breaches of health and safety regulations – have eroded the rights of workers, as well as their ability to access justice and hold employers to account.

PAINFUL

The European Communities Act 1972 forms the basis of a large amount of UK law and it is extremely unlikely this will be repealed immediately due to the extensive amount of law-making which would be required to replace it. It is most likely to be amended to allow for a slow process of replacement of the rights we currently enjoy – a slow and painful dismantling rather than any immediate withdrawal.

Formal negotiations on the shape of UK law after

exiting the EU will not begin until the Government triggers Article 50 which we now understand will be before March 2017. However, internal and informal discussions in the meantime will be vital for the Government to get a clear idea of the sort of relationship which is on offer from the other EU states.

The TUC has set out five requirements to benefit workers during the informal negotiation process (see panel). These requirements are designed to ensure that workers' rights are protected as much as possible during the Brexit process and to give the movement a real say in the future of the UK's relationship with the EU.

We cannot trust the Tories to protect workers' rights

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without pressure from our movement and, for this reason, it is vital that unions secure a seat at the negotiating table.

While our government tries to work out what Brexit means and how they unpick the laws and treaties in place, and indeed how the process of exiting will actually work, we will remain largely in the dark about the implications for the future of employment law and health and safety regulations.

Not only must we make sure the Government does not let essential rights and protections (conveniently for their big business mates) slide off the table, we should see Brexit as an opportunity to fight for those laws to be strengthened - not weakened. ■

BACK IN THE SADDLE

Health branch secretary Amandeep Singh sustained serious spinal injuries in an horrendous bike crash so he knows the value of the NHS. **Peter Carroll** reports



Photo: Jim Varney

If Amandeep Singh needed any more reasons to fight for the NHS, his terrible cycling accident two years ago is a major one.

The branch secretary of Bradford health services for the past five years was out on one of his regular gruelling bike rides when disaster struck.

Forty three year old Ammi had cycled to the top of Fleet Moss, the highest proper road in Yorkshire, just outside Hawes in Wensleydale. It made the Guardian's top ten toughest bike rides in Britain.

He said: "It is infamous among cyclists because it has one in five gradients. Cyclists go there because it is so steep you need great levels of fitness to tackle it.

"I was at the top when it started to get overcast and it looked like it was going to rain so I decided to get down as quickly as possible.

"I started to increase my speed coming down but not too fast because there are lots of corners and an uneven surface. I was going about 10 mph.

"As I carried on there was a hidden dip in the road. As I went over this the road took a very sharp right-hand turn.

“THE NEXT THING I KNEW, I WAS LYING ON THE GROUND IN A COMPLETE DAZE”

"My wheels locked on me as I braked very hard. I was shocked by how tight this bend was."

CRASHED

The next moment, Ammi and his bike were flying through the air over a hedge and into a field.

He somersaulted over the handlebars and crashed down heavily on his right shoulder.

He said: "It must have happened very quickly but I remember, as I flew through the air, how it all seemed to be happening so slowly.

"The next I knew I was lying on the ground in a complete daze, but I could move my neck and limbs.

"I even considered getting up and back on the bike but I could only get up onto my knees because of the pain in the middle of my back which was increasing by the minute.

"My breathing had also become irregular and then I really started to gasp for air. I thought I had broken something or punctured my lungs.

"I ended up lying down and thought I might be in shock or have concussion. I could hear the cars going slowly behind the hedge.

"After a few minutes one of them stopped and this guy came over and asked if I was alright. I said I was fine and I would be off in a few minutes.

"He said I wasn't in a good way. My sunglasses were dug into my face. He said he would call an ambulance and by then the pain had become excruciating.



IT WAS
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"He got in touch with the Grassington Ambulance Service about 20 miles away. They took the decision to call the Yorkshire Air Ambulance out.

"Cars started to arrive and people were giving me blankets. I was starting to get very distressed. These complete strangers were holding my hand and talking to me.

"They were comforting me and trying to take my mind off the pain, caring for me like professional nurses.

"I will never forget the humanitarian qualities of those good people"

Ten minutes later the Air Ambulance was landed near Ammi's stricken body and he was strapped to a "spine board" to ensure there was no movement as he was flown to the nearest hospital in Lancaster.

Scans revealed that he had suffered a crushed vertebra in his back which was protruding dangerously close to his spinal cord.

He was then taken to Preston, to the nearest spinal unit, and stayed there for four days.

Ammi said: "The consultants said I had two options, either to hope the back would heal naturally over three months or have an operation to realign my spine with steel support pins.

"Both options had risks attached and I was told I could end up paralysed whatever I chose to do. It was a very difficult time for me but I had to trust them."

After the operation Ammi was completely out of action for three months, and all he

could think about was how to get back on the bike.

He was determined not to let the accident destroy his passion for cycling and he started a slow recovery with five or ten minute rides round the block.

He said: "it was like I had never cycled before and I had lost all my fitness.

"But the muscles seemed to have a memory of what they had been trained to do."

After becoming a vegan last year he has since cycled up the highest mountain in Thailand (a steep 30 miles) and performed similar feats of strength and endurance in Andorra.

GRATITUDE

He says he feels fitter and stronger than ever.

He said: "I can never say or do enough to thank them. I took round thank you cards to the NHS staff and I noticed that their walls were covered with similar cards from other patients.

"They must get used to it, there were so many cards.

"But if I lived somewhere without free at the point of need medical help, I couldn't have paid for my treatment and would probably be permanently paralysed. The NHS deserves a huge thank you from me."

One way of showing that gratitude is in his work for the 3,000-strong branch membership, covering the whole range of NHS staff, including domestics, porters, nurses, support staff, midwives, occupational therapists and many others.

And he is appalled by the





Photo: Jim Varney

- government's "ideological" drive to deprive the NHS of funding and so pave the way for more privatisation.

He said: "Their agenda is to introduce 'change' which has no clarity and is all done behind closed doors. It's like living in a vacuum.

DAMAGE

"It is very difficult at the moment because these massive cuts and reorganisations can become normalised once they are forced on the service.

"It is one of our fundamental beliefs that the NHS should never be privatised.

"As branch secretaries we can say and believe this. But when services are outsourced it becomes a very slippery slope and outsourcing is just part of business as usual.

"We must not allow

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WHATEVER
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”

the normalisation of the privatisation of the NHS and all the damage that is doing to our members and the patients they devote their lives to caring for.

"That's what we are up against. It is the biggest challenge for the union. We're totally against outsourcing but we have to deal with it practically.

"I am as passionate about doing this work in UNISON as I am about cycling.

"I have been so lucky and saving the NHS is a battle that won't go away. We won't throw the towel in.

"I feel that I am now a stronger person after what happened to me, and the experience I had of our brilliant NHS services only makes me more determined to fight for our members and fight to protect the NHS across the board.

"The Government has been waging a war against us all and we have suffered numerous body blows and endless threats and setbacks.

"But these have also made our determination stronger. It sometimes feels we have been knocked down, but we carry on.

"Whatever they do to us, we get back in the saddle." ■

Curriculum Vitae

- Education: Tong comprehensive, Bradford
- 2000: NHS agency worker in portering services
- 2000-2005: UNISON steward, membership officer, safety rep and convenor
- 2011 to present - branch secretary, Bradford health services



there for you

supporting UNISON members
when life gets tough

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

Please make sure our members
are aware of the help that is
available in these difficult times.

UNISON members struggling
through an unexpected crisis can
get help from 'there for you' by:-

- ☑ Contacting their
Branch Welfare Officer
- ☑ Calling us on 020 7121 5620

You can also find out more
information by visiting our website

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

Registered charity number 1023552


UNISON
the public service union

A SURE FIRE FAVOURITE

There's nothing like a day out at the gee-gees. Ask the hundreds of UNISON members who turned up on July 30 at Doncaster racecourse. They came to UNISON's raceday with friends, family and colleagues from other regions. They came for a flutter, a day out in the fresh air and above all, they came to have fun. Some even made a few bob!

Photography Louise Pollard







Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn meets the brave 'Kinsley Three' - (left to right) Leslie Leake, Marice Hall and Karen McGee. **Peter Lazenby** reports

“
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Yorkshire's a place known for people fighting back against injustice, and that includes UNISON members.

In 2014 Care UK workers in Doncaster staged 90 days of strike action in defence of their wages and working conditions after their jobs with Doncaster Council were transferred to the private sector.

And once again Yorkshire UNISON members are setting a lead with an indefinite strike against pay cuts following the privatisation of their jobs.

The action by three women school cleaners isn't going to make national headlines or

bring share prices crashing.

But to the three workers their strike is vital to defend their wages and conditions.

It is also an example to hundreds of thousands of other workers in the public sector.

Leslie Leake, Marice Hall and Karen McGee are cleaners at Kinsley Academy in Wakefield in West Yorkshire.

Their school, Kinsley primary, became an independent academy last year. It moved out of local authority control, and its managers decided they didn't want to employ the three cleaners themselves. They brought in a privateer, C&D Cleaning Group, and gave

the firm the contract to clean the school.

DETERMINED

The cleaners' jobs were transferred from Wakefield Council to C&D.

The company immediately cut the women's wages from £7.85 an hour to £7.20 – the minimum wage. The company also abolished the sick pay agreement which UNISON had with Wakefield Council.

The union believes this is in breach of legislation which protects workers' pay and conditions when their jobs are transferred from one employer to another.

UNISON is taking the cases to an employment

tribunal, but that takes time.

So meanwhile the three workers are not putting up with their treatment at the hands of C&D. They are on strike, and they're determined to stay out for as long as it takes.

HEARTENED

Leslie has been a cleaner at Kinsley for seven years.

"In that time I've had no trouble whatsoever," she said. "It used to be Kinsley Primary School but it became an academy in November last year. Our jobs were contracted out in April."

Marice said: "I've been at the school 11 years. There were no problems. I'm very upset because we're not getting what we had before. We're down in our wages every month and I'm upset because I have to borrow off my partner to pay the bills."

Karen said: "We used to ring the company and they used to put the 'phone down on us. We all work the same jobs but every wage is different. Even on the minimum wage they are not paying us right. Last month my wage was down by nine hours. Our pension fund has been frozen as well."

"It's a lot of rubbish and I'm sick of it. Something needs doing about it." Marice said she and her colleagues were heartened when on the first day of their strike, 18 workmates, including teaching assistants, not only refused to cross the picket line, they joined it.

"It's the first time I've ever done it to be honest," she said. "I was a bit nervous – I didn't know what was going to happen." The three women

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FOR
JUSTICE
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have a shared determination to win their struggle. "I'm going to go all the way," said Leslie.

"All the way," echoed Marice and Karen.

The UNISON organiser working with the strikers is Robin Symonds.

He said: "The three women are standing up against a macho employer that is clearly used to getting its own way. They are very brave and determined and C&D Cleaning has met its match. I am proud to stand with them."

"The strikers are setting an example – working people refusing to buckle under to an aggressive employer. They deserve the support of all trade unionists in their struggle for justice."

The strike by the three cleaners is important, not just from their point of view, but because what has happened at Kinsley Academy is a microcosm of what is going on all over Britain today, and it is affecting hundreds of thousands of public service workers, with private companies running rampant through public services,

and what used to be public service jobs.

ROTTEN

Councils are unable to match the bids for contracts made by privateers because the councils know it is impossible to provide the services and pay the agreed wages at the price the contractor puts in.

The contractor gets the work, takes over the workers' jobs and the services they provide, slashes the wages, reduces levels of service, so cutting costs, and hey presto! The privateer is making a healthy profit. A nice little earner, as Arthur Daley used to say.

Employees suffer, and so do their clients as services deteriorate.

Millions of people are being detrimentally affected by this rotten system of privatisation.

Leslie, Marice and Karen say they are out for as long as it takes to win, and good luck to them. They deserve our support in their struggle. ■

● UNISON has set up a fund to help them. Cheques should be made out to **Wakefield Unison** and sent to **18 Gills Yard, Wakefield WF1 3BZ**

InhumanResources

Nick Thorpe, head of human resources at C&G, responded to an approach from UNISON by sending an abusive letter in which he said union representatives 'make your living justifying your means out of recalcitrant behaviour and churlish threats'.

He dismissed UNISON's approach, saying: "We do not require your input, opinion or indeed assistance in any shape or form, therefore I do not expect to hear from you again."

When rung by our reporter Peter Lazenby for his side of the argument, Mr Thorpe said: "We have done nothing unlawful and the matter is with our solicitors. Just be careful. That is all I am going to say to you." He referred any questions to the firm's lawyers, who he named as Crooks Commercial Solicitors. ■



WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

At last the heroes from Hull who went to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War - including a 16-year-old boy - will be remembered in the city centre. **Ryan Fletcher** reports

Nearly seven decades passed before Jim Bentley's courageous deeds were revealed to his descendants. The Hull man's death as a volunteer in a little understood foreign war was brushed under the carpet, by both his country and his family.

Millions of others who died fighting the same evil during the Second World War were sanctified.

Now, with the help of UNISON, Jim's relatives know that he - and the seven other Hull men who volunteered to fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War - will not be forgotten by future generations.

After a nine year campaign by the union, Hull City Council has agreed to the erection of a street memorial commemorating the city's International Brigade members. Previously the only other mention of the men was on a small brass plaque hidden away in the city's Guildhall.

Similar UNISON-led initiatives are taking place in Grimsby and Rotherham, ensuring International Brigade volunteers from those towns are also properly remembered.

VOLUNTEERS

More than 2,300 British volunteers went to fight against the combined fascist forces of Spain, Germany and Italy in the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939, after General Franco launched a coup against Spain's elected socialist government. Five hundred volunteers gave their lives, including four men from Hull. More than 500,000 people died during the conflict, which ended in defeat for Spain's leftist forces.

Yet public memorials to the soldiers of the International Brigade - many of whom were trade unionists prescient about what the far-right would unleash - are rare. Despite being the first to see the danger, the sacrifices of the volunteers went unrecognised by the British

government, which remained neutral during the Spanish Civil War. As a consequence of the Government's policy, the actions of the volunteers were technically illegal.

There was another reason, however, why Jim Bentley's history was hidden from his family and the wider community, as his great grandson James Bentley explained.

"(Jim) left a wife and three-year-old son behind when he volunteered. There was a lot of bitterness amongst the people who knew him and it wasn't a subject anyone ever talked about. It was only when a historian from the University of Hull, who was researching the city's links to the International Brigade, contacted us for information in 2005 that we learnt about what he did," James said.

Jim was a 24-year-old leather worker and member of the Communist Party when he left his home to fight in Spain in 1938. He volunteered with his friend Robert Wardle, a dock worker with a young family who was also from Hull.

The pair had been in the country for just six weeks when they were both killed, along with 100 of their comrades, during an attack by Italian tanks at the village of Calaceite, near Barcelona.

CONVICTION

After the truth was revealed, the Bentleys joined with UNISON, local activists - including Hull band The Beautiful South - and the families of the other volunteers, in calling for a memorial to be erected.

"Jim was a man of conviction who fought and

“THE PAIR HAD BEEN IN THE COUNTRY FOR JUST SIX WEEKS WHEN THEY WERE BOTH KILLED”

died for what he believed in. He is a hero and as a family we're extremely proud to have his name. During the Spanish Civil War most people in Britain didn't realise it was the first wave of a much bigger conflict," James said.

"Although the volunteers weren't fighting in their country's name, they knew that fascism was a danger to everyone in Europe. They fought to protect people from evil, just as the British soldiers in the Second World War did and it's about time they were recognised for it."

UNISON area organiser Joe Gibbins, who has led the campaign and moved a motion in support of a Hull memorial approved at the union's national delegate conference nine years ago, said the memorial would also serve as a reminder of the conflict's relevance to today's febrile political climate.

"There are a lot of parallels between the 1930s and the present day. Economic decline and severe austerity helped to foster fascism then and they are doing the same now. Greece has seen the rise of the far-right Golden Dawn party and Austria recently avoided electing a neo-fascist government by a hair's breadth," said Joe, who is from Hull.

"Across the globe it is a poison that's gaining ground. As well as acknowledging the sacrifices of the volunteers and honouring their memory, the memorial will help to educate against the dangers of fascism. In order to remind people that we're one as working people and the divisions created by the far-right harm

communities."

Despite the similarities some aspects of the volunteers' lives are almost unimaginable today, Joe pointed out.

"One of the volunteers, Bernard Wilson, was just 16 when he hitchhiked from Hull to Spain and used his brother's passport to sign up. There aren't many 16-year-olds with that sort of political conviction today," said Joe. ■

InMemoriam

Designs for the memorial to Spanish Civil War heroes planned for Hull city centre, are still being considered.

The memorial group are hoping to raise between £8,000 and £20,000 for its construction.

If you would like to contribute please send the donation to the campaign's Hull and East Riding Credit Union account: sort code 08-92-50, account number 67005844, using the reference 18734 ■



THEY
FOUGHT
TO PROTECT
PEOPLE
FROM EVIL



▼ Below: Spanish civil war hero Dolores Ibárruri Gómez - 'La Pasionaria'



Photo: MemoWikipedia



Photo: Mark Harvey

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The MP for Sheffield Central finds opposition frustrating, but the former UNISON activist still manages to make a massive impact. **Mary Maguire** reports

“
PEOPLE
WERE
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NEGLECT
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In a typical Parliamentary week, Paul Blomfield says goodbye to his wife, MEP Linda MacAvan on Monday morning. He goes to the Commons in Westminster. Linda goes to Brussels. The couple meet up again in Sheffield for the weekend's campaigning activities, surgeries and meetings with constituents. If Paul gets a bit of free time, he can be found at a Blades home game at Bramall Lane or maybe eating a curry at his favourite Indian.

Paul, a former UNISON branch secretary, was first elected MP in 2010, for Sheffield Central, a marginal seat after boundary changes. He won in a tightly fought campaign after the second count with a majority of just 165. In 2015 he turned that into a thumping majority of 17,339 and it is now regarded as a safe Labour seat.

Not an easy achievement, but easy to see how he did it. As he seems to do with everything he undertakes, he got stuck in from the word go and carried people with him. He explains: "Campaigning on the doorstep felt different in 2010. I was ready to criticise those things that Labour had got wrong, but also to point out the extraordinary achievements of 13 years of power.

RENOVATED

"Sheffield was transformed. Almost a billion pounds was spent on improving social housing, every one of our secondary schools was rebuilt or renovated, there was a huge investment in the NHS and the transformative impact of the minimum wage. In 2015 people were feeling the huge impact of five years of Tory led neglect.

"I have been active politically since a schoolboy

but never thought about entering Parliament.

"I agreed to stand because I felt that the expenses scandal was just another step in the growing public cynicism about politics. And I wanted to find ways of reconnecting politics with people."

CASEWORK

Paul set up his 'big conversation' with constituents. He organises more than 50 events each September before the start of Parliament to find out what people are most bothered about. Around 2,000 people attend and that, says Paul, 'shapes the work that I do in Parliament'.

Sheffield Central covers both the wealthiest and the poorest parts of Sheffield, plus the city centre.

It's hugely multi-cultural and Paul, as a consequence, gets a wide range of

casework. Despite being in opposition, he has scored some hits and won awards. Recently he persuaded the Government to change the rules on benefit payments to terminally ill veterans. "It was a relatively small thing, but hugely important for those affected".

Payday loans trapped many of his constituents in a spiral of debt, so Paul built up a cross-party coalition and succeeded in changing the rules governing payday lenders.

INJUSTICE

And as a champion of workers' rights, he led the charge in Parliament against the 'scandal' of home care workers not being paid for travelling time between care visits. He says: "This is simply illegal, non-compliance with minimum wage legislation. Greater enforcement by HMRC, with local councils making it a contractual condition for providers to pay for travel time should be the norm. Otherwise we are letting down those workers and the people who rely on them".

Paul cut his political teeth as a schoolboy when he joined the Anti-Apartheid Movement to fight against the injustice of racism. He set up Sheffield AAM – the UK's biggest anti-apartheid group – and was part of the national leadership. At the request of the African National Congress, he visited South Africa after the Soweto school students' uprising.

So it's not surprising that Paul cites Nelson Mandela as his greatest political hero.

Fighting injustice, unfairness and inequality provide a sharp focus for Paul's unceasing energy. He trained as a teacher, worked as a researcher, managed Sheffield University's students' union and City Trust, and joined the Labour Party in 1978. A former activist in NALGO, then UNISON, Paul believes our biggest single challenge is reversing the growing inequality between the rich and poor. He says:

"Throughout the last century there was an increasing move towards greater equality.

"That is reversing and it can be tracked back to Margaret Thatcher's attack on trade unions. It tilted the balance of power towards the employers."

RELENTLESS

"Alongside that, with manufacturing in decline – a crisis in steel – we lost secure, skilled jobs. Now we rely on financial services with no incentive to invest for the long term."

Paul is relentless in attacking the Government's 'empty rhetoric about creating a Northern Powerhouse'. He is battling to get Government offices, with more well paid public sector jobs, moved out of London, preferably to Yorkshire. He added:

"Yorkshire built this country's wealth through the industrial revolution, but wealth and opportunity has been shifted from the north towards London and the south-east. Government intervention is crucial. We need

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WEALTH
HAS BEEN
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NORTH
TOWARDS
LONDON
”

investment in infrastructure, particularly transport, and a comprehensive industrial strategy."

Although he finds it 'deeply frustrating' being in opposition, particularly trying to challenge Government policies that hit the most vulnerable and attack many of the great social advances that he holds dear, he has made an impact:

"Being able to make a difference is satisfying, but it would be so much better if we were in Government".

Hear, hear! ■

Curriculum Vitae

- Born 25 August, 1953
Chatham, Kent
- Joined Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) 1969, aged 16
- St. John's College, York 1971-1974, qualified as a teacher
- Visited South Africa, trailed by secret police 1979
- Twice president of student union and member of NUS national executive.
- Set up Sheffield AAM Member of AAM national committee 1979 - 1994
- General manager Sheffield University students' union 1979-2010
- Joined Labour Party in 1978
- Chair Sheffield Labour Party 1993 - 2009
- Trustee and then chair, Sheffield Trust 1994 - 1998
- Former NALGO and UNISON branch secretary
- Elected MP for Sheffield Central 2010 and 2015
- Married to Linda MacAvan, MEP for Yorkshire and Humber, son Michael

A BRIGHT FUTURE

Some people might take UNISON for granted, but not Elson Nkoma. **Ryan Fletcher** talks to a man who escaped a despotic regime in Zimbabwe



“
I THINK
LEAVING
THE EU
IS A
BIG BLOW
FOR THE
UK
”

When UNISON member Elson Nkoma waved goodbye to his family in 2003 he didn't know it would be 11 years before he was re-united with his wife, Albertia, and daughter, Lindie.

Being separated from your loved ones isn't a decision that anyone takes lightly, but the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe left the Nkomas with no choice. Under the despotic rule of President Robert Mugabe, the country's economy collapsed and political repression was rife.

"It was just really bad," explained 45-year-old Elson.

"There was an economic meltdown and when the situation is that bad you can never know when you're on the wrong side of people.

"We had to sit down and say 'this isn't working, what can we do? How can we have a decent and peaceful life? How can we provide our child with a safe environment and a good education?' It was a very difficult decision to make."

NURSING

After Albertia and Lindie had arrived in the UK, Elson faced yet more problems: He was repeatedly denied a visa to join them, prompting him

to move to the relative safety of South Africa, where he subsisted as a security guard for the next eight years.

Family life was reduced to letters, phone calls and occasional visits to South Africa for Albertia and Lindie, who by then had settled in Sheffield. By the time Elson was granted permission to join them in January 2014, Albertia had embarked on a nursing career and Lindie was close to finishing secondary school.

"I can't even explain what it felt like to be with them again," Elson said. "When I saw them I just threw my



Photo: Jim Varney

suitcases down. For us all to be under one roof is the greatest feeling I could ever dream of."

FANTASTIC

Some time after he arrived Elson got a job as a porter at Sheffield's Royal Hallamshire hospital and within a few weeks had joined UNISON. He describes his experience in the union as 'fantastic'.

Elson said: "It's very different from what I have found in workplaces where people are classified and divided because of their roles. But in the union you are integrated and you can make things happen. It's very

motivating and it gives you a purpose."

Being pigeon-holed is something Elson became familiar with during his time in South Africa, where resentment towards immigrants from neighbouring countries often runs high.

In the run-up to the EU referendum, Elson noticed that similar anti-foreigner sentiment crept into the debate over whether to remain or leave.

He said: "It seemed there was a lot of criticism of figures from the outside, rather than educating people about the facts. It was something I saw in South Africa as well, where people say 'they're taking our jobs'."

With his experience of keeping a family together over thousands of miles and being immersed in different cultures, Elson is not convinced that dissolving ties with the EU will benefit the UK.

"Immigrants do many jobs that people don't want to do, and they bring new skills, and in that way they help the economy. For instance in the hospital the majority of cleaners are foreigners, if you removed them it would be very difficult for it to function," he said.

"I think leaving the EU is a big blow for the UK that will have major consequences. I believe it is better for people to integrate and work together; because this makes it easier for them to find a common purpose that benefits everybody."

The key to achieving cohesion, says Elson, is education and the confidence

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WOMEN
REALLY
DO HAVE
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TO CHANGE
SOCIETY
”

and understanding that learning brings. That's why he decided to undertake UNISON's Return to Learn course, which he completed earlier this year.

Before Elson was "afraid to go to interviews," but now "I look forward to them because it is an opportunity to sell myself. Other people should feel like that too." In fact, Elson enjoyed the course so much that he signed up to become a learning rep and will begin training in October.

POWER

Elson credits his awakening to the benefits of education to Albertia, who is he clearly devoted to.

"I give this honour to my wife because she gave me the encouragement. She said 'I think we need to go to school so we can improve our lives'. I was saying 'no I don't think we do, it's better for Lindie to do that'," he said.

"But she helped change my mentality and made me realise that if your children see you doing it and see it's attainable, then you are an inspiration to them. Women really do have the power to change society, they are the greatest motivators ever."

Elson and Albertia's attitude has already born fruit, with Lindie – who is now 18 – about to start a degree in international trade. As for Elson, he plans to follow in his wife's footsteps and become a nurse.

Despite the struggles and the years spent apart, the Nkomas are stronger than ever and looking forward to a bright future in their adopted nation. ■

BEST SAY NOWT?

Sometimes it's probably best to keep your most unpopular opinions to yourself. But here Active! resident controversialist **Peter Carroll** gets a few off his chest

Nineteen years ago we witnessed scenes of unprecedented national grief after the death, in a car crash, of Princess Diana.

Huge queues of mourners waited for hours in silence for their chance to write their thoughts in one of the thousands of books of condolence which seemed to appear overnight right across the land.

HYSTERIA

These were dangerous times for anyone who wasn't visibly upset by that fatal crash in a tunnel in Paris.

There were reports at the time of people being physically attacked by others who, almost demented by grief for a woman they had never met, demanded loud and tearful mourning from everyone around them.

Life-long republicans were wise to keep their views to themselves in the face of such mass hysteria. Everyone was expected to conform to the national mood.

It was like the clock had been turned back a couple of centuries as angry accusations of treason circulated about those who dared to put the story into a more rational perspective.

Looking back, I wonder what those mourners think now about their (real) emotional distress all those years ago. What caused the outpouring of public

sadness, and who were they really crying for, are surely questions they now ask themselves.

That Princess Di moment was the most extreme example I have ever witnessed of the mass of the public responding in the same way to a death which can only have had a symbolic meaning to anyone outside her family and close friends.

And this extraordinary outburst was before the advent of the power of social media, which would surely have staggered under the weight of Tweets and blogs from here and around the world.

But on a less intense level, we are still regularly urged by the media to sign up emotionally to national and international enterprises which are supposed to show our superiority to other nations.

Not the European Football Championships, obviously. The England team, once again, managed to defy everyone's low expectations of them before the tournament by losing to Iceland's plucky part-timers.

But the Olympics in Rio provided a rare opportunity for the media to fly the (for now) union flag and brag about all the medals our boys and girls brought home.

Day after day news programmes thrust emotional young athletes onto our screens and asked them, endlessly, how they felt

“ I HAVE NEVER MET ANYONE WHO IS A DEVOTEE OF THE COXLESS PAIRS ”

the moment they knew they had won the medal.

There are only a limited number of responses to such a daft question. Their replies were all variations on 'fantastic' - including 'mind-blowing', 'unbelievable' and 'ecstatic'.

OBSCUR

Unsurprisingly, no athlete I saw expressed sympathy for the losers and most of them put their success down to years of gruelling and repetitive training in the gym and on the roads. Sheer hard work was the only way to win.

I don't know about you, but I have never met anyone who is a devotee of the single sculls or coxless pair rowing, for example.

They don't run pub trips to watch small-bore shooting contests and you don't tune in to watch live archery on the TV on Saturday night.

Most athletes who took part in the 28 sports featured in Rio are condemned to spending all their lives anonymously honing often obscure skills until they get their moment in the spotlight every two and four years.

A cynic is said to be one who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

I accept there is an intrinsic value in playing sport and respect their dedication to their chosen career.



Peter Carroll



Photo: Jefferson Bernardes/Shutterstock

Picturesque but poverty-stricken – a Rio favela

But let's look at the price of everything. Economically struggling Brazilian taxpayers paid out \$11.6 billion to pay for the spectacle.

It comes down to money, as we know from the allegations of corruption swirling around athletics. The Russians were more or less excluded because of proven state-sponsored doping of athletes to enhance their performance.

That's cheating on a vast scale and casts doubt on the very future of the Olympics

The fact that 'we' won a record number of medals is meant to make us feel good,

“
WHAT
THEY
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BY SPORT
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SMALL
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”

even as, like in Brazil, the gap between the haves and the have-nots grows by the day.

Social housing, the NHS, schools and careworkers are struggling to survive, as Jamie Oliver declares war on the Government for shelving its anti-obesity drive.

ALLARDYCE

He says if the Government doesn't act, we'll be fielding a medal winning sumo wrestling team when the next games come round.

This talking-up of the importance of sport coincides with the sell-off of hundreds of school playing fields and the closure of community

sports centres.

What they mean by sport is the creation of a small elite funded by national lottery money flying the flag for Britain abroad.

I can live without seeing another double sculls race ever again, but fair play to athletes who do it for the love of sport.

As all the athletes have said, for them it's down to sheer hard work.

Unfortunately, for the national and international bodies which run the Olympics and world football, it seems to be about sheer graft. Just ask Sam Allardyce. ■



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

Active! political columnist

Want a real scandal? This is it...

The National Health Service was never meant to be run as a commercial enterprise with a profit and loss account, but if it were a company it would be bankrupt. The best way to fund the NHS and social care may be a dedicated tax to be spent only on these services. Labour needs to take note



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THE 1980s



Forget Brexit, the grammar school row and the private life of Keith Vaz MP. The real scandal is the terrible state of the NHS.

For years, people have been crying wolf over the funding of the health service – but now the beast is in the wards.

NHS Providers, the bosses who run the show, say finances are 'at a tipping point'. They must get more money - or services will have to be cut; including A & E, cancer treatment and mental health provision.

Complacent as ever, Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt says NHS England must make do with an extra dollop of less than £4 billion for this year.

But he's ordered hospital chiefs to cut back almost six times that sum - £22 billion – in 'efficiency savings' by 2020. Maybe he's too busy bashing the junior hospital doctors to remember that.

NHS trusts everywhere are running massive deficits. The total for last year was about £800 million. In the first nine months of 2016, that figure has almost tripled to around £2.3 BILLION.

This parlous state of affairs was never intended by the founders of the health service. The NHS was never supposed to be run as a profit-and-loss commercial enterprise.

But that's what it's become, cautiously under New Labour and now full-pelt under the Tories. If it were a public company, it would be bankrupt,

MPs on the Commons health

committee are investigating NHS finances, and Chancellor Philip Hammond will have to make emergency provision in his November 23 autumn statement on public spending. Or the NHS will go over a cliff.

Already, 50 hospitals have been allowed to abandon waiting time targets for A & E, cancer and routine operations. Every area of NHS England has been told to come up with services that could be shut or merged.

Five wards could be closed by Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust, and a 'major reconfiguration' of front-line services in Wakefield, North Kirklees, Calderdale and Huddersfield is coming down the track.

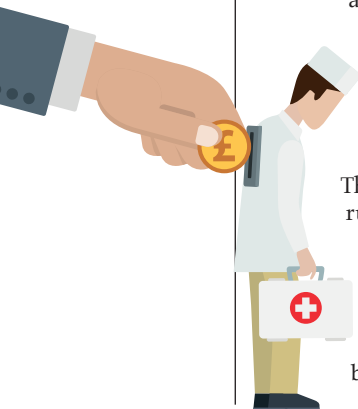
Hospital bosses warn they are 'at breaking point'. In the year to June, 76,845 patients had their operations cancelled on the day they were due to take place. Every day, 210 hip replacements, cataract and other 'non-urgent' procedures were called off at the last minute.

A new report blamed 'bed blocking', mostly by elderly patients. But they're the victims of this crisis, not the perpetrators.

Between 2005 and 2015, the NHS lost one quarter of its hospital beds, and more closures are threatened. The UK has 2.6 beds per 1,000 of the population, compared to six in France and eight in Germany.

In Sheffield alone, nine hospitals (not wards) have closed since the 1980s, and the sites sold off to developers who built housing estates or converted them into flats.

These are the symptoms. What's the cure? Investment, obviously. The Government isn't properly funding the NHS. The Tories sneer that the solution isn't 'throwing money at the problem'.





But there's money to face down the striking doctors. There's money to channel NHS work into private medical firms, who now soak up one pound in every twelve spent on our health.

I still think the best way to fund the NHS and social care would be a dedicated tax to be spent only on these vital services. Even a Tory former health minister, Dan Poulter, agrees.

Maybe now the leadership election is over, Labour will revisit this issue. It's more important than the private life of a back-bench MP.

IT'S A SICK JOKE

Yorkshire is the second least prosperous – i.e. poorest – region in the country, with high rates of youth unemployment: Bradford, 26 per cent, Sheffield, 19 per cent, Hull, 17 per cent and Leeds, 14 per cent. Even affluent York has seen the figure triple since 2004 to 12 per cent.

Northern Powerhouse? Don't make me laugh, it hurts.

CLUBBING TOGETHER

The future of that great British institution, the workingmen's club, is in peril.

In the heydays of the 1970s, there were more than five thousand. Now, fewer than 1,500, and many are in financial trouble. In the Leeds area alone, numbers have dipped from 70 to around 56.

Pubs are shutting too, I know. But important though they are, they're not the same. Clubs don't just serve cheap beer. They offer community spaces to all kinds of activities from slimming, knitting and charity fund-raising to karate.

When t'club goes, something goes out of the heart of the community. They've been part of the fabric of life for generations – and occasionally a joke, like the Idle Workingmen's Club in the Bradford suburb of that name, whose

badge features a man leaning on a shovel.

I'm a member of two clubs, the Empire and the Brookside, in South Elmsall. Writing for the Daily Mirror, I visited Garforth WMC, originally established in a house in 1907 by miners in the village's long-closed pits.

The club hasn't gone the way of the collieries. It thrives. Garforth has opened its doors to every kind of community activity, free. It has 1,200 members, and turns in a healthy profit.

There's life in the old WMC yet. Let's nurture it.

TYKE-OVER

The Yorkshire Dales National Park has extended westwards into Cumbria, exciting fears that us Tykes aim to take over the world.

Well, some territorial ambitions are only right. We should have Saddleworth and Earby back, not to mention Middlesbrough and Redcar.

TYKETASTIC

If Yorkshire was a country (and who sez it isn't?), it would have been 17th in the Rio Olympics medal table, above New Zealand, Canada and even sports-mad Cuba.

This is a tribute not just to the athletes themselves, like boxer Nicola Adams and the Brownlee brothers, but to the ethos of the county. It's the winning, not the taking part, that counts for Tykes.

FOR THE BIRDS

Animal lovers oppose the building of Britain's biggest offshore wind farm, 55 miles off the Yorkshire coast. They say it will kill sea birds using the North Sea as a flight path.

Surely, gannets will have the sense to fly round the turbines. After all, the structures are 623 ft tall, so easily visible. But what do I know about avian aviation. ■

DustUp

When I was a boy, I told my father I wanted to be a dustman. The lads were always so cheerful.

He said I could do that once I had a university degree, and then it didn't seem so appealing.

Now, I read that refuse collectors are spat at, punched and abused by homeowners angry about recycling rules. One was even attacked with a samurai sword. The attacks more than doubled from 159 to 309 this year.

UNISON quite rightly blames the 40 per cent funding cuts that devastated services.

A spokeswoman for the union said: "No one should have to suffer verbal abuse or physical attack for the job they do. Councils should adopt a zero tolerance approach to anyone who tries to abuse or intimidate their staff." Amen to that.



A LESSON TO REMEMBER

All too often teaching assistants are the victims of abuse from pupils and sometimes parents. In extreme examples teaching staff are physically attacked. Here solicitor **Phil Kyte** of Thompsons' Leeds office, urges UNISON members who have been the subject of assault – verbal or physical - to access legal advice through the union if they feel management is not dealing with the problem

Photo: Pavel Ilyukhin/shutterstock

A recent UNISON study found that more than half of all teaching assistants (TAs) have directly suffered abuse in the classroom.

The figures show that 53 per cent of TAs have experienced verbal threats and 73 per cent have witnessed it. The scale of the abuse suggests that TAs can often work amid a general culture of hostility and are having to face unpleasant and threatening environments to carry out a job that, in most cases, is their passion.

Also worrying is the level of verbal abuse meted out by parents. Some 31 per cent of TAs surveyed said that they had been subjected to threats from mothers and fathers.

These trends, if left unchecked, threaten to toxify what should be a healthy learning and working environment. Educators go into their line of work with

a passion for helping young people for the long term, but the more they are exposed to this level of abuse, the less likely it is that they will see it as a career path. This has serious implications for the sustainability of our high-class state education system.

The unrelenting pressure on schools to meet government-imposed grade targets only adds to the challenges facing TAs. These poorly-paid public servants provide one of the most valuable services in our society. Too often they are not being given the support from the school, from the education authority, and ultimately from the government, that they need to do their job to the best of their ability.

Thompsons' work representing teachers and teaching assistants who have been victims of violence reveals an alarming level of abuse that tallies with these findings. In one case we

“
A
TEACHER
WAS
KNOCKED
OUT BY
A PUPIL
WHO THEN
TRIED TO
STRANGLE
THEM
”

supported a teacher knocked unconscious by a pupil who then tried to strangle them in a corridor. Our investigations revealed that the teacher had not been made aware of the pupil's violent past - clearly wholly unacceptable in a line of work which can be volatile. While this may be an extreme example, the TAs that we see are facing unacceptable levels of threatening behaviour.

As a UNISON member, if you face physical or verbal abuse at work you should report it to a senior member of staff immediately.

If you believe that not enough is being done to deal with the problem, or if it continues, then your employer may be in breach of their legal duty to provide you with a safe and secure working environment. Under such circumstances you should consider taking legal advice, via UNISON, from experts at Thompsons at no cost to you. ■

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- Offer a presentation to or 'exhibit' at a branch meeting
- Provide promotional literature and materials



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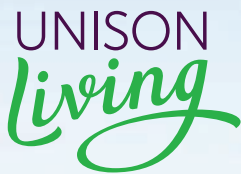
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