

P3 & 12 DAVE RE-ELECTED

Leeds-born general secretary will boost the union's key campaigns

P26 HE'S OUT AND ACTIVE

Stephen Wood warns that LGBT workers are still being victimised

P30 LET THEM EAT CAKE

Peter Carroll is cheesed off with The Great British Bake-off

UNISON ACTIVE!

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A Total Con Job

**'ORRIBLE OZZY'S STAGE TRICKERY
RYAN FLETCHER - p16**



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

IT'S A GREAT HONOUR

The new year may be little more than three months old, but it's already been a tough time for many UNISON members.

This year began as the last one ended – with trade unionists under attack from the Government. The Trade Union Bill is the latest and most vicious example of its assault on our movement. It seeks to take our voice, reduce our ability to campaign and curb your right to take action when you need to. Quite simply, it's the biggest attack on working people

in decades.

Meanwhile, you've been getting on with making our country a better, safer place. Whilst you've been under attack, you've been giving your all to your communities.

Who was tackling the floods this Christmas? UNISON members.

Who was staffing our hospitals and care homes as the water levels rose? UNISON members.

And who has been going to remarkable lengths to provide local services as their budgets are cut and wages are capped?

UNISON members.

Representing you is a great honour, and I was proud to be re-elected as your general secretary. The years ahead will be tough, but I will keep fighting for the better jobs, pay, services and country we are all striving for.

UNISON members have always stood alongside me, and I will continue to stand beside all of you in these difficult times. Thank you for everything you do for your communities, your workplaces and your union.

• Dave's our champ page 12

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

Fighting every step of the way

The Government's unprecedented attack on our public services is bringing misery and chaos to millions.

Every essential service, from the NHS and local government to police and ambulance services is being systematically starved of funds. Austerity has created the slowest recovery in recent history, while government borrowing continues to soar. But that does not concern this government. It is creating these

problems for ideological reasons – to replace public services with private insurance policies and to hand billions of pounds of taxpayers' money to private companies.

Our members are bearing the brunt of all this and yet still dedicate themselves to improving individual lives and the well-being of communities.

The Trade Union Bill is designed to suffocate any resistance to this relentless destruction.

That is why it is so encouraging to see our

members standing together to fight for the very existence of the NHS and local democracy. UNISON members, as always, will take whatever action is needed to protect jobs and services and ensure decent pay and conditions in the public sector.

We will fight every step of the way to save our services from greedy private companies and their close friends in Government.

• A real eye opener page 9



Fury as car park charge doubles

UNISON members working for the Doncaster and Bassetlaw NHS Trust face a doubling of car park charges from March this year.

The trust says the new fees, which will also apply to the public, will raise up to £800,000 a year, writes *Peter Carroll*.

But UNISON says the new charges could cost low paid staff at least an extra £30 a month just to go to work and is in negotiations with the trust over the issue.

Regional organiser Sue Cookman said the increases were being rushed through without proper consideration for members who will

struggle to pay the increased charges.

Sue said: "The trust admits that the increases will be unpopular but blames their huge budget deficit for the need to generate income in this way.

"Many members who live in villages do not have a public transport system to get them to and from work and are reliant on a car.

"It is not their fault

that the trust has a budget deficit or that the Government is starving the NHS of

vital funding, yet they are being forced to pick up some of the bill with these new charges."

UNISON has serious

concerns about the burden on members, particularly as they have had less than a one per cent pay rise in the last five years.

As Active! went to press, it seemed that the trust was planning to introduce a flat rate increase so that senior medical staff and managers will pay the same rate as the lowest paid staff. UNISON was due to present the concerns of members to management.

Sue said: "We want them to understand that this proposal will cause real hardship to dedicated NHS staff who are already under severe pressure just to make ends meet."



College staff strike over pay freeze

Members of UNISON and the University and College Union (UCU) at further education colleges took strike action on February 24 in a row

over pay.

Staff are angry that employers' representatives, the Association of Colleges, demanded a pay freeze, despite the fact that some staff have suffered a real-terms pay cut of more than 17 per cent in the last five years. UCU members walked out in November as part of the dispute and in February they were joined on picket lines by

UNISON members. It was understood that further strike action could take place if employers fail to negotiate.

Some colleges have indicated that they would offer an increase so the unions concentrated industrial action at institutions which had signalled their adherence to the pay freeze.

UNISON's regional manager Steve Torrance said: "Further education has always been the Cinderella sector

compared with higher education. We've got to the stage where employees in FE are on Cinderella pay. They're not asking to go to the ball, they just want a decent level of pay. Many people are leaving FE. There's only so much pain you can take.

"College employers are split over this and we welcome those who are offering a pay rise and urge the others to get back to the negotiating table."



Paramedics win 12-year-old dispute

Paramedics in Yorkshire and Humberside have won a re-grading dispute which has dragged on since 2004.

The UNISON members working for the Yorkshire Ambulance Trust had been balloted on taking industrial action over the issue in January, writes *Peter Carroll*.

An overwhelming majority voted in favour of industrial action in their fight to be given pay grades which reflect their level of skill and responsibility.

But after further long and detailed negotiations with the trust management, the threat of industrial action has been withdrawn.

UNISON regional organiser Ray Gray said: "This is a success for both the union negotiating team and the Yorkshire Ambulance Trust who have been working flat out to find a solution to this long-standing



Ray Gray



problem.

"Paramedics were wrongly graded way back in 2004 and, while it's sad that it has taken this long to put it right, we are pleased that the paramedics are now going to receive a pay rate that truly reflects the work they do and the skills they have."

Ray added that the regrading from band five to band six will give paramedics an increase

ranging from £544 to £2,909 depending on where they are in the current grading system.

He said the overdue pay rise was not only important for the individual members affected, but also for the future of the ambulance service in the region.

Ray said: "We hope this is the first step towards making sure the service retains the paramedics it already has and attracts new ones.

"For some time paramedics nationally have

been leaving the service in droves because of the lengthy dispute over pay grades and the pressure they work under.

"This is the first step towards changing that situation. Our members made it clear in the ballot that they were prepared to take action.

"Thankfully we have avoided that by negotiating this agreement with the trust which we all hope will greatly improve the service."

Top managers award themselves 10 per cent rise

Senior managers at Hambleton council in North Yorkshire have awarded themselves a 10 per cent pay rise this year - while front-line staff enter the fifth year of below inflation pay rises.

Regional organiser Mark Harrison said:

"This is a slap in the face for our members and we will consult them on what steps they want to take.

"Residents in Hambleton have had their council tax raised by five per cent for the first time in four years. They will be disgusted that most of that is going into the

pockets of a handful of highly paid council managers."

The Tory-led local authority also voted to increase councillors' basic allowance from £5,500 to £6,050,

which they say is in line with independent recommendations in 2014.

A Conservative councillor described the decisions as "grubby".



Mark Harrison

MAKING A SPLASH

Having reported on the floods, the media turned its attention to pestilence. Consulting editor **Mary Maguire** (below) casts an eye over the coverage

There you are sitting down to your tea with your family and suddenly three uninvited guests turn up. Like latter-day Viking hordes, Eva, Frank and Gertrude stormed in, bringing watery destruction in their wake. Ah, if only they had been content with smashing your best china or ruining the downstairs carpet.

Eva, Frank and Gertrude sent every river in Yorkshire into overdrive. Banks were burst, homes destroyed, people made homeless or worse. The iconic city of York was under water. And, knowing the British appetite for weather disaster stories, editors across the nation gave their favourite order: Clear the front page.

All fun and games for the media perhaps, but it meant a huge workload for UNISON members in the affected areas and distress for too many families.

A plethora of "Britain braced" headlines appeared. "...for nightmare storms" declared the

Daily Star, "...for more floods", according to the Mail, Guardian, Telegraph, ITV and BBC; with the variation: "Yorkshire braced for

storm Frank" (Heart Radio) and "North Yorkshire braced for storm" (Minsterfm), to the "Flooded areas braced" (Sky). Footage, shot from helicopters, was broadcast on all the channels, snappers were seen dangling precariously from helicopters, lamp-posts, treetops, or roofs to get the best shots. The emergency services and the environment agency were "inundated" and the Government sent in the troops. A story is nothing if it hasn't got human interest – and editors sent reporters out to round up the usual suspects.

SINKING

York Press (et al) reported on the rescue by firefighters of 26 schoolchildren trapped in a flooded bus. The kids used their mobile phones to call for help and one smashed a back window. The driver got it in the neck – well someone had to.

Then there was the farmer who steadfastly refused to leave his sinking Land Rover. Rescuers forced open his sunroof and, after police negotiators failed to persuade him to leave, manhandled him to safety, gleefully recorded the Mail. They should have called in UNISON negotiators.

Help came from an unlikely source. As the Jewish Chronicle, Mail, Calderdale Advertiser, reported thus: "Residents in the flood affected areas of Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd and Kirkgate in Leeds have been helped by

an Israeli disaster relief charity, whose team flew in especially. Four IsraAID volunteers are working to repair homes and distribute blankets and food in the worst hit areas." More help came from local mosques, particularly in the Calder Valley area.

Just as with Noah, animals were centre stage. The Racing Post told us of a trainer who "bravely helped save three horses and a Shetland pony from the floods".

Of course, a row always goes down well. City AM reported on a fight breaking out over Government plans for a temporary footbridge over the River Wharfe in Tadcaster to replace a flood-hit crossing

TERROR

For some, though, the floods presented an opportunity to go waterskiing. Who was that man filmed waterskiing near Selby (Telegraph, Yorkshire Post)? Answers on a postcard, please.

No "splash" would be complete, however, without a royal appearance. Prince Andrew, the Duke of York arrived by royal barge to pay tribute to how the "local community had pulled together in such a fantastic way" (Sky, Y Post et al).

Harrumphing editorials began to apportion blame for the floods. I blame the Government.

And then, suddenly, the waters receded and a new terror materialised – pestilence in the shape of the Zika virus.

But that's another story. ■



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FIGHT OF OUR LIVES

Former activist Steve Torrance, recently appointed temporary regional manager, sets out the challenges faced by the union.

Barrie Clement reports



Image: Andy Paraskos

Steve Torrance was bored rigid at school.

Education – or at least the way it was taught – just didn't interest him. He was the “classroom joker” at his secondary school in Hamilton, Scotland.

He left school at 15 without qualifications and became successively an apprentice baker (for two years), a trainee area manager with brewer Ind Coope (two years) and then three years as a seasonal worker in Cornwall, or “beach bum” as he puts it.

Having met his wife in the South West, Steve moved to her home town of Hull and got a job as a security guard at the city's university. It was there he joined Nupe and set a new course as union activist and subsequently union official.

“I have a lot to thank the union movement for,” says Steve. “The vast majority of my education came through Nupe and then UNISON.”

Steve, who has two grown-up children, has been appointed temporary regional manager following Chris Jenkinson's secondment to UNISON centre.

He has taken responsibility for local government, water, environment, transport,

police and justice, equalities and TUC liaison. It is a portfolio which will leave him considerably less time for his hobbies; motorcycling and swimming.

“I feel really privileged to get the opportunity to put some of my ideas into practice – although I take an evolutionary rather than revolutionary approach.

“I'm fiercely committed to the idea that the lay membership is in charge of the union. That is its driving ethos. But on a day to day basis it's about partnership between the lay membership, officials and staff.”

PRAGMATIC

A Labour Party member since 1985, he says: “I'm most comfortable with traditional Labour Party values. I'm pragmatic but not New Labour. Probably the best way of putting it would be to say I believe in traditional values in a modern setting.”

He believes Labour councillors are being forced into a corner. “They're having a really horrible time because of cuts imposed by central government. It's their duty to set a balanced budget, otherwise the council gets

taken over by government commissioners whose priorities won't be to look after working people. “There are massive challenges for local government. Some councils are even going to struggle to deliver statutory services. Meanwhile services used by young people, youth centres and so on, are being axed everywhere because their provision is not a statutory duty. The problem is that such facilities make for a much better society.”

On his responsibility for equality issues, he says: “Equality is an intrinsic element of what we do as trade unionists. It's in our fibre, in our DNA. We must never forget that. If we compromise on that in any way, we are not fit to call ourselves trade unionists.”

And the issues facing working people? “There are massive challenges ahead. There is a real need for people to belong to trade unions and unions have to confront the Tory government over its anti-union legislation. We're in for the fight of our lives. We're not guaranteed to win, but if we don't fight, we are guaranteed to lose.” ■

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A REAL EYE-OPENER

Yorkshire and Humberside convenor **Wendy Nichols** reflects on her hectic first period as UNISON president and looks forward to the next few months

One of the great things I found about being UNISON president is you get to meet so many different members in different areas with different jobs, but with one thing in common: our amazing union.

Over the past six months, I've travelled thousands of miles across most of our regions and all our nations; I've chaired and spoken at conferences, stood on picket lines, demonstrated, lobbied parliament and presented awards. And I've tried to keep on top of my branch work. I have been touched by the amount of effort put in by both lay members and staff in looking after and representing our members.

It's been an eye-opener. Being vice-president helped prepare me a bit, it helped me get ready, but you are never able to gauge what might be thrown at you.

I am the first president for years who has faced an incoming majority Conservative Government. They have thrown a lot at our members, the people they look after and the union.

In Ireland in July, I joined our Northern Ireland colleagues at the ITUC conference. Two subsequent visits to Northern Ireland helped me realise what it's like for them. I admire their grit

and courage in getting through what we have never really faced here.

And I found similar determination to keep fighting, when I spoke at the black members' conference in Llandudno. If I had a hat, I would take it off to people like Margaret Greer, the winner of our inaugural Nelson Mandela award, for her courage in fighting racism and inequality.

ASSAULT

At our LGBT members' conference in Brighton, I found a passion and conviction that inspired me. Similarly, our police and justice members deserve our support. I learnt that because police officers cannot be made redundant, it's our members in the firing line for cuts. They've been absolutely hammered by this government, yet they still carry on doing their best for the public they serve.

I've had one constant theme throughout the past six months and that is to try to defeat this rotten government's pernicious Trade Union Bill.

Whether it's speaking to union safety reps in London, or the East Midlands branch of the year, or Cymru or Scotland UNISON councils or to MPs or employers, I have put our case. This Tory government wants shot of us and we are in one of the biggest battles we have

“THE TORIES WANT SHOT OF US AND WE ARE IN FOR ONE OF THE BIGGEST BATTLES WE HAVE EVER FACED”

ever faced in the teeth of an all-out assault on unions.

I've also represented UNISON at conferences of sister unions in Canada and Austria, offering them our support and solidarity. In Vancouver, at the Canadian Union of Public Employees' conference, I spoke at a fringe about the dangers of the anti-union Bill. At both the CUPE conference and the Austrian YOUNION (Die Daseinsgewerkschaft) in Vienna, I was struck by our different approaches whether its frequency of conference or election of president. But, mostly, I was struck by how much we have in common.

Not much of the past six months has been plain sailing. I've hardly had a minute to myself and I've got used to living out of a suitcase. I don't scare easily, but when I got caught up in storm Desmond coming back from Glasgow, it got close. It took me 11 hours to get home and I was never so glad to get there in one piece.

It's been hectic, but I relish what the next few months will throw at me. ■



Wendy Nichols



A ONE WOMAN WHIRLWIND

Active! reporter **Ryan Fletcher** meets one of UNISON's unsung heroes

They say time waits for no man. But Tracy Brown is a woman – and a determined one at that. The 44-year-old St Anne's Community Services branch secretary juggles life as a single mum, a career as a housing support officer and her UNISON work with an energy that seems to defy the limited number of hours in a day.

West Yorkshire regional organiser, Dean Harper, described her as “almost a one woman branch. Not that she doesn't have a lot of support from her stewards because she does, but because she works so hard.” The fact that Tracy, from Leeds, has been St Anne's branch secretary for 13 years clearly shows that her members feel the same way.

When her popularity is pointed out to her, Tracy's response is modest.

“I don't see myself like that. The reason I started doing it was because I wanted to help and support people. I wanted better terms and conditions and for it to be fair. I feel like if the union wasn't around, employers would sometimes ride roughshod,” said Tracy.

“In the care industry especially, because of the sensitive and difficult nature of the work, people get accused of things they haven't done. Care work is underpaid and undervalued, and while I do understand that there have been cases of abuse, the vast majority are there to help people. That's why I work in housing support as well. Helping people is just part of my nature.”

One of Tracy's main duties

is to represent people during disciplinary proceedings, which take place “nearly every week”. Apart from completing a diploma in employment law in December 2014, Tracy feels her biggest achievement is that during 13 years of representing people only two of her members have ever been sacked.

AMBITION

Tracy’s sense of justice is also something she’s passed onto her 15-year-old son Nicholas, who she has raised on her own since he was six. Nicholas’ main ambition is to be a scientist, however his other passion is social justice. “He’s in all the top grades at school. Not bad considering he’s had a single parent on his hands,” says Tracy – though clearly it’s a statement that works both ways.

“He’s doing citizenship at the moment and he loves that because it’s all to do with human rights and employment law. God knows why he likes it, but he does. He feels like there should be justice in the world. He went to university last year to meet all the politicians and tell them what idiots they are – well the Conservative ones anyway! Last night he was out debating at an event held at Tetley’s, putting arguments for and against,” Tracy said.

Keeping all the plates spinning can be overwhelming at times. Tracy’s job is demanding and much of her UNISON work has to be completed at home in the evenings because her days are so busy. When Tracy isn’t working she’s shuttling Nicholas’s

back and forth from his extra-curricular activities, making sure he’s up to date with his school work and keeping her house in order.

“I don’t have a lot of time for myself and sometimes I think I’ve had enough – but then I get through it and carry on. You just have to,” she said.

Multitasking is a skill Tracy learnt from her mum, Margaret, who brought Tracy and her two siblings up on her own whilst working full time as a tailor. The most valuable lesson Tracy learnt from her mum was ensuring that she lived within her means in order to maintain a stable home life. Her own experiences as a single mum in a different era have also influenced her approach as a branch secretary.

PRESSURE

“There are quite a few single parents who have difficulties with childcare and working. It’s a lot of added pressure on people these days, so I advise that they can put in for flexible working and things like that. Years ago children weren’t expected to go to activities. Kids did them in school and other than that they were kicked out to play in the back garden,” Tracy said.

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“Life’s very different today. You’re expected to do more. So when we represent members we understand that they have to do their job but they have to have the opportunity to give their children so much as well.”

On top of learning from the past and managing the present, Tracy keeps an eye on the future. She would like to see an improvement in the atrocious pay and working conditions that many care workers face and hopes that UNISON will keep up the momentum in fighting for a proper living wage.

Last year she moved to a different area and so has taken a well-deserved break from doing the accounts for Nicholas’s scout troop and volunteering at a Help the Aged shop.

“I’m making sure Nicholas’s gets a good education, but when I moved it was too difficult to keep doing the other things, so apart from work and the union that’s all

I do at the moment,” said Tracy. “For the time being at least.” ■



DAVE'S OUR CHAMP

Active! editor **Barrie Clement** discovers how UNISON's newly re-elected leader will give a fresh boost to campaigns to promote public services and the dedicated people who work in them



The arithmetic is frightening. Under the Coalition Government more than 850,000 public sector jobs were lost.

But now UNISON's re-elected general secretary is predicting that a further 400,000 jobs are at risk as the Tory Government pursues its devastating and totally unnecessary austerity policies.

"This has got nothing to do with balancing the books, this is all about the Conservatives' pathological hatred for public services – and in particular public services delivered by public servants.

"They want people to believe that these enormous cutbacks are good for the economy. Well clearly they're not. Whole parts of the North in general and Yorkshire in particular are being plunged further and further into poverty. If there's no money to spend, local economies will be sucked further into a downward spiral."

Despite the attack on public servants' jobs, UNISON has managed to hold its head above water, says Leeds-born Dave. "Faced with the 850,000 job losses, the union has

managed to recruit 750,000 new members through well-planned and resourced campaigns, but mainly through the sheer hard work and persistence of our activists.

"Basically we've pretty much maintained membership levels which is no mean feat, given the circumstances. The challenge now is to make the membership grow."

Dave said that in his fourth term as UNISON general secretary he would concentrate his efforts on recruitment, promoting the value of public services and raising the public profile of care workers.

He also wants to give a fresh impetus to the campaign for the £8.25 an hour Living Wage: "We'll be pushing for the proper living wage, not George Osborne's pale imitation," said Dave. The Government is introducing a minimum of £7.20 an hour from April and calling it the 'living wage'.

Behind the scenes Dave and his colleagues have been taking on the Government in an attempt to win concessions on

▲ Above: Dave with colleagues from Yorkshire and Humberside

key points.

The Trade Union Bill is an example. "We're not going to stop this nasty, authoritarian legislation, but we must try and change it through arguing our case in public and in private."

LIFELINE

Ministers are seeking to cut off UNISON's financial lifeline by scrapping check-off – the system whereby union subscriptions are deducted from wages at source.

"The Government is arguing that subscription payments must be transparent and modernised. They also argue that taxpayers are paying for checkoff to be administered. This myth was dispelled by our lobby of Parliament last Autumn when we set the record straight with Tory MPs

"In fact UNISON pays most public sector employers a fee for deducting union subscriptions from wages. And employers get to hang on to the money for a while before it is passed on to the union – and earn interest on it as a consequence. In fact the system amounts to a nice

“WE’LL BE PUSHING FOR THE PROPER LIVING WAGE, NOT GEORGE OSBORNE’S PALE IMITATION”



little earner for some public sector organisations.”

Dave has been involved in discussions with the Government pointing this out to MPs and Peers who are preparing to put down an amendment to the Bill. He also believes the Labour Party could do more. “This is an attack on Labour as well, because a large chunk of members’ money paid into the UNISON fund affiliated to Labour, goes through the check-off system.”

Tories also seem to misunderstand the idea of facility time. “The fact that in large public sector organisations some UNISON activists get time off for union business acts to the advantage of the employer. They solve problems before they turn into crises.

VINDICTIVE

The job of the shop steward is to represent members by resolving difficulties, not by shouting ‘everybody out’ every five minutes. The problem is that the media only takes interest in conflict, ‘Branch secretary resolves problem’ is not much of a headline.”

UNISON has managed to persuade Tory peers and

cross-benchers in the House of Lords to argue against the Bill which seeks to emasculate the union movement. “The authoritarian and vindictive measures envisaged by the Government would not be tolerated if they were applied to other voluntary organisations – or any other area of public life.”

Dave is also putting pressure on MPs over tax rules which allow big companies like Google, Amazon and Starbucks to exploit loopholes.

“Family-run shops in Crickhowell in Wales were so fed up with the big companies that they adopted the same accountancy practices and they’ve moved their businesses ‘offshore’. We’re certainly not advocating that loophole, but the idea is spreading to other towns and it will demonstrate the ridiculous nature of the system. The fact that our lowest paid members pay a much bigger proportion of their wages in tax than the mega-companies and the super-rich is simply wrong. And we have found that most Tories – in private at

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”

least – agree with us. There are indications that Osborne might have to respond in the Budget.”

Turning to the Labour Party, Dave called for an end to the internal squabbling. “We want Jeremy Corbyn to succeed. We won’t play any part in campaigns to destabilise the leader, but he does need to pay more attention to public services and public service employees.”

On Europe the union will ensure members are briefed on the pros and cons of EU membership rather than urging them to vote Yes or No in the referendum on June 23. “That does not mean we regard the vote as unimportant. The EU vote will have a massive influence on the future of the UK and we urge members to participate.” ■

ClearWinner

Election result:

- Roger Bannister 16,853 (12.6 per cent)
- John Burgess 15,573 (11.6 per cent)
- Dave Prentis 66,155 (49.4 per cent)
- Heather Wakefield 35,433 (26.4 per cent)



TRAUMA FOR NURSING

Plans to scrap nursing bursaries will leave trainees at least £50,000 in debt and deter people from entering the profession at a time of shortage **Ryan Fletcher** reports

When student nurse Gemma Whitaker heard about the Tory plans to cut nursing bursaries in England and replace them with loans, she knew she had to stand up and be counted. The UNISON member travelled to London from her home in York late last year, to protest against the moves at a rally outside the Department of Health.

"It just seemed like the right thing to do. Without the bursary I wouldn't have been able to do the course.



IT'S THE NUMBERS OF MATURE STUDENTS THAT WILL BE HIT THE HARDEST

Kerrie



I don't have financial support from my family, so I would have found it impossible. There's a lot of other students in a similar situation to me. I thought 'I want to make a difference and join in,'" said 28-year-old Gemma.

Despite further protests this year and a petition signed by more than 140,000 people, the Conservatives are intent on scrapping the £6000-a-year nursing bursaries by August 2017. They say the proposals, which will see nursing students shoulder at least

£51,600 of debt to undertake their training, will save £800 million-a-year and boost recruitment by increasing paid-for degree places.

Critics of the policy contend that it will deter people from ordinary backgrounds pursuing the vocation. The view is backed by a recent UNISON survey of 2000 student nurses – 90 per cent of whom said they would not have taken up the career without the bursary. There are also concerns that the measures will leave the NHS even more reliant on costly locum staff. During the

2014-15 financial year alone, temporary agency staff cost the NHS £3.3bn.

DEMANDING

Student nurses already spend half of their training working 37.5 hours a week in the NHS on a stipend that amounts to less than the minimum wage, while the average starting salary for a graduate nurse is £22,799. Rather than encourage people to enter nursing, Gemma says the cuts will simply put people off an already demanding and poorly compensated role.

"It's not like a normal degree – that's what's being missed here. It's a really difficult course that runs for 46 weeks over the year. When you're not at university you're working full time. A lot of people consider the bursary as the wage from the placements. Without it you'd basically be paying to work," Gemma explained.

If the moves come into force Gemma predicts that healthcare assistants and auxiliary nurses will be expected to take up more responsibilities to compensate for the shortfall in nurses. Although she says this might work in some circumstances, Gemma's experience as a healthcare assistant leads her to believe that patient care could be affected.

"I didn't muddle through as a healthcare assistant – I was very good at my job. But I didn't have the knowledge you gain through proper training. The degree is

shaping me into a really good nurse. You need that education to provide better care," she said.

For nurse and UNISON member, Kerrie Hall, the bursary allowed her to fulfil her lifelong ambition of becoming a nurse. Without financial assistance Kerrie, who is a single mum, would never have been able to study and support her son, Jordan. The 35-year-old from Barnsley, who was 29 when she qualified, says axing the bursaries will hit mature students especially hard. Given that the average age of a student nurse is 30, Kerrie says that the moves could lead to major problems.

SACRIFICE

"Mature students have more responsibilities and have to weigh up whether it's worth it. The wage isn't attractive and it's a career that requires a lot of dedication and sacrifice. Who's going to want to pay £50,000 to train on top of all that? When the current generation of nurses retire they'll be left with a skeleton staff," Kerrie said.

The people most likely to enter nursing degrees under the new system will be school leavers who aren't constrained by personal and financial responsibilities. However Kerrie says that young people are not always the best candidates for nursing and may be more prone to dropping out.

"You're dealing with people who have mental health issues, people withdrawing from addiction, critical illnesses and emergencies. It's a very



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Gemma



demanding role for young people," said Kerrie.

"They often bring positive elements to the job, but mature students have more life experience and that's of great value in nursing. But it's the numbers of mature students that will be hit the hardest."

Currently there are 80,000 healthcare students supported by an NHS bursary. UNISON is fighting to ensure that future students can also take up their vocations, with general secretary Dave Prentis condemning the Government for putting the health service at risk.

"It's terrifying to think that nursing could soon become a profession only for those who can afford to study it. The last thing this country should be doing – especially at a time when the NHS is under pressure and when we need more nurses – is to load students with huge debts," he said.

"The Government should be talking about ways to make nursing a better paid and a more attractive profession.

"Nursing shouldn't be a route to a mountain of debt, which some nurses, midwives, radiographers and occupational therapists will be repaying almost until they retire." ■

DebtBurden

The government plans to force nurses into debt of at least £51,600 by making them pay the entire bill for their training, even though nurses spend 50 per cent of their training time working for the NHS on clinical placements. Their starting salary is £22,799



Kerrie Hall

'Orrible Ozzy's Con job

Cynical Chancellor George Osborne dropped his plans to cut tax credits after wide-spread protests claiming he was listening to people's concerns. But his alternative is just as alarming for the low-paid. **Ryan Fletcher** assesses the threats and speaks to UNISON members who fear for the future of their families



On November 25 last year a large proportion of the nation heaved a collective sigh of relief. Chancellor George Osborne had u-turned on his deeply unpopular plan to cut tax-credits for millions of families by more than £1,300 a year.

At first it seemed like Osborne had taken note of the overwhelming evidence that the moves would leave millions struggling to

manage and push the most vulnerable below the poverty line. Ostensibly the reversal demonstrated the Chancellor had heeded the warnings, issued from across the political spectrum; that he had acted after being moved by the huge and sincerely felt public outcry. Mr Osborne made a great display of showing that he understood it was a step too far – even for him.

It didn't take long, however, for people to realise

▲ Above: Cynical Chancellor resorts to stage trickery

that his promises amounted to a temporary reprieve at best and underhand stage trickery at worst. In truth the scrapping of the tax credit cuts was just the sugarcoating Mr Osborne needed to disguise another bitter pill within the Autumn Statement: Cuts to Universal Credit, which are currently being rolled out across the UK and are scheduled to replace tax credits by the end of 2017. This will mean 2.6 million families will lose an

average of £1,600 a year.

Single mum of two, Philippa Sykes, was one of those who thought she'd escaped the cuts. With an annual wage of £6,500, the 28-year-old domestic cleaner is still facing a severe shortfall in her income.

PERILOUS

In fact, low-paid lone parents will be between £554 and £2,629 worse off under Universal Credit, depending on whether they receive help with housing costs. Philippa, a UNISON rep from Sheffield, and other single parents in financially perilous positions, will be among the worst affected by the Universal Credit reforms.

"My tax credits are weekly and I rely on them to get the household from A to B during the week. They're for food, gas, electric and if the kids need something. When my wage comes in at the end of the month, I pay the rent. It's a struggle. I don't socialise much. If I take the kids out for the day it probably costs me a week's wages. We don't do family holidays," Philippa explained.

"If my tax credits went down that'd be Christmas out of the window. If I needed some money for an emergency I'd be scuppered. I did up my daughter's bedroom a couple of days ago after my wages came in. All I did was buy her a new bed and put some carpet down – it's just a little box room – then I paid my bills and bought some food. I'll be lucky if there's 30 quid left. I'm reliant on my tax credits now for the next month."

The Conservatives

argue that the rise in the minimum wage this April from £6.70 to a so-called "living wage" of £7.20 will help improve people's finances. In Philippa's case the increase won't make any difference, because she already earns £7.76 an hour. Like the Chancellor's smoke and mirrors tax credit announcement, Philippa believes the Government's co-option of the "living wage" term - from the campaign to implement fair pay - has been a ploy to deter debate.

"I can't cope on £7.76, never mind £7.20. They're just playing with people's minds calling it the living wage. It's like these cuts – there's a lot of people who are probably thinking they aren't going to arrive. But there's still a big bomb coming and it's still going to hit us," she said.

It's not just struggling single parents that will be hit by the cuts to Universal Credit.

LOSSES

Work and pensions select committee chair, MP Frank Field, in a report he wrote for think tank Civitas, found that on average workers without children will be £866 worse off. Couples with children will see their income reduced by between £234 and £1,084, depending on whether they claim housing benefit.

The losses are in part due to the lowering of the work allowance - the amount which a claimant can earn before their benefits are reduced. For single parents and two parent families not claiming rental assistance the work allowance has



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Philippa Sykes,
Sheffield Teaching
Hospitals



been lowered to £4,764 – a reduction of £4,044 for single parents and £1,686 for couples. For families receiving help with housing costs the work allowance is £2,304, a cut of £852 for single parents and £360 for couples. For those without children the work allowance has been abolished.

Although the figures seem more lenient on two parent families, research by the Resolution Foundation found that steep benefit reductions incurred after the work allowance is reached, will also hit hard. For example, under the current system a second earner who finds work at £10,600 a year, will see their net household income increase by £6,000. However that sum falls to £3,600 under Universal Credit.

Cuts will also be heaped on in other ways. Under the controversial "two child" policy, larger families stand to lose up to £2,780 for each additional child beyond the first two - regardless of the number of parents in the household. Families with disabled children are to have their disability support halved from current tax credit levels, with the loss of around £1,400 a year. ►

Ryan Fletcher





Image: Andy Paraskos

► UNISON member Lee Marshall, from Hull (above), is a local government worker who will eventually have to deal with the myriad of complicated restrictions Universal Credit will bring. The 42-year-old earns £22,000 and has three children at home. When his wife, Sue, is not caring for their disabled daughter, she works part time as a school dinner attendant.

IMPOSSIBLE

Before the Chancellor's tax credit reversal the family stood to lose £2,800 a year. When they move to Universal Credit the amount will be somewhere in the same region – a situation, Lee says, which will be impossible.

"Something has to massively change, but I don't know what it is. Do I not feed my children? Do I not provide heating for them? Do I not clothe them? Do I need to sell my

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THEM?”

Lee Marshall, Hull
local government

”

house and move into a one bedroom flat with three kids? I don't know what they want me to do. It's not even worth thinking about – we'll be in dire straits," said Lee.

"This is the problem with David Cameron and George Osborne – they don't live in the real world. I don't think there's anyone in England that doesn't want the benefit budget to go down. But the Government doesn't have the tenacity or the courage to go out there and make companies pay proper wages, so that people don't need to claim any benefits."

Labour Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, MP Owen Smith, described the Chancellor's tax credit reversal as "a total con job", after independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) figures showed that by 2019-20 the changes to Universal Credit will shave £3bn from the welfare

budget. By 2021, the OBR report said the amount cut will almost be identical to that under the axed tax credit policy.

The Tories would disagree with Mr Smith's assertions, but the fact is that unpytting welfare reforms will continue unabated regardless of the name of the system they are delivered under - with millions of hard working families across Britain paying the price. ■

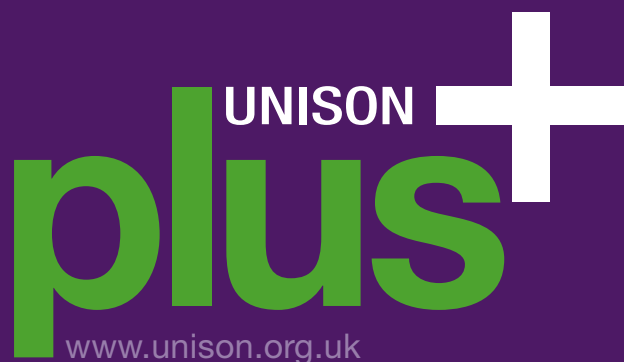
HelpOnHand

Members who think they will face financial difficulties because of cuts to universal credit can contact UNISON's welfare charity There for You on 0800 0 857 857.

There is no charge for calling the number. It provides confidential advice and a support service for members and their dependents.

UNISON DEBTLINE SERVICE

Call our Freephone 0800 389 3302 which is available to all members to help them manage their money and deal with debt



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COMING TO A BRANCH NEAR YOU

Activists all over the region can expect a visit from Rose Bent who is spreading the word about the benefits of UNISON's education courses. **Annie Mitchell** reports

Rose Bent is a woman on a mission. Throughout her life she has challenged herself to keep working, studying and gaining new qualifications. She is keen to pass that challenge on to others and spread her passion for learning as a Union Learning Fund project worker. Rose is on a six month secondment from her job at UNISON's regional office in Leeds and says: "Watch this space - I'm coming to a branch near you".

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was established in 1998 with the aim of supporting projects that help

members develop skills, gain qualifications and continue life-long learning. And Rose's many years of effort to develop her skills, reads like a perfect case-study for the benefits and challenges of continuing education.

FAMILY

Born and still living in Huddersfield, Rose left school with three 'O' levels. "I was in the top class for maths, English and languages and was expected to do much better." But the disappointment didn't stop her from applying for and passing a BTEC national diploma course, the first step in getting the GCEs she

“
JUST JUMP
IN AND
SEE
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TAKE YOU
”

calculated were needed to get a good job.

In the years that followed, Rose kept on learning, passing more exams and short courses as well as changing jobs several times. "I had no game plan. I started a family and did lots of temp work. I enjoyed working with different people and jumping into whatever needed to be done. Then in my 30s, with three children, I decided I wanted to do a degree and began an Open University access course.

"It was a one year distance learning course and I passed. Then the 'top three life-crises' hit me in one year.

My marriage broke down, I lost my 16-year-old daughter and I had to sell the house and find a new place to live. I got through it somehow but after a time I felt in a rut and needed to get back into learning, it's such a passion of mine."

MASTER'S

With UNISON's financial support, Rose followed a programme of education that would eventually lead her to a master's degree and a certificate of training and practice.

"The tutor on an earlier course encouraged us to go for a masters. You might not believe in yourself first of all but all you need is that encouragement. Just jump in and see where it will take you. We all have to start with a first step."

Since 1997, Rose has worked in a variety of roles at UNISON but her interest has always been in encouraging and showing members how they can find and access the many courses that the union provides.

When the six month secondment working for the Union Learning Project was advertised, Rose jumped at it. "I felt like I wanted to keep moving ahead. I started the part-time job in September and my remit is to help branches develop new and existing union learning reps (ULRs) and spread the benefits of courses for members as well as reps.

Rose began by mapping out and identifying ULRs in branches across the region. She is currently concentrating on two health branches – Leeds teaching hospitals and

Barnsley hospital, targeting low paid members in particular.

"We started by running bite-sized learning sessions during lunch breaks in Leeds. They are tasters to see what works and to hear what people would benefit from. During health and safety week we looked at stress, with stalls on confidence-building and assertiveness as well as knitting – which may seem odd but it is designed to get people talking and help to deal with stress. They were half hour sessions where people could exchange experiences and have fun.

"The employers see the benefits of a more motivated workforce and Leeds hospital have agreed to put on a 'facing challenge together' course which will be delivered by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA)."

At Barnsley hospitals, Rose is keen to build learning teams. "It's a small branch and the reps are very busy. We need more ULRs to promote learning whether it's IT, maths or English."

CONFIDENCE

Mary Sawyer from Barnsley health branch summed up the advantages:

"UNISON courses have been of tremendous benefit to some of our



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POSSIBLE



members. Quite a few of the branch members have attended courses such as building confidence in women and women's assertiveness."

Rose is also working with Barnsley local government branch which already has a number of ULRs. "It is all about getting confidence, getting people involved and telling colleagues what opportunities there are. It's amazing when you see the transformation that takes place when people go on these courses – it is inspiring."

And her work is already paying dividends according to Gillian Nixon, from Barnsley local government branch:

"Even looking at what UNISON had to offer made me look twice. Doing the course to become a rep opened up so many possibilities and seeing other stewards and members get excited about learning is so worthwhile."

Rose's next plan is to bring together ULRs from across the region: "I want to touch base with as many reps as possible, so they can share experiences and explore ways to develop further."

And that's what the Union Learning Project is all about. And it's coming to a branch near you. ■

KnowledgeIsPower

John Ingleton, of Leeds Teaching Hospitals, extols the virtues of UNISON's education courses:

"The Manic Street Preachers sang 'libraries gave us power' on their hit single Design for Life when discussing how the early trade unionists helped support and educate the working classes of Wales. This statement holds true today. Through the basics of education, our members can empower themselves, and in turn those around them. It is a true socialist statement that echoes from the pit villages of Wales to this challenging time of austerity."

You can contact Rose Bent, Union Learning Fund project worker, on 07585 29126 or email her at rbent@unison.co.uk



FIGHTING IGNORANCE

We need greater awareness of the kind of prejudice faced by Muslims in the region's workplaces, says Ishrt Raouf of the black members' group. **Christine Buckley** reports

You don't have to look far for evidence of Islamophobia in all its guises.

Whether it is mild prejudice sometimes dressed as humour; unwitting and ill-informed behaviour; or outright abuse and violence, it is rarely far from the news.

Tactless ignorance can

▲ Above: Ishrt - You can't teach people compassion

often be displayed by those who should know better. David Cameron has pointed the finger at Muslim women as needing to improve their English when he announced more money for teaching our language even though other faiths and newcomers to Britain would also benefit

from greater fluency.

Shortly after The Great British Bake-Off champion Nadiya Hussain won the high profile competition she said she feared she was "putting her kids in danger" after being targeted by anti-Islamic trolls on Twitter.

PREJUDICE

Even a woman who serves on a Government advisory board to tackle anti-Muslim hatred was recently subjected to Islamophobic abuse while in a car with her young daughter.

And of course behind the headlines are many more stories of prejudice that Muslims face as they go about their working lives.

Ishrt Raouf works in administration and patient liaison for Sheffield health and social care trust and is deputy chair of UNISON's Yorkshire and Humberside black members' self-organised group. The group, which is open to anyone who doesn't identify themselves as white British, campaigns on issues affecting black members in the region and those affecting people in a broader context.

She is keen to raise awareness of Islamophobia across the union. "We need to look at how to prevent the demonization of people. We need to break down the ignorance which breeds mistrust."

Crimes and abuse against Muslims have until very recently been hard to document. Only since last October have all police forces been obliged to record Islamophobic crimes

separately and treat them as seriously as anti-Semitic attacks. The move came shortly after London's Metropolitan Police, one of the few forces to record the crimes separately before the directive, reported that Islamophobic crime had risen 70 per cent in the year to last July.

There are no moves yet to ensure that employers, including large organisations and big companies, follow suit. So unions are likely to come under increasing pressure from activists to fill that workplace void and conduct surveys of their members to try to paint a better picture of how anti-Muslim behaviour not only involves crimes on the street, but affects people at work.

By far the most comprehensive monitoring of Islamophobia is undertaken by the national organisation Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks). This year they predict that 2000 incidents will be logged. Tell MAMA recently reported many shocking incidents including a Muslim midwife who quit her job after a woman about to give birth said she didn't want her baby delivered by a terrorist.

Isht stresses that people who feel they are the victims of Islamophobia or are witnesses to such behaviour and want to do something about it, should contact their union's equality committees as well as the police if necessary and that they should inform employers.

UNISON regional manager Steve Torrance

said: "UNISON members are at the forefront of battling the rise in Islamophobia and helping eradicate the ignorance that exists in wider society. Some right-wing elements in society are trying to scapegoat a whole religion for atrocities carried out by extremist fundamentalists."

BEATEN

Parts of Yorkshire have become flashpoints for anti-Islamic behaviour despite the fact that, like London, they have long-standing Muslim communities. In towns such as Rotherham, where incidents are particularly high, much of the abuse can be attributed to a high presence of the English Defence League. Last August Mushin Ahmed, an 81-year-old Muslim grandfather in Rotherham, died after being beaten on his way to a mosque early one morning.

And the elderly are not the only easy target of those who attack Muslims. Being dressed quite obviously as a Muslim is probably the reason why more women than men suffer anti-Islamic abuse and assaults. And, with great irony, the perpetrators often say that one of the reasons that they dislike Islam is because they believe it oppresses women.

Isht doesn't encounter significant Islamophobia at work but she says that this changes during Ramadan

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▼ Below: Bake-Off Champion Nadiya targeted by anti-Islamic trolls

when she dresses more obviously in Muslim attire. "It's one month when I want to follow my faith. But I get a number of disapproving looks from colleagues and comments like: why are you wearing that funny garb? I've never seen it as my job to correct ignorance; it is up to people not to be ignorant. You can't teach people compassion but you can make people aware of how their behaviour affects others."

Opinions differ on what should be the best Muslim response to abuse. After the Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris last year the Federation of Mosques in Sheffield condemned the attack and appealed for unity. To some the statement seemed like an apology and strengthened a perception that all Muslims should apologise for the actions of a few terrorists.

Isht says: "I don't think I've been more distressed. It was the idea that we have to apologise or justify ourselves for actions of people, sometimes halfway round the world, when it was nothing to do with us." ■

The Religion

Islam is the second biggest religion in the world after Christianity. There are two main branches of Islam: Sunni and Shia. The great majority of the world's more than 1.5 billion Muslims are Sunnis - estimates vary between 85 per cent and 90 per cent. There is an ultra-conservative version of Sunni Islam, which is known by its detractors as Wahhabism, although adherents prefer the term Salafism. This form of Islam was started by an eighteenth century preacher Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab who was opposed to anything he regarded as idolatry. So-called Islamic State or Daesh follows an extreme and violent version of this creed.





LET'S SHOW 'EM!

Former Mirror journalist **Paul Routledge** is standing for Labour in the May council elections in Skipton. Here he points out why a vote for the party is vital for the region



Top Tories hardly ever use public services, says John Cafferty



Standing for a seat on Craven council - Paul Routledge



Laying down a marker - Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn

For sins I must have committed in a previous life, I'm a candidate in the council elections in May.

For Labour, naturally. It may not be the answer to a maiden's prayer, but it's still the only party with the interests of working people at heart that can aspire to govern at local and national level.

I'm contesting the Lothersdale and Aire Valley ward for Skipton-based Craven District Council. My chances of winning are slight, but you never know.

My motto is: "There's no guarantee of success if you have a go, only a guarantee of failure if you don't." And we have to take the fight to this shower in power, and hundreds of seats are up for grabs.

Across Yorkshire and north and north east Lincolnshire, it looks like being a case of "as you were" after polling day, with Labour keeping control of the cities - Leeds,

Sheffield, Wakefield, Hull and Bradford.

Only a political earthquake of eight points on the Richter scale could shake the party's traditional hold on Barnsley, but there's a fight on for control of Calderdale and Kirklees. Rotherham is also difficult political territory, with some of the council's functions only just restored to elected representatives following the child abuse scandal.

VERDICT

After years of spending cuts, lost public services and thousands of redundancies, the Tories are trying to blur the issues at stake by pretending that the May poll is a referendum on the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.

No way. If it's a referendum on anything, it's a referendum on the dismal Tory record of six years in government: a people's verdict on the savage cuts and attacks on rights at work that public service workers have suffered - and those in the pipeline.

Some people ask: "What's the point of having a Labour council if all they can do is implement Tory cuts?" It's a fair question. The simple answer is that Labour always tries to sustain front-line services and employment. The Tories just take an axe to anything and everything, but especially union representation.

Take one example. After York City Council slid out of Labour's hands into a Tory/Lib Dem coalition, the gung-ho new regime is trying to curtail UNISON activity by restricting time off for convenors. The coalition also wants union reps to sit in an open-plan office, a clear attempt to discourage members from taking their grievances to the union.

As night follows day, this is what happens when Thatcher's ideologically-driven children get their hands on power. Ironically, some of the older Conservative hands running councils in Yorkshire see the wisdom of maintaining good



relations with the unions in times of financial pressure. It eases the painful transition to reduced budgets.

EXPOSED

They could teach David Cameron a thing or two. In the words of UNISON regional secretary John Cafferty: "It's at times like these, with the floods and problems in the NHS that Tory inexperience and short-sightedness are exposed.

"They hardly ever use public services, and they cut and cut again. When there's a crisis, they suddenly find out what's missing and discover that they can't respond because of the cuts they've made.

"The floods in winter were a case in point and so were ambulance response times. Social care problems brought about bed-blocking, leading to ambulances queuing outside A&Es stacked out with patients. It's a vicious circle. They just don't understand that all these factors are inter-related. The cuts are at the

heart of all these issues."

Another example: violent crime – rape, knife attacks, even murder – is going up relentlessly, yet contrary to Tory promises, police resources are being cut while detection and conviction rates are falling.

West Yorkshire police face swingeing cuts in their budget, with hundreds of civilian support staff, PCSOs and vital employees such as scene of crime officers set to lose their jobs – along with yet more serving police officers. No wonder so many Police and Crime Commissioners are not standing for re-election. They've had enough.

Meanwhile in the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn is taking up the challenge to his leadership. In a message to party members, he says: "These elections will allow us to lay down a marker, to show that we're standing tall, our values and will-to-win are stronger than ever.

"Councils in all parts of the country, often on the end of a raw deal from Tory cuts,



**COUNCILS
ARE OFTEN
ON THE END
OF A RAW
DEAL FROM
TORY CUTS**

Jeremy Corbyn



are working incredibly hard to deliver the vital public services that so many rely on. That's why these elections are so important."

One issue behind the headlines is Dodgy Dave's so-called "devolution revolution" for the county, creating two new "super regions" - Leeds City and South Yorkshire.

The Tories have so far failed to impose this blueprint for power. In my view, it's a trick to impose elected mayors so they can usurp local democracy and put one of their own in charge.

If the Tories really wanted to hand power back to councils, they wouldn't have cut town hall budgets by 40 per cent, slashed public services and sacked thousands of workers in the region.

But that's their record. I say again: If our local elections are a referendum about anything, they're a referendum on how badly the Tories have treated Yorkshire and Humberside. Let's show 'em what we think. ■

OUT & ACTIVE

Attitudes have changed for the better, but LGBT workers still suffer more than most, says Wakefield activist Stephen Wood. **Helen Hague** reports

Stephen Wood, UNISON's LGBT officer for Wakefield District, wasn't around in the miners' strike. Which is hardly surprising, as he wasn't yet born.

But, talking to friends and colleagues from mining families, Stephen, who grew up in the South East, knows a lot has changed since then – beyond the destruction of pits and jobs.

And not all of it's bad. He points to the "thunderous

applause" for Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners at a celebration of solidarity in Wakefield last year marking 30 years since the pit strike ended. Such a spontaneous public outburst would have been unthinkable back in the eighties.

It took the recent film *Pride* to bring to a wider public the "hidden" story of how a group of gay men and lesbians from London supported striking miners and their families – amid

much culture clash comedy.

But alongside the heart-warming solidarity that grew between striking South Wales miners and their newfound supporters, the film captured how rank, widespread and largely unchallenged homophobia was back then. Spitting at gay men in the street wasn't considered a hate crime. And coming out as LGBT - which can still be difficult today – could be a really huge deal. No wonder

so many chose to keep their sexual orientation under wraps.

"There were gay miners in the strike" says Stephen. "There have always been gay miners but it was really hard to come out in those days, especially in mining communities."

But despite much progress on equalities since the eighties, there's still a long way to go. "Best practice", equality policies and mission statements are plentiful now, but bullying and harassment in the workplace are still very much with us. And LGBT workers are still suffering disproportionately - says Stephen.

He "doesn't suffer personally" at work - Wakefield Council's Regeneration Unit - where he is a UNISON shop steward.

He would, he says - "feel quite confident to challenge" any attempt to pick on him for being gay. He also knows that not everyone is so robust. "I see my role as LGBT officer to ensure everyone has the confidence to challenge such attitudes, so people don't feel they can get away with it."

As a "young member" Stephen stepped up to the leadership challenge at the union's LGBT conference in Blackpool just 18 months ago.

At the conference, he heard the experiences of others and felt "inspired" to stand as the first ever LGBT officer for Wakefield District. There was no LGBT SOG (Self Organised Group) for Wakefield then either. So as the new branch LGBT officer he felt well-placed to encourage others to join a

new group to determine joint priorities, encourage activism and challenge prejudice in the workplace and beyond.

He sees "the welfare side of the job" - offering support to individual members facing difficulties - as crucial to his role. But as a committed socialist and activist, he also believes very strongly in showing solidarity with oppressed workers and citizens at home and abroad. In some countries, being gay can lead to imprisonment and even judicial killing.

Brought up in London and Hertfordshire, Stephen got his first taste of Yorkshire life as a politics student at Hull University - where he came out, and became politically active across a number of progressive causes.

IMPRESSIVE

A couple of examples from Stephen's student days show how his take on politics is grounded in solidarity and equality.

When workers on the Isle of Wight occupied their closure-threatened wind farm, Stephen and fellow students were among hundreds of environmental activists turning out to protest, with Bob Crow from the RMT speaking up for both workers and green energy. "Climate change activists and trade unions were protesting together. It was very impressive," says Stephen.

And when a gay Iranian student was denied asylum despite the fact that he faced execution if he returned home, Stephen was among student activists and others championing the young



IN SOME COUNTRIES BEING GAY CAN LEAD TO JAIL AND EVEN JUDICIAL KILLING



man's case to stay in the UK. He was granted asylum.

Stephen had a placement in Parliament during his degree course, working for Labour MP and former UNISON legal officer Kate Clark. While he enjoyed getting an insight into life in Westminster, he soon realised he could "achieve much more as a trade unionist in the workplace than helping an MP write letters."

A stint straight after university answering complaints at a debt collection agency - private sector and non-unionised - fuelled his determination to work in the public sector.

Wakefield SOG's first event was an act of solidarity - joining the London Pride march at the end of July, the union's new branch banner held high. It includes an image of pit winding gear to celebrate the area's mining heritage. The pits may have gone, but, as austerity bites deeper, the need for solidarity and collective strength has never been greater. ■

HowWeWork

UNISON fights discrimination and prejudice in the workplace on behalf of its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) members. The union works through local and national LGBT groups to campaign and provide support for them. The groups also provide access to practical advice and legal information. The LGBT group's priorities are:

- Recruit LGBT workers into the union
- Encourage LGBT members to get involved
- Build our network of LGBT groups
- Support individual members
- Identify and challenge discrimination, informing the union's negotiations with employers
- Defend and promote LGBT public services
- Campaign for equality



LOG ON WITH DONNA

Former Army nurse Donna Padget, together with colleague Julie Butterfield, is determined to make 1,000 UNISON members at Leeds city council computer savvy. Consulting editor **Mary Maguire** meets Donna the Dynamo

If you are one of the 5,000 Leeds city council members who cannot use a computer, don't despair, help is at hand. Help comes in the shape of 51 year-old Donna Padget who is up for the challenge of changing all that.

Donna is Leeds city council learning coordinator, a task she job-shares with colleague Julie Butterfield. She's been coordinator for two years and the secondment arrangement has just been agreed for a further two. Donna has ambitious plans for her members which include an

▲ Above: Dynamic duo – Julie (left) and Donna

eye-watering target of getting 1,000 computer literate a year. That, she says, would be a "fantastic achievement".

Donna is in no doubt about the challenge, but she is used to challenges, and, as job-share partner Julie says: "Donna is like a dynamo, she never stops – once she gets hold of something she won't let go. A bit like a Jack Russell".

This Jack Russell, was an army child, born and brought up in Leeds, but schooled both in Leeds and Germany where her dad was stationed. The army was in her blood

and, after leaving school - following a brief flirtation with British Telecom - she applied to join.

"I really wanted to be a PT instructor," says Donna. "I was keen on keep fit and my natural ability is with sports. But, in those days, a woman couldn't be a PT instructor – she had to be a clerk or a cook or in medicine – viewed as female work. So I became a nurse."

INJURED

She joined the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps, and nursed

Image: Andy Paraskos

“
YOU ARE
NEVER
TOO OLD
TO LEARN
”

in Catterick, Woolwich, Cambridge, Germany and places of conflict where troops were stationed. And it was in the army that she met her future husband.

Sadly, after 15 years, her army career came to an abrupt end when she was injured during a military exercise and was medically discharged.

“I was so disappointed and sad to leave the army. It was such a huge part of my life. I lost my trade and had to retrain in other areas.”

Well, the army’s loss was UNISON’s gain. A stint at Leeds General Infirmary in diagnostics and A&E followed, but her injury caught up with her. And her path led her to a job with

Leeds city council on the old green card scheme for workers with disabilities.

A work colleague recruited her to UNISON a while later. As Donna said: “We don’t have unions in the army, but I felt work was better when we acted as a collective. We were going through regradings where it was a whole lot easier to act through the collective rather than individually.”

And it wasn’t long before the Jack Russell instinct took over. A spate of bullying in the legal department where she worked, led to her becoming a union steward to “make it stop and to give younger workers a voice”.

BULLYING

Apart from Donna’s military injury, she is mildly dyslexic. Her job as a legal assistant involved producing reports and attending court. To ensure the quality of her work, she put in place protocols and procedures that involved the use of electronic devices and others proof-reading her work. She had never been criticised by a judge, or solicitor or other member of staff for the quality or standard of her work as a result. However, she told me:

“A colleague was promoted and all of a sudden started to criticise my work, photocopying it, keeping copies in his bottom drawer and he treated younger members of staff in a similar way. He would criticise staff in front of the whole office – that is unprofessional, bullying behaviour.

“This type of bullying makes people feel very small

and you get to the stage where you question your own abilities. It was making me ill. I decided it had to stop.”

And it did. Her army training came in handy in dealing with conflict situations and to some extent her injury made her “see life in a different way”.

Donna went on to become a union learning representative (ULR) because, as she says: “you are never too old to learn”. She is helping to drive a number of projects aimed at encouraging members to go on to do Maths, English and ICT. Having found that a large proportion of staff are not IT literate, she applied for a ‘Moving on’ grant that allows the project to buy digital equipment.

She told me that Leeds, like many other councils, has a large number of women who work in the care sector whose job security is precarious at the best of times. They don’t have IT skills and they need those in today’s jobs market. The ability to use technology is now becoming paramount where “digital enhancement allows people to do research for their jobs, their health and well-being”.

But she wants to go beyond getting 5,000 people computer literate. She has just applied for funding to help progress all those members to a Level One City and Guilds certificate, which would give them a qualification. As she said: “If I can open a door for someone and help them through it, I can put hand on heart and say well done”. ■



Mary Maguire



LET THEM EAT CAKE

At a time when increasing numbers of desperate people are forced to use food banks, TV chiefs have chosen to give us The Great British Bake-off. **Peter Carroll** rails against celebrity-obsessed television programmes

As the Government continues to pile on the austerity agony, deep and visible cracks are opening up in our communities.

I live in Wibsey, Bradford, one of the oldest parts of the city. It gets mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1068 as being home to about four people and two cows.

But the industrial revolution led to an explosion in the city's population as immigrants from far and wide came to keep the looms clattering by day and by night.

But like so many other places, Wibsey is now reaping the full destructive whirlwind of an economically disastrous policy.

Recently the village learnt that, after two robberies at the NatWest bank in the High Street, it will now be closed permanently.

Then we heard that because of yet more Government spending cuts, Wibsey Library faces closure.

These are the sort of decisions that ultimately destroy established communities. One by one, services and facilities disappear, causing a downward spiral into terminal decline.

TRAFFICKING

Meanwhile a new food bank at a Wibsey church has opened to feed the growing number of poor and hungry people in the area.

And the police have recently prosecuted a business owner in the

city for using “slave labour” at his bed making firm - Hungarians who were victims of human trafficking.

So serious is the situation in Bradford, a former police chief superintendent who now works as a “modern slavery consultant” announced that a lot of small businesses in the city would be “full of people like this, working for slave labour wages.”

It's almost unbelievable that we have come to this in such a short time and I know similar Dickensian horror stories are being played out all over the country.

Meanwhile back in the alternative universe of mainstream TV schedules, life goes on with its own mad obsessions – baking, cooking, amateur singing and dancing competitions and, of course, football being chief among them.

BALLS

So it came as a surprise – a bit of a shock even – when I turned on the TV to see a trailer for The Great British Bake Off, featuring none other than former Chancellor Ed Balls.

Later on, there was Ed again, sitting proudly in the chairman's chair at Norwich City, not far from fellow director and screen cookery trailblazer Delia “Let's be ‘avin’ yer” Smith.

Ed was once known for his technical grasp of the economy and his legendary verbal battles with the opposition.

This was the man who once declared himself

an adherent of “post-neoclassical endogenous growth theory”.

Now he is more likely to hold forth on how to make the perfect Victoria sponge, or maybe how to “tap up” unsettled players at rival clubs.

The transition from serious politician to celebrity has been completed in a very short space of time. It is a testament to the enormous power of TV to absorb and assimilate everything and everybody almost instantly.

While communities all around us are changing rapidly for the worse and our children struggle to pay soaring rents, let alone get mortgages, and food banks proliferate, what do millions of us turn to for comfort? Programmes about food!

So how come when we are regularly assailed with warnings about an “obesity epidemic” and Type 2 diabetes, everybody suddenly becomes obsessed with the making and eating of cakes? As far as I can see, they need a lot of sugar and fat to be described as “absolutely super”, and from what I hear they are not compatible with a healthy lifestyle.

POINTLESS

The Government presides over an ever more desperate and squalid public sector while TV presents us with competing Cordon Bleu chefs or loathsome “entrepreneurs” who want to make their fortunes selling us garbage we don't want or need.

Yet we are told these are



THE REALLY
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the sort of people society needs if it is to succeed - millions of strident egomaniacs trying to get Asda or Tesco to stock their crappy, pointless inventions.

But the really vital members of society receive no such admiring spotlight. Nurses, doctors, social workers, cleaners, classroom assistants are all shamefully treated in terms of their pay and conditions.

Tories line up to demand more for less from essential public sector workers.

They routinely insult them, implying they are lazy and encouraging the public to regard them as a costly burden, not a prized asset.

The only thing that could make us feel any worse about this state of affairs is if someone came up with perhaps the most offensive conceivable project of all – a museum to the great architect of all this misery, Margaret Thatcher.

Although maybe only something as outrageous as that would be enough to rouse more people from the make-believe world of celebrity culture so they can see what's really happening on their own doorsteps.

And with Osborne already getting his retaliation in first, warning of an economic crisis beyond his, or anyone else's control, we need to prepare for another concerted attack on our union and our public services.

We are on the front-line of this battle and our voices will be heard. ■



Peter Carroll

Paul Routledge
was until recently
a Senior Daily
Mirror political
columnist



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

Active! political columnist

Bridge too far for Southern Tories

The Government's much-trumpeted "Northern Powerhouse" is a cruel farce as pits are shut, steelworks run down and power stations switched off. The Tories' proposed high speed railway HS3 is just Pie in the Pennines. And now we hear that it will take them at least a year to repair Tadcaster's broken bridge...



MORE
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'GARDEN
BRIDGE'
OVER THE
THAMES
THAN IN
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OF OUR
REGION



Tadcaster's broken bridge is the iconic image of Yorkshire's winter floods.

After three hundred years of holding back the turbulent waters of the river Wharfe, the old stones salvaged from a Roman castle finally gave way.

The collapse was watched by horrified Taddy townsfolk, but disbelief turned to anger when Tory ministers rained down promises of instant help.

Restoring the vital link was "a national priority" they pledged. Money no object. Back up by Christmas. With free beer at the opening ceremony.

OK, I made that last bit up, but the rest is true. And now we're told it will take at least a year, and cost £3 million, to rebuild the bridge. The Treasury has reluctantly agreed to foot the bill.

Even plans to build a £300k temporary foot crossing to reconnect the stricken town were almost "a bridge too far" when Sam Smith's brewery wouldn't allow it to be built on their land.

Wealthy brewer Humphrey Richard Woolcombe Smith, 71, the squire of Oxtan Hall, rejected pleas for help from David Cameron.

Local councils and Tadcaster Albion FC were forced to step into the breach, in this case quite literally.

Bridges were also damaged in Elland, Cawood, and Linton on (or, rather, under) Ouse. Financial aid was slow to come,

and inadequate when it arrived.

Environment Secretary Liz Truss, a Leeds lass who ought to stick up for her city, came to a meeting with Yorkshire MPs and council leaders empty-handed. "No new money" she trilled. Leeds, hit by the worst floods for decades, will not get its £189 million protection scheme.

If this calamity had hit London, there would have been parliamentary pandemonium, and floods of cash. More cash is being splurged on Joanna Lumley's vanity "garden footbridge" over the Thames than in the whole of our region.

People in the North, and particularly God's Own County, have learned to be cynical about Tory promises. The Northern Powerhouse? A cruel farce. They shut the pits, they closed or ran down the steelworks and they're switching off the power stations.

HS3, their much-trumpeted new high-speed railway from Leeds to Manchester? Pie in the Pennines.

No wonder eight out of 10 respondents to a regional newspaper poll agreed that "The government is biased in favour of London and the South East." It is.

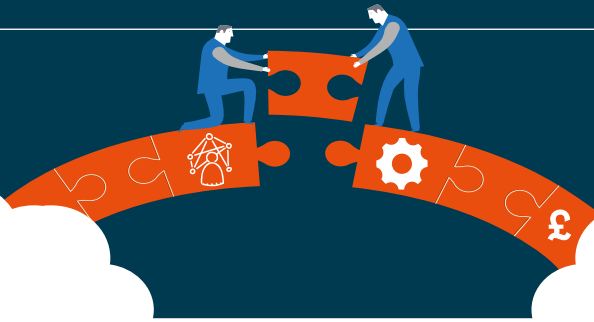
TORY TEALEAF?

Tory MP Geoffrey Cox, earning £400,000 as a barrister a year on top of his £74,000 parliamentary salary, had a 49p claim for milk and £2 for teabags rejected by the Westminster expenses watchdog. Insults fail me.

CLUE IN THE NAME

NHS bosses want to shut down Huddersfield





hospital's A & E department, making emergency patients travel to Halifax, Wakefield or even Barnsley.

This is the economics of the madhouse, a direct result of the "businessisation" of the health service.

The NHS is not, and never will be, a business, making profits for investors. The clue is in the name: it's a service paid for by taxation, available free at the point of use.

Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Trust faces a financial deficit of £25 million by the end of this financial year, and a colossal £155 million shortfall in funding by 2021. Safe in their hands? Don't make me weep.

EVEN THE RHUBARB!

Stuff the Government doesn't want you to know:

- Families in Yorkshire have an average debt of £17,110
- Average water bills rocket to £396 a year, while company bosses pocket £1.25 billion "windfall" profits
- Nine out of ten NHS hospital wards do not meet safe levels of nursing staff during the day
- Thousands of stressed, overworked nurses are quitting, 5,500 within a year of starting
- 70,000 Yorkshire children are taught in "super-size" classes of more than 31 because of Osborne's spending cuts
- Claimants for sick and disability benefits wait an average 23 weeks for tests under IDS's dud new American fit-for-work firm Maximus
- David Cameron has pocketed £500,000 from renting out his flash pad in Notting Hill since moving into Number Ten in 2010.
- Even the rhubarb harvest is at risk!

RIGHT ROYAL RIP-OFF

Got a free day on June 12? Then buy a ticket for the Meal on The Mall to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday. A snip, at £150 a head. That's more than many (if not most)

families spend on food for an entire week.

The event is organised by Her Majesty's grandson, Peter Phillips, through his company Sports and Entertainment Ltd (SEL). Some Royal. Some sell.

SNATCHERISM

Carol and Mark Thatcher are not hard up but they auctioned off their mother's most intimate possessions.

The sale raised £4.5 million, which should keep the pair from claiming benefits for the rest of their pampered lives.

Maggie's ministerial red box went for £242,500. It's a bloody box, for heaven's sake. Even her sewing basket sold for £3,250, admittedly with some buttons thrown in. The Iron Lady mythology grows as memories of what she was really like fade. This act of offspring exploitation is a useful reminder of what Thatcherism was all about.

FISHERMAN'S FRIEND

Salmon have returned to Rotherham after an absence of 150 years. In the rivers, not the fish shops.

NOBBUT A MALL

York station will become "the King's Cross of the North" if rail chiefs get their way. Really? The refurbished London terminus is nobbut a shopping mall, from which trains occasionally depart.

ROUGH DIAMOND

Hull has been named by Rough Guides as one of the world's top ten cities, alongside Nashville, Mexico City and Vancouver. Rough, in places, I grant you. But certainly a damn sight more interesting than Number One on the list – dreary Reykjavik. I just hope this fishy business doesn't revive the Cod Wars with Iceland. ■

Passport to Debt

I was the first boy in Railway Terrace to go to university – and the last. They pulled it down – the street, not the university, and happily it's been rebuilt.

But is today's child wise to go to university, as nearly half do? This year's graduating students, the first to pay Nick Clegg's £9,000 a year fees, will have debts of £44,000.

A staggering burden to start your working life. Latest figures say nearly £4 billion of unpaid student loans may have to be written off.

More than 270,000 graduates have simply disappeared off the radar. More than half a million don't earn £21,000 a year, the level at which repayments start.

Many professions now require a degree, but for how many is it really necessary? I know brilliant men and women in my profession (if you can call it that) who never went near a cap and gown. Penguin Books scrapped its "graduates only" rule, but anybody who thinks a degree is a passport to prosperity is a fool. It ain't.



INSULT TO INJURY



The Government is undermining the right to legal representation for people injured in road accidents, says **Gerard Stilliard** of Thompsons Solicitors

If you are injured in an accident, the right to independent legal representation to help you get what a court would award you for your injuries, losses and expenses - not what the insurers decide they will give you, is under threat.

The age-old entitlement that compensation is fair to all, regardless of your wealth or position in society, is currently being challenged by proposed government changes.

In November's Autumn Statement, the chancellor announced that he wants the small claims limit to rise from £1,000 to £5,000 in road traffic cases. This means that if the level of compensation awarded is less than £5,000 the injured person would not be able to recover the money spent on a solicitor.

The government claims that injuries of this type are not 'significant' enough to warrant proper legal representation. But tell this to the 64-year-old social worker and UNISON member who recently secured £3,105 in compensation through the union's legal scheme after a car crash left her with significant nerve and soft



WHO WILL KNOW WHAT THEIR CASE IS REALLY WORTH WITHOUT EXPERT ADVICE?



tissue damage.

While some people may be fortunate enough to have the time, knowledge and confidence to fight an insurance company, for many the idea of representing themselves without the help of a solicitor while recovering from injuries is nightmarish. And who, without expert advice, will know what their case is really worth; what the long term medical impact of an injury is going to be, or how much they have really lost in wages? Injured people will increasingly have to accept settlements the insurers deem 'appropriate', and there will also be those who won't seek compensation at all.

The Government, along with its mates in the insurance industry, says there is a 'fraud and claims culture'. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) says it 'detected' 67,000 instances of 'fraud' in 2013 alone. But there has never been any independent verification of the insurers' figures which include cases which 'might have had an innocent explanation' or where claims handlers have a 'suspicion' of fraud and an applicant accepts a substantially

reduced offer, withdraws a claim without 'credible explanation' or allows communication with the insurer to lapse.

Without solid evidence to back up the idea that fraud is at the level of an 'epidemic' (as one insurer claimed), the figures being peddled are self-serving rhetoric to reduce the money they have to pay out while increasing their profits and dividends to shareholders.

While this government continues its attack on working people, UNISON members should remember that they and their families are protected from the worst effects of Tory policy through the union's legal scheme.

If you, or a family member, are injured in a road accident don't go it alone - contact Thompsons and get support from expert solicitors who represent union members in personal injury cases every day of the week.

Thompsons is working with trade unions and opposition parties to fight these changes before they are sneaked through as law. Help us fight them - read the latest on our car insurance campaign at www.thompsons.law.co.uk/cutpremiumsnow ■



Gerard Stilliard - head of personal injury strategy at Thompsons

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

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