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UNISON ACTIVE!

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE



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FROM ZERO TO HERO

**AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP
LEFT LAURA RILEY AT ROCK
BOTTOM. NOW SHE HELPS
OTHER WOMEN P08**



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

WE'LL STAND BY YOU

In difficult times, our union has always pulled together and fought for our shared values. UNISON members are resilient and spirited, passionate and dedicated – and always supporting each other.

That's the kind of members we have. That's the kind of union we are. And at times like these – when the battles ahead are expected to be difficult and it can feel like those who share our values face an uphill struggle – UNISON members continue to stand up and be

counted.

At a dark time for those who value rights at work and fight bigotry in all its forms, UNISON members don't just stand firm, they continue to march in the direction of justice.

Together we can continue to make great strides in the year ahead.

Providing the best possible public services – from local government that still gives so much despite years of savage cuts, to the National Health Service – still our nation's greatest

achievement after sixty years. And supporting the public service champions, without whom our communities and our loved ones would not be cared for and protected.

Your union will stand by you every step of the way throughout this year and the years to come. Fighting for the best deal at work, fighting for rights at work and at home and standing up to those who wish to do down our public services.

So let's stand together – let's stay strong, and let's win together.

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

Tories' Big Lie about austerity

The Government is systematically starving the public sector of the funding it needs to provide essential services, and our members are bearing the brunt of the misery this is causing.

They have suffered years of real-terms cuts in their pay while coping with ever greater pressure on them in their working lives.

The fear of redundancy looms over members in local government and the NHS and there seems no end in sight to the Tories' war on public services. They have slashed budgets in the name of austerity and the result is the crisis in the NHS and the destruction of local government services.

Yet the budget deficit has risen to historically unprecedented levels, revealing the lie that austerity would bring economic stability. This

has been an ideologically-driven attack on working people and the communities they serve.

But we continue to do everything in our power to fight for our members' jobs, pay and conditions. We have joined forces with the public to stand together against the numerous attacks on services in our communities.

I cannot praise our members too highly for their resilience and solidarity in such appalling circumstances. They know that their union will continue to fight for them and their communities, leading from the front in the battle against the cruel injustices of this dreadful government.



Fight for NHS

Campaigners in the UNISON-led battle to save the A&E department at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary took their message to a national rally in London.

Thousands of people from across the country gathered on March 4 to call on the Government to fund the NHS properly, *writes Peter Carroll.*

News of the campaign in Huddersfield had spread to other parts of the country, according to UNISON regional organiser Natalie Ratcliffe (below).

She said: "Some campaigners have sought advice from us so they can use our experience as a blueprint in their own areas."

"We took three full coach loads from Huddersfield down to London to make our voices heard and we

ended up at the head of the march. Our campaign has inspired people from across the community to get involved and fight for our treasured health service." Natalie was interviewed for Channel 4 and ITV national programmes giving the Huddersfield campaign an even higher profile.

Local Tory MP Jason McCartney has been trying to get in on the act, alleging the campaign has been 'politicised'. He claims to have spoken to ministers about the closure plan, but has produced no evidence of it.

Now the campaign is considering seeking a judicial review into the closure decision.

Natalie said:

"Lawyers think we have a very good case, but we will continue to explore all available avenues."



EVENTS 2017

April – September

Yorkshire Barrio Fiesta 2017

Saturday June 10 (10 am- 5 pm)
The Ripon Racecourse, Boroughbridge Road,
Ripon, North Yorkshire HG4 1UG

Durham Miners Gala

Saturday July 8, Durham City

First UK Pride Event,

Saturday 22 July, Hull

Bradford Festival

Friday July 28 – Sunday July 30

UNISON Doncaster Race Day

Saturday August 5, Doncaster Race Course

Leeds Pride

Saturday August 5 and Sunday August 6

South Yorkshire Festival

Saturday August 13. 12 Noon – 17.00 hours
Wortley Hall, Wortley
Sheffield S35 7DB

Hull Freedom Festival

Queens Gardens, Hull
Friday September 1 – Sunday September 3

Rotherham Show

Saturday September 10 and Sunday September 11
Clifton Park, Clifton Lane, Rotherham S65 2AA

Theresa's Test

Melanie Onn MP, former regional organiser for UNISON in Yorkshire and

Humberside (left) was left furious after her Bill to preserve workers' rights post-Brexit was 'talked

out' by Conservative MPs.

Melanie, who represents Great Grimsby, drew up a bill to safeguard every aspect of employment legislation currently protected by EU law. These include rights, such as maternity pay, TUPE and equal pay for part-time workers.

She said her Bill would form the first test of whether Theresa May

would keep the promise she made at Conservative party conference in October last year, that workers' rights will be maintained.

Melanie said: "Theresa May failed working people at the first hurdle by enlisting her MPs to talk about their favourite radio programmes for four hours instead of this Bill. The fight isn't over. I will be keeping the pressure on the Government."

UNISON assistant general secretary Liz

Snap said the lives of millions of workers had been transformed by these hard-won workplace rights.

"But they could now face a future filled with job insecurity and a labour market where zero-hours contracts become the norm."

"Laws that protect people's right to a decent family life and stop injury and death in the workplace could be undermined. That's why it's essential we protect them."



£2000 for Mencap workers

UNISON in Yorkshire and Humberside has won a major battle in the fight for fair pay for carers who carry out 'sleep-in' duties.

One member took her employer Mencap to an employment tribunal because she calculated they were paying her

less than the national minimum wage, *writes Peter Carroll*

The judge agreed that the member, in common with other colleagues working for the charity in East Yorkshire, should be paid for remaining on the premises at night.

Mencap announced after the hearing that they intended to appeal against the judgement,

but as it stands the ruling means members in a similar position

should be paid around an extra £168.30 a month - £2019.60 a year.

Regional organiser Ashley Harper said: "UNISON's view is that if you are doing a sleep-in at a care home for vulnerable people and you are required to be on the premises throughout the night, you should be paid the national minimum wage for every hour worked.

"These carers are available at all times to deal with any emergencies or other incidents and therefore

should be paid correctly.

"We are very pleased with the outcome but also very surprised that Mencap intend to spend even more money from the charity's coffers to pay lawyers in a bid to continue underpaying our members."

UNISON has now taken a collective grievance nationally against Mencap on behalf of members who are in a similar situation.

"It is a very important victory for our care workers everywhere," said Ashley.



Eric 'the best'

UNISON lost a true champion when our president Eric Roberts (*right*) died suddenly at the end of last year. Eric was also my friend and I am devastated, *writes Wendy Nichols*.

Born and brought up in Liverpool, Eric was a lively, bubbly man who just wanted to help others. After a brief flirtation with wine waiting, repairing drums for the Beatles, and selling pots and pans, Eric found his way to London, to the ambulance service and to UNISON.

For 42 years Eric worked for the London Ambulance Service - as a paramedic, UNISON branch secretary and NEC member. He was the first ambulance member to become our

union's president.

Eric never thought of himself, he always put others first. A Scouser at heart and a staunch Liverpool fan, he was part of the campaign to win justice for the Hillsborough 96 and their families.

We were together last year at the health conference when the inquest delivered its unlawful killing verdict. Eric was very emotional, but I thought it right that he make the announcement to conference not me.

Eric understood the concepts of solidarity and loyalty and would never do anything that would harm the union. He always said UNISON was the best union. For me, though, Eric was simply the best.



TYKES AND TRUMPS

The US president's dangerous antics sent shockwaves across the world – including Yorkshire and Humberside. Our media expert **Mary Maguire** reports



Yorkshire folk are well hard. According to the Metro, the biggest earthquake to hit Britain for ten years, merely left people in God's Own County 'shaking with laughter'. The magnitude 3.9 'quake struck in the North Sea off the Scarborough coast. There were no reports of any injuries, or damage to property. A couple of wheelie bins were knocked over, but it was unclear whether this was the 'quake or local foxes. One unconcerned resident said: "I didn't feel a thing". And one wag tweeted a photo of the ruins of Scarborough Castle, saying it was "hard to believe it was once a Travelodge".

But as we all know, drop a pebble in the middle of a Yorkshire pond and the shock waves are felt around the world. Across the pond, the earthquake released a political tsunami as the wise folk of America elected a trump as their president.

The American presidential election was a spectator sport for editors around the world. The biggest news story around for months. With thousands of reporters writing or broadcasting millions of words, enough pictures to stretch to the moon and back and commentators pontificating at great and tedious length.

SHOCK AND AWE

Amidst all the media flurry, it was hard to separate fact from fiction. Citizens voraciously devoured every little tit-bit about their favoured candidate. Fake news complete with fake photographs, from fake news sites travelled around the world in seconds and became hard fact.

Using fairly simple web tools, these modern day propagandists made their claims look so authentic that many were taken in. BBC Yorkshire, Radio Leeds, Yorkshire Post, Calendar News and most of the nationals. ranted and raved about fake news stories, such as 'Pope endorses Donald

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PETITION
”

Trump', or 'Tens of thousands of fraudulent Clinton votes found in Ohio warehouse', while breathing collective sighs of relief that they hadn't been taken in. In typical British style, a parliamentary inquiry into fake news was set up (Harrogate Advertiser, Wakefield Express et al).

The real Trump then indulged in 'shock and awe' by keeping campaign promises that everyone had assumed were fake. In response, the people marched. Everywhere.

Women in Yorkshire and Humberside, a sizeable proportion of whom were UNISON members, joined millions around the world marching for equality. The Halifax Courier reported marches also in Bradford, Leeds, York and Shipley and '24 Calderdale residents joined the Women's March in London'. In Hull, Bradford and many other cities, other marches took place to protest at the US president closing borders to refugees and people from seven Muslim-majority countries (Hull Daily Mail).

ANTI-TRUMP MAP

And then there was the wall. Not content with a tower, this Trump wanted a wall. "A big one. China has a big wall. One that can be seen from outer space. So America should have one. And Mexico should pay", he said (Telegraph & Argus). However, this 1,900 mile wall 'could be built in Sheffield' (YP). It revealed that a Sheffield-based company, a world market leader in perimeter security systems, could benefit. The YP published an artist's impression depicting a wall with no bricks. Just steel.

Here in Britain, the weapon of choice for keeping out undesirables such as the Donald is the petition. Launched by a solicitor in Leeds, it reached a million within a couple of days and kept growing. The Doncaster Star and the Wakefield Express helpfully produced an anti-Trump map of the county. Sheffield trumped the lot with more than 13,000 signing the petition. This one will run and run. ■



Mary Maguire



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FROM ZERO TO HERO

UNISON member Laura Riley (below) has used her painful experience of an emotionally abusive relationship to help other women. **Helen Hague** reports



Laura Riley founder of Mums in Need, knows from experience just how hard it can be for a mother to get her life back on track after leaving an emotionally abusive relationship.

Laura, a mental health nurse, has been there herself. Her ex-partner left her feeling undermined, manipulated and isolated, especially after she became pregnant.

So when he told her to go when their young son was a baby, Laura managed to do just that – despite her crumpled sense of self-esteem. She moved up to Sheffield from a town in the south, started to rebuild her life with her son, and vowed she'd do what she could to help other mothers move on from emotionally abusive relationships.

For UNISON member Laura, setting up Mums in Need (MiN) was 'the best therapy ever'. She started building the website in 2013. It went live the following year – reaching out to mothers seeking advice and non-judgmental support.

Her voluntary organisation – it plans to register as a charity soon – has already helped women navigate through the family justice system.

"The courts can be very scary for mums who have suffered emotional abuse which is why we try and help them prepare", says Laura. "Cuts in legal aid

have made it even harder for women locked in custody or access battles over children to get support. MiN has a strong team in place – four trustees, 25 volunteers and two therapists.

“Many of us have first-hand experience of the family courts,” says Laura. “The family justice board in Sheffield invites us to training days. We can explain the process to mums who get in touch” says Laura. Mums in Need also has links with ‘McKenzie Friends’, who can help mothers put their case.

SUPPORTIVE

As the magazine went to press, Mums in Need was about to embark on a new phase. Though the website continues, there is a fresh focus on meeting the needs of mothers in the Sheffield area who are grappling with emotional abuse and its confidence-busting aftermath.

Thanks to a supportive local organisation, Mums in Need has a new ‘home’ for the next twelve months. It is offering group support to local women who have left an emotionally abusive relationship, crèche provided. The group is a safe space to share experience and build mutual support.

“We want to help mums feel more confident and in control so they are in a better situation to help themselves and their children”, says Laura. Mums will also be encouraged to boost their life skills and learn strategies to cope with the

legacy of emotional abuse and intimidation.

Due to a lack of resources, the group is not offering on-line support at the moment, but hopes to re-establish the service later this year. However it is still accepting referrals, and mums who contact the organisation will be placed on a waiting list. Fundraising has been stepped up to provide a service which meets an evident need against a backdrop of legal aid and council service cuts.

“We know there are a lot of women out there who are looking for help and support after difficult break-ups with abusive partners. We hope to get back to giving online support as soon as we can. We are giving priority to group meetings for mums in the Sheffield area at the moment” says Laura, who is pleased to see that more people are becoming aware of the destructive effects of emotional abuse – from the legal establishment to radio soap operas.

The Archers’ plot line, where repellant Rob Titchener humiliates, isolates and undermines his wife Helen, highlighted the potentially devastating effects of emotional abuse. Helen was cleared of attempted murder after stabbing Rob following months of manipulative cruelty and control – and repeated marital rape. After the court heard psychological reports, he only has restricted supervised access to their baby son.

Laura welcomes the

“
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FOR HELP
”

publicity generated by the story line – which flagged up the new offence of ‘Coercive Control’ and showed how devious and manipulative emotional abusers can be: the constant undermining, cutting mothers off from friends, raiding joint bank accounts.

But she reckons that emotional abuse and its effects on mothers are not recognised enough by the family courts. “Often, what has happened between a woman and her partner is not seen as relevant to the court case so is often overlooked”.

One mum, who found the family court experience ‘tough, unforgiving and invasive’, says she dreaded to think where she would be now without MiN’s ‘invaluable support’. Mothers like her who had to face their abusive ex-partners in court, could ‘easily crumble’ without it.

Laura is keen to point out that Mums in Need does not hate men. “We offer support specifically to mums because that is our experience and who we can relate to. We recognise that men/fathers can also experience emotional abuse and signpost them to organisations where they can receive help.” ■

Testimonial

“The Founder (of Mothers in Need) not only cares passionately about what she does, but also has a deep knowledge of her subject. She is a great listener and her friendly and welcoming personality makes you feel instantly at ease” - A 36-year-old mum from Sheffield.

HAVE KNOW-HOW, WILL TRAVEL

Does your branch desperately need a hand sorting out admin and finance? Lynda Dye (right) could well be the answer. Editor **Barrie Clement** reports

I'm absolutely loving my role," says Lynda Dye. "I'm really embracing everything about it."

Not everybody can say that about their jobs, but Lynda is bubbling over with enthusiasm.

Lynda works for UNISON's Yorkshire and Humberside region as - for want of a snappier title - peripatetic branch administrator.

Since September 2015 Lynda has been a sort of travelling trouble-shooter who goes in to branches in different parts of the region sorting out their administrative and financial problems and helping to make sure they file their returns on time.

"It's really given me a new lease of life," she says, "I'm meeting new people and I feel I'm making a difference on a region-wide basis."

Lynda's role emerged from an initiative by regional secretary John Cafferty who felt the region's 62 branches - constituting one of the biggest regions in the union - needed back-up.

Originally the focus was on IT.

Yunus Ravat was the point man for computer systems at the regional offices, but his role was expanded by John to include branches.

Yunus now spends 80 per cent of his time out and about in the region, developing new computer and phone systems. Over the last four years he

has helped 15 branches get their systems ship-shape and each year another three or four branches request his assistance.

John decided that if it worked for IT, it would make sense for administrative and financial systems which is where Lynda came in.

Lynda comes from a Rotherham family with strong links to the labour movement and worked for the Royal College of Nursing before she joined UNISON more than 16 years ago.

She started at the sharp end, having initially been attached to the Rotherham local government and health branches, so she knows the ropes.

Lynda points out that some branches have been struggling to fulfil their functions because government cuts have squeezed employers which in turn has meant fewer union members. Increasingly branches have to take tough decisions "They have to prioritise more; they have to be more restrained, especially in funding such things as social events."

Meanwhile the union's national conference decided that branches should receive extra financial help, especially where they find it difficult to mount vitally important recruitment campaigns.

Lynda can help branches to apply for that extra funding.



IT'S ABOUT TRYING TO GET ALL BRANCHES SINGING FROM THE SAME HYMN SHEET



She can also help to manage the adjustment to new union rules which will require quarterly reviews of budgets.

But is she sometimes seen as a spy from regional headquarters? "There's not been one branch which has been defensive when I've arrived. I suppose they might feel that before I get there, but they quickly see that I'm only there to help."

FAMILY LIFE

Lynda is loath to sing her own praises as a trouble-shooter, simply saying that the function she performs seems to be going down well with branches. "I'm aware that apart from full-time convenors, the majority of branch activists have substantive jobs as well. I understand the pitfalls of trying to balance work, family life and activism in the union."

Demand for her services is increasing. "A lot of branches weren't aware of the role but it seems to be getting around by word of mouth."

Lynda points out that many branch treasurers have only had a day's training to perform their duties and so sometimes a helping hand is welcome. "It's basically about trying to get all branches singing from the same hymn sheet administratively so that there is a more uniform approach."

Clearly some branches have less need of Lynda's



Photo: Andy Paraskos

support, particularly the larger ones where branch officers have facility time, says John. "But in most branches, officials have to conduct union business and activities in their own time and that's hard for them to do."

TROUBLESHOOTING

If you think your branch is in need of Lynda's help, you should first go to the regional organiser who can then contact the branch support team leader, Laraine Senior, to discuss the issues. Laraine can advise if and when Linda or Yunus, or both, can assist, says John.

It seems the troubleshooting approach has literally paid dividends. "Last year Yorkshire and Humberside together with Ireland were the only two regions of the union to get all their branch financial returns in on time. It was

actually the first time this region managed it and John was kind enough to say that it was down to me," says Lynda.

While the idea to provide IT, administrative and financial systems back-up was implemented in Yorkshire & Humberside there are growing numbers of requests for help from Lynda and Yunus from other regions.

Both Lynda and Yunus have been to a branch in the union's northern region to help out with their organisational processes and IT, but recently demand for their services has been such that they have been fully occupied in Yorkshire and Humberside.

A national initiative is now being considered by the union to provide HR services to branches employing staff. "We never forget that these are volunteers

“
I ASKED
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and that they often need professional support to fulfil their obligations as employers towards branch employees," says John

"When I was appointed regional secretary I asked myself what could I do in the first few months to improve the lot of branches. That's how the idea emerged. It is not a quick fix, however, this is about long term solutions." ■

HelpatHand

If you think your branch is in need of Lynda's help, you should first go to your regional organiser who can then contact the branch support team leader Laraine Senior to discuss the issues. Laraine can advise if and when Linda can assist with admin and finance systems or Yunus with IT systems. It may be decided that the branch can sort things out without external help, or it may need the help of one, or both of them.



BATTLE STARTS NOW

Corbyn looks safe after a victory for a UNISON official in the Stoke by-election. But now the party needs to win or hold hundreds of other seats, says Mirror columnist **Paul Routledge**

“

THIS
COULD
BE THE
FINAL
NAIL IN
UKIP'S
COFFIN

”

It woz UNISON wot wun it!

Labour's Gareth Snell, a UNISON official, won the crucial Stoke on Trent by-election, defeating cocky Ukip leader Paul Nuttall.

It was a tough fight that went right down to the wire, but a resounding victory for hope not hate, for decency over division.

This was easily the more important poll of the two by-elections on the same day. The Tories snatched Copeland in Cumbria from Labour, but that was on the cards.

Ukip staked everything on winning in the Potteries, putting their new leader into the fray – and lost by a healthy margin. Talk of a big breakthrough in Labour's heartlands proved just that – talk.

PROTECTION

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn now looks safe in his position, though he has a political mountain to climb before he can become Prime Minister.

John Cafferty, UNISON's Yorkshire and Humberside

regional secretary, welcomed the Stoke victory, saying:

“This could be the final nail in Ukip's coffin. Labour's message there is clear: there is more that unites us than divides us.”

“But we can't be complacent. The message from Copeland is that Labour must wake up and smell the coffee. People like Jeremy's policies, but the best policies in the world are no use if you're not in power.

“UNISON members can't afford another five years of Tory rule after 2020. Public services won't exist, they'll be destroyed.

“The anti-Corbyn attempts last year were absolutely reprehensible. It is not the time to question the leadership.

“But the bottom line is unless you can get elected there is nothing you can do. We have to have the best possible chance of getting elected and if that means changing leader next year that is what we have to do.”

All eyes are now on the impact of the March Budget, and the progress of Theresa May's negotiations to take the UK out of the European

Union. This isn't just a faraway thing, it affects all UNISON members.

Former Unison official Melanie Onn, Labour MP who saw off the Ukip threat at Great Grimsby, has vowed to continue her fight at Westminster to keep EU-created protection for working people.

UPHEAVAL

The Government has promised to 'cut and paste' into UK law regulations like the working time directive and maternity/paternity leave. “But we can't just take their word for it. I will make sure they're in the Great Repeal Bill,” she pledged.

Prime Minister May refuses to give a 'running commentary' on what Brexit means, but even the dimmest Tory MP knows she wants the most access to trade in Europe while giving the fewest concessions.

The status of EU migrants here, without whom the NHS would be unable to operate, remains unclear as Active! goes to press. Ministers have refused to promise that they will be given the unconditional



right to stay

Brexit hogs the headlines, but the old saying 'all politics is local' is still true in Yorkshire. The NHS crisis, local Government upheaval and public service cuts are closer to home than Brussels-bashing.

Hospital trusts across the region are posting record deficits, school budgets are under pressure and councils are making thousands redundant. And rising food, fuel and energy prices affect all UNISON members.

The long 'devolution war' being fought between Whitehall and Yorkshire and Humberside is coming to a head, with a conflict over a new deal for the region inevitable.

I understand that majority Labour opinion has moved in favour of an elected mayor for Yorkshire, with some executive powers but reporting to a consortium of local Government leaders from towns and cities.

The Tories have poured cold water on this idea, with so-called Northern Powerhouse minister Andrew Percy, MP for Brigg and Goole, claiming that it

would require legislation – which the Government will not allow.

So much for local people making local decisions. The Government is behaving like Henry Ford, who said his customers could have their cars any colour they liked – as long as it was black.

There are few fights for council control in the county this May. Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford, Wakefield, Kirklees and Calderdale don't have elections this year. Labour will remain largely in control. In Doncaster, voters will choose a new council and decide whether directly-elected Labour mayor Ros Jones should have a second term in office.

NEW BLOOD

Westminster has got some new blood with the election of ex-Corrie actor Tracy Brabin as MP for Batley and Spen in succession to murdered Jo Cox. And the threat of parliamentary constituency boundary changes, which could have cost four Labour seats in Yorkshire, has receded as Tory MPs in the South

realise they might lose their seats too.

While some local Labour parties are talking about getting rid of their MP by re-selection, I honestly don't think that threat will materialise either.

Scouse windbag Paul Nuttall has been seen off in Stoke, and I don't think we'll hear much from the new Tory MP for Copeland. But the battle to hold or win those seats – and hundreds like them – has to start now. ■



SCOUSE
WINDBAG
PAUL
NUTTALL
HAS BEEN
SEEN OFF
IN STOKE



TheResults

STOKE (TOP FOUR)

Labour - Gareth Snell 7853
(37.09%)
Ukip - Paul Nuttall 5233 (24.72%)
Tory - Jack Brereton 5154
(24.35%)
Lib Dem - Zulfiqar Ali 2083 (9.84%)

COPELAND (TOP FOUR)

Tory - Trudy Harrison 13748
(44.25%)
Labour - Gillian Troughton 11601
(37.34 %)
Lib Dem - Rebecca Hanson 2252
(7.25%)
Ukip - Fiona Mills 2025 (6.52%)



BOSSSES HIT NEW LOW

Sacked strikers at Kinsley Academy (above) have been the victims of disgraceful allegations in an attempt to frighten them into abandoning their courageous fight against pay cuts. **Peter Lazenby** on how a cleaning company has scraped the bottom of the barrel

Bosses who sacked three women cleaners at a Wakefield school have made outrageous accusations against them in an apparent bid to frighten them into ending their battle for justice.

Leslie Leake, Marice Hall and Karen McGee were cleaners at Kinsley Academy, a primary school converted into a self-managing academy, taking it out of the control of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council.

Academy bosses 'outsourced' the three cleaners' jobs to a profit-hungry private contractor, which slashed their pay from £7.80 an hour to the minimum



AT THE
END OF
THE DAY,
WE
HAVEN'T
DONE
ANYTHING
WRONG



wage of £7.20, and cut holiday pay and sick pay.

The three, who are UNISON members, bravely resisted and took strike action. They were out for 12 weeks, regularly picketing, staging protests and demonstrations, with UNISON rallying support.

On Halloween night they dressed as vampires and demonstrated outside the Barnsley headquarters of cleaning contractor C&D.

PANIC ATTACK

They returned to work but were suspended after being falsely accused of taking photographs of children at the school, in breach of child protection legislation.

The allegations stunned and upset the women, who were then sacked on the spurious grounds that their vampire demonstrations had upset Catholic religious sensitivities.

Marice said: "We were suspended for taking photos, something about child protection, which we hadn't done. They threatened us with the police as well.

"That night I couldn't sleep. I felt sick. I had a panic attack and I've had to have treatment for that as well."

The three were called to a disciplinary hearing, but there the allegations about photographs were not mentioned.

"When we had the



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SINCE
BEING
SACKED
WE HAVE
GOT A
FEW
DONATIONS
BUT IT
DOESN'T
COVER IT
”

disciplinary hearing they just swept it under the carpet, but I haven't forgotten. They tell lies. They tell lies. It's a very serious allegation and I just can't believe it. They are scaremongering to make us go away.”

The other two cleaners were also badly affected by the false allegations.

Karen McGee said: “They said something about photos. I didn't know what accusation it was. I was stumped, but it was really upsetting. I didn't know where it had come from. I was a dinner lady at Fitzwilliam school for 15 years and had all the checks you have to have, working with children. Then for someone to turn round and say stuff about child protection to you – I've got grandchildren myself.

“Really it was slander. It's been really upsetting. I'm on tablets now because it's been getting me down. I shouldn't

have to be on tablets and going to the doctor because of a cleaning job.

“At the end of the day we haven't done anything wrong. At the end of the day we just want our jobs back, and now it has escalated into this.”

She said she had felt ‘really intimidated’ by the company's actions.

The third cleaner, Lesley Leake, said: “The allegations were disgusting, really disgusting. It's affected me. Marice had a panic attack. I've not been very well myself. I can't sleep properly. I've not been able to sleep properly since the strike, and it's getting worse.”

STRUGGLING

UNISON is pursuing the sackings though an appeals procedure, and if that fails, the cleaners' cases will be taken to an employment tribunal.

But in the meantime the cleaners are suffering financially – on top of the disgraceful emotional pressure and intimidation to which they have been subjected.

Their pay has been stopped, and while all three have partners who have incomes, the loss of their wages is a big problem.

“It's rough really,” said Marice. “Very hard.”

She has a second job which helps. Ironically it is at Kinsley Academy, working as a dinner lady. She is employed directly by the academy – not by a contractor.

Karen said: “Since being sacked we have got a few donations but it doesn't

cover it. Luckily I've got my partner but we're struggling. I've borrowed money off my mum and dad to cover bills just to see me through next month.

“We are keeping a roof over our heads but we're struggling financially.”

Lesley said: “We're just getting by really. I've got a partner and he has got a pretty good job. I've had a part-time job at Next for 13 years.

“Obviously the bills and the mortgage come first. But life is on hold at the moment. All the money goes on bills. It was a bit rough at Christmas.”

UNISON has vowed to pursue the three women's cases for as long as it takes.

The three won the support of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn when he was on the campaign trail in Yorkshire during last year's leadership challenge, which encouraged them. They also have the support of their local Labour MP, Jon Trickett.

Karen was full of praises for the support the three have received.

“All the support we've had – often it's been people we don't even know. We've been to rallies and stuff like that. It's been absolutely brilliant.” ■

PleaseHelp

UNISON has set up a support fund and is asking for donations to help the three Kinsley cleaners manage until their brave battle is over. Cheques should be made out to Wakefield UNISON and sent to 18 Gills Yard, Wakefield WF1 3BZ.

UNISON members at the University of York are getting the adult learning bug – thanks to financial help from their branch.

Branch secretary Helen Adcock realised that members were stressed out and demoralised after a series of highly disruptive restructuring exercises.

These were prompted by financial concerns as the university projected a loss of income because of a fall in student numbers.

Some members have left their jobs through voluntary redundancy while others have endured the uncertainty of re-deployment and changed job descriptions.

Helen said she wanted to do something positive and practical for members and came up with the idea of the branch providing them with bursaries so they could sign up for a wide range of courses.

She said: "I took it to our branch executive committee and we agreed to pilot the scheme last year.

"So far 17 members have benefited from the branch's support and taken up courses. We are hoping they will spread the word to others about the benefits of learning new skills."

The courses available through York City Council's 'York Learning' network include programmes to enhance people's employment prospects.

Improving mathematics and languages and learning practical skills like accountancy, computers and IT can give people a major boost when they send their CVs to potential employers.



IT'S A NO-BRAINER

Not all branches can fund additional learning for members, but where the cash is available, it's a great use of resources, says **Peter Carroll**

CONFIDENCE

But it is not only practical subjects that members are keen to study.

Popular courses include painting and drawing, flower arranging, dressmaking, cookery, health and fitness, drama and history.

Helen believes that whatever course members choose, the experience is helpful in building confidence and stimulating the minds of people who may not have been in a learning environment for many years.

She said: "I went back to college 10 years ago because I wanted to become a teaching assistant. I also studied accountancy and have just

completed a BA Hons in Management.

"I wanted to have an up-to-date CV and I tell our members it is important for them too.

"I am very pleased that we have had four people who went on courses and have returned to continue learning this term.

"They have got the bug and I hope they will carry on and spread the word among their friends and colleagues.

"We try to make the process as simple as possible, so there aren't piles of forms to fill in. I feel sure there will be even more members taking up the bursaries in the year ahead."

▲ Above: Helen (centre) and colleagues

**EXCELLENT**

The cost of courses depends on whether they are introductory or more advanced, ranging from £125 up to £350.

Mark Brown cycles to work at the university every day so he snapped up the chance to take a short course in bicycle maintenance.

Mark said: "I used to take my bike to be mended and I used to watch them and think to myself I could probably do that myself with a bit of training.

"So I went on the course and UNISON paid the fee. It was very good and obviously I have benefitted from it in my day-to-day life.

"I think it is an excellent

idea for the branch to support members like this."

Research Grants co-ordinator Shirley Foster wanted to improve her health and fitness and put in an application to the branch to take a course in yoga.

She said: "It has been wonderful! I am really feeling the health benefits and I'm a lot fitter and more flexible.

"Also, the social side of getting out and meeting new people in a comfortable and friendly environment is something I will continue doing.

"Many thanks to UNISON for giving me the opportunity to do something that is, for me, a great



I THINK
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LIKE THIS



success."

UNISON has long led the way in promoting adult learning among its members.

Lifelong Learning is a fundamental policy of the union. Learning is regarded as being intrinsically good, whatever the subject being studied.

POWERFUL

It broadens the mind, enhances lives and builds greater confidence and self-esteem, as well as providing social contact for people who might otherwise be isolated.

But it is also true that rapid changes to the world of work are taking place, with the prospect of ever more automation threatening traditional jobs.

The need to be prepared for these changes is also a powerful motive for learning new skills.

Office manager Vanda Castle has seen her role change considerably in recent times.

"It has changed hugely over the past 20 years and I feel it will continue to do so.

"I decided that bookkeeping would be a course that would back up some of the financial work I do currently in my existing role and may well be transferrable to roles I may take on in the future.

"The course was great because it was on an evening and near where I live. The teaching and support were very good."

Vanda is continuing her studies and is delighted she has been able to add another qualification to her CV.

"Having a family and young children it is always a ►



► challenge, putting yourself first. Having the bursaries available through UNISON was a fantastic opportunity. It gave me the nudge I needed to do something for myself."

RESOURCES

Helen realises that many UNISON branches do not have the resources to provide similar financial support to their members.

Her branch has not had to fund lengthy and expensive industrial action among members and so has more resources than others.

But she wholeheartedly believes that adult learning is the best way to invest any available branch funds, bringing a wide range of personal and professional benefits to members.

“
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BRANCH
MEMBERS
”

Annette Johnson, a UNISON member for 26 years, couldn't agree more.

Since doing a degree back in 2008, Annette had done no more formal learning. Last year she decided to change that and started to learn Italian.

She said: "I did it for fun but also, when I go away, I like to be able to speak the language of the country I am in.

"I used to be good at languages when I was younger but it gets a bit more difficult later on. So it has been good to push myself mentally and I'm doing fine.

"Also, we have a number of Italian academics in the department I work in and I think it's a good thing to be able to speak to them in

their own language.

"So I have plenty of chance to practise my Italian even when I'm at work in York.

"The main thing is, I'm using my brain and I think that is important throughout your life, whatever age you are.

"Both my kids are at university and it is very costly, as other parents in my position will know.

"So the UNISON bursary gave me the chance to do this course which I probably wouldn't have done without it.

"Quite a lot of people in my class are retired and they seem very happy and mentally stimulated by it.

"UNISON is doing a brilliant thing for its branch members and I can honestly say I love it." ■

Learning in UNISON



Return to Learn and Women's Lives will run from September 2017 in the following areas:-

Women's Lives – Huddersfield, Leeds and Sheffield

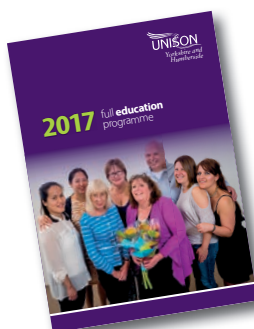
Return to Learn – Barnsley (inc. Wakefield and Rotherham), Bradford and Halifax

More information about venues and times will be available from July 2017.

For more information or to register your interest in these courses please contact Tanya Shearer:- Email: t.shearer@unison.co.uk Tel: 0113 218 2330.

Members' Courses	Dates	Closing date	Residential Details	Venue	Cost to branches
Pre-Retirement Workshop	28 Apr 17	28 Mar 17	Non-Residential	Commerce House, Leeds	£10
Coping with Change	15, 16 June 17	15 May 17	Non-Residential	Commerce House, Leeds	FREE
Facing Change Together	11 Jul 17	9 Jun 17	Non-Residential	Commerce House, Leeds	FREE
Dementia Workshop	17 Jul 17	16 Jun 17	Non-Residential	Commerce House, Leeds	FREE
Pathways into UNISON	16, 17 Sept 17	14 Aug 17	Residential	Northern College, Barnsley	FREE

Activist Courses	Dates	Closing date	Residential Details	Venue	Cost to branches
UNISON Workplace Refresher Course	5, 6 Jun 17	5 May 17	Non-Residential	Northern College, Barnsley	£100
Discussion Leaders	26, 27 June 17	26 May 17	Non-Residential	Commerce House, Leeds	£50



For our full Education Programme, our members Education Programme and for our application forms please visit our website at:-
www.unison-yorks.org.uk/education

For more information about any courses please contact our Education Administrator on 0113 218 2330.



Wendy Nichols (above, centre) paid an emotional visit to The Gambia to assess the impact of her record-breaking presidential charity. **Mary Maguire** reports

“When I saw for myself the poverty and how people lived, contrasted with the sheer enthusiasm of the children to learn, I was inspired. And I knew that it was absolutely the right thing to do. I found it all very emotional at times.”

So said regional convenor Wendy Nichols who visited Bijilo, The Gambia, at the end of her UNISON presidential year, eager to see a mission accomplished. She had reason to be proud. Her charity had raised a record £28,000 to provide school facilities and bring education to some of the world's most deprived children. The

“IT WAS LOVELY TO HEAR THE KIDS SINGING HOW UNISON WOULD ALWAYS BE CLOSE TO THEIR HEARTS”

UNISON president's charity usually raises between £10,000 and £15,000 in the year.

The money for Wendy's nominated charity was used to build four desperately needed classrooms. Yorkshire and Humberside region had adopted the school some years back. The funds raised helped build a toilet block, provide cleaner kitchens and help kids grow their own vegetables.

The school was such a success that it became too small and needed funds to expand. From small beginnings, the school now has 1200 pupils, ranging in age from five to nine-years-old.

Accompanied by UNISON's

former regional officer Jim Bell, who ran the project for the union but has since retired, Wendy visited the school the day after she landed. It was a Sunday so Wendy could see what the union had done before the children arrived. It was a poignant moment. She recalls:

“The classrooms look absolutely fabulous and are really well built. But my satisfaction was tinged with sadness. Just before we arrived, the monsoons had wreaked havoc. Three of the four older classrooms were destroyed, leaving one old one and our four new ones standing. Without our contribution, they would

have ended up with just one classroom after the monsoons."

Wendy wanted the children to know where the money had come from to build their classrooms. So the region's banner machine was put to work to produce a map of the UK for each classroom. Each map records the name of every branch and every region that donated money.

Each classroom has a UNISON-inspired name in recognition of extraordinary donations. There is the Lucia McKeever, Eleanor Smith and UIA room. Another is named after Wendy's own branch, North Yorkshire; another after Dukeries health branch in north Nottinghamshire, due to disappear with NHS changes; and the fourth after veteran fund-raiser and south east region health member Peggy Smith.

When Wendy went back to school on Monday morning to meet the teachers and pupils, she didn't go empty-handed. She had with her three complete football kits, enough pencils and crayons and books to sink a ship and a stack of purple UNISON ponchos for the next monsoon.

The children put on an opening ceremony in her honour that featured on the news. Wendy said:

"They made up a song about UNISON and it was lovely to hear the kids singing how UNISON would always be close to their hearts. They bought us gifts, and the ceremony also included a play they had written about me and Jim Bell. One of the girls

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WHEN
THEY
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WAS MY
BIRTHDAY,
THEY
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ME A CAKE
AND THE
SCHOOL
SANG
HAPPY
BIRTHDAY
”

played me and one of the boys played Jim, talking about how we would help the school. They were incredible.

"During the week, when they found out it was my birthday, they bought me a cake and brought in the school choir to sing happy birthday to me. At times, it was difficult to hold back the tears".

TURBULENT

One of the teachers who spoke good English was Wendy's guide for her visit. He invited her to his home which she found a 'humbling' experience.

The contrast between rich and poor was enormous. "Most people still live in poverty in shanty towns," she said. "But you have a few living in opulent luxury. And everything had to stop for Gambia's president, Yahya Jammeh. We were stopped by soldiers one day to allow his cavalcade to pass – he went by waving a hankie seemingly oblivious to the poverty around him."

President Yahya Jammeh subsequently faced an election at a particularly turbulent period in The Gambia's history. He lost that election, but initially

refused to leave office. He grabbed power in a coup in 1994 and in his 22 years of rule, tens of thousands of Gambians had fled to other countries. Neighbouring African countries were threatening to step in and remove him by force if he did not go. He finally stood down in January and went into exile.

Wendy met teachers' union leaders and forged links with the local hospital, meeting hospital staff and the 12 Cuban doctors working there. The next part of the project, she said, will help raise money for a container to stock medical equipment, towels and bedding for that hospital.

When Wendy chose the Bijilo school project as her charity, she told me that she had thought long and hard about which charity to support. At the time she said it felt right to reach out across the world to help children get a better start in life. She told me:

"I want to continue to help the children. It would be great if we could raise even more money to replace the classrooms destroyed by the monsoon." ■

BareEssentials

The Bijilo School Project provides essential equipment and improved amenities for a school in Gambia, West Africa. Over the years, UNISON's Yorkshire and Humberside region has raised money to provide such basics as tools and equipment for the school's kitchen garden, a water pump and a freezer. Toilet blocks, cleaner kitchens and a water storage tower have also been built. The more money the project gets, the more places for children can be provided. The school urgently needs funds to replace classrooms destroyed by the monsoon. Cheques, made payable to the Gambia Schools Project, can be sent to Joan Walker, UNISON Centre, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY.





INSULT TO INJURY

Ministers want to force the vast majority of injured people to pay legal costs to claim compensation. **Tom Jones** warns of a bonanza for insurance firm fat cats



Tom Jones

Ministers have taken a critical step nearer their plan to introduce severe restrictions on the ability of injured people to access justice.

Slipped out just before Christmas, the Government's proposals would affect nearly one million people every year, removing free or affordable independent legal advice.

Currently, the system allows the injured to claim back their legal expenses if their claim has a value of more than £1,000. Everything below £1,000 falls into the 'small claims limit' where expenses are not recoverable.

If the Government gets its way, the small claims limit would increase to £5,000. In a single, destructive stroke this would force 95 per cent of injured people to pay the costs of running a case from their own pockets rather than from the party at fault.

Experience from the effect of the introduction of fees in employment tribunals suggests that many will simply be put off bringing a case, even when they are fully entitled to.

While the Government says its proposals, first announced in November 2015, are designed to tackle a perceived problem with so-called 'fraud' in 'whiplash'

claims, this is a dangerous con. It is a fig leaf cynically deployed to create a false impression.

HELL-BENT

The Tories launched a consultation which ran for an extremely short time over the festive period, limiting the scope for interested parties to fully interrogate the Government's arguments (such as they are).

The consultation document proves ministers are hell-bent on imposing this five-fold increase in the small claims limit. The change will affect all personal injury claims, whether they occur on the road, in the workplace, or



IT WILL
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OF RICH
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COMPANY
BOSSSES



anywhere else.

This cannot be justified on any legal, moral or economic grounds and is not supported by any independent evidence.

While UNISON's legal scheme has protected members from most of the harshest Tory meddling to date, these latest changes - if successful - would undermine the funding of union legal services. It would make it more difficult for the vast majority of injured workers to enforce their right to compensation.

It would also line the pockets of the super-rich insurance company bosses who already get eye-watering pay packets.

SLAPDASH BOSSES

The changes in effect mean a huge cheque from the Government to insurers, their multi-millionaire bosses and their shareholders.

The insurance industry has spent years lobbying its mates in Government to change how the legal system works. They have been rewarded with changes that make it harder for slap-dash bosses to be held accountable for health and safety failings. Disgracefully, their lobbying even tried to get legal costs imposed on victims of asbestosis disease.

The proposed change to the small claims limit would take away a basic, long-established principle of UK law that those who cause injury should pay for all of its consequences - the so called 'polluter pays' principle.

It would directly attack injured people's right to pursue damages using an independent solicitor.

The Government has been talking up scare stories of a 'compensation culture' and 'whiplash fraud' for years despite two Government reports stating that there is no such culture. In fact their own statistics show that the number of work injury cases has dropped 12 per cent over the last ten years. They also admit there is no suggestion of fraud by injured workers.

The Government skates over the fact that the insurance industry's own figures show they have saved a staggering £8.7bn in costs for motor insurance claims in the last five years. And they happen not to mention that premiums are higher now than they were in 2010 and have increased by 17 per cent in the last year alone.

We investigated the pay of the CEOs of the top three insurers and found that their salaries, benefits, bonuses and dividends gave them earnings in 2015 ranging from £4.82m (paid to Direct Line's Paul Geddes) to £37.82m (Admiral's Henry Engelhardt). AVIVA's

Mark Wilson doubled his pay to £5.67m.

On the steps of Downing Street, when she was appointed prime minister, Theresa May said that her

Government would not work for the 'privileged few' but for those who are 'just about managing'. It is hard to think of many people who better fit the definition of 'privileged few' than these insurance CEOs.

The insurers are raking it in and are happy to see premiums go up. Meanwhile it is hardworking people on low incomes, who struggle to afford a car to get to work, who bear the brunt.

And it is the same people who are being told that their injury, worth 'just' £5,000 is too 'minor' to deserve the support of an expert lawyer. Let Theresa May or justice secretary Liz Truss tell a carer, nurse or cleaner that £5,000 is insignificant and see how they react.

If we are to defeat these unfair and vindictive proposals, it is essential that the entire union movement pressures the Government to think again. ■



JoinTheProtest

In opposition to the proposed changes to the small claims limit, the #FeedingFatCats campaign was launched by Thompsons Solicitors.

To help prevent nearly one million people a year from losing their right to legal protection, the campaign is urging UNISON members and others to write to their local MP and lobby justice secretary Liz Truss by signing the online petition at petition.parliament.uk/petitions/173099. Find out more at www.feedingfatcats.co.uk

BUILDING A CAREER

Phyllis Foster (right) was thwarted in her ambition to be a bricklayer, but eventually built a career in occupational therapy. Now she is on a mission to get more members active in UNISON. **Annie Mitchell** caught up with a busy woman

When Phyllis Foster left school she wanted to be a bricklayer but that ambition proved elusive. “No one would have me” she says matter-of-factly and her surprising response to this setback was to go into management. Born and raised in Hull, one of eight sisters and two brothers, Phyllis’s home life was unusual from the start. Her parents rented privately from people who had temporarily gone abroad, - which meant she did lots of moving about.

“It could be six months or three years and I just bounced around junior schools until I got to seniors - then I got lots of different buses!”

Instead of bricklaying, Phyllis went to college in Sheffield and for the next three years studied for a BTEC National Diploma in construction and land use. Then, like many young 20-year olds, she looked

abroad for some excitement and ended up going to Camp America, which provides summer camps for youngsters, working as a dance teacher. “It was there,” she explains, “that I met a man, married and stayed ten years.”

“I had a well-paid job in New Hampshire working as a customer service manager at Unicast – an alumina factory. When I got pregnant I found the rules and regulations in America were very different and I only had six weeks’ maternity leave. I went back to working 40 hours a week, but was only there for six months before I quit. I had to leave.”

INVOLVED

Phyllis spent the next two years taking jobs that fitted around their young son. She worked evenings and weekends as a receptionist at a YMCA gym and as a nanny, taking Joe with her. But her thoughts were always with her family. She returned home to Yorkshire

twice a year taking her maximum two weeks paid holiday and insisting on two weeks unpaid.

“My mother became ill with emphysema and I always said that when she needed oxygen for more than 12 hours a day, I would come home. My husband didn’t want to leave so we split and I left America with Joe. I moved back home to Bridlington. It wasn’t easy caring for my mother who was very poorly and looking after a two and a half year old.”

However, Phyllis found time to do a GCSE in maths and complete a child-minding course at East Riding College. In 2005, the year after her mother died, she took a part-time job in support services at East Riding Council working with the occupational therapy team, where she still works today.

“I cover a broad area of support for the public, clients or organisations who ring up or call with questions about ramps, bath lifts, extensions – all sorts.”

ENTHUSIASTIC

Phyllis was clearly enthusiastic about her job but had little to do with UNISON until a flyer came through her door about Return to Learn courses.

“I thought it sounded interesting - especially the free weekend in Leeds at the end of the course! This was in 2013 and I hadn’t done any studying for years, but Return to Learn gave me confidence in my abilities.

“At the end of the course,

“IT WASN’T EASY CARING FOR MY MOTHER AND LOOKING AFTER A TWO YEAR OLD”

someone from UNISON came along and said how people could get involved in the union and that caught my interest."

Phyllis went to her branch AGM and found that they were looking for people to get active. "I was really surprised, I would have got involved years ago but I didn't know. We have 2,500 members spread over a wide area, but very few people to help. Even a workplace contact can make such a difference."

EYE-OPENER

Phyllis is now the branch health and safety officer. "It's been a steep learning curve, but fun. This year I went to national and local government conferences in Brighton, which were a real eye-opener. It was my first time and I was on my own so it was quite difficult, but it was incredible and I learnt a lot. I am now being mentored by our UNISON area organiser with a view to standing as branch secretary next year."

She is keen to crack on and build a strong branch. "I only want to fill the gap so that in a couple of years someone else will say - I could do this job."

Between a hectic family life, work and the union, Phyllis still finds time to belong to Bridlington's Old Town Association. "I am responsible for the Secret Gardens open days. I love my gardening and in June local people can visit private gardens and allotments as well as old churchyards. We raise



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money for planters and baskets in the old town where the council has made cuts. We also support a local charity for the homeless."

Phyllis is a very busy woman and is on a mission to get members more active in UNISON. "It's good for your social life and gives your confidence a boost. The one thing that really struck me at conference was when someone said - you wouldn't join a gym and expect to get fit without going - so if you want to get the most out of your union, get involved." ■

HerStory

Phyllis Foster, 44, was born in Hull, one of eight girls and two boys. She studied for a BTEC National Diploma in Construction in Sheffield. At 20 she went to America where she later married and had a son. In 2000 she returned to Bridlington with two and a half year old Joe, to care for her sick mother. Since 2005 she has worked part-time in support services at East Yorkshire Council with the occupational therapy team. She completed UNISON's Return to Learn course in 2013 and is the health and safety officer for East Riding local Government branch.

'THEY DON'T SCARE ME'

Mary Maguire meets actor and writer Tracy Brabin (above) on her 100th day as MP for Batley & Spen. Elected following the brutal murder of Jo Cox, Tracy has since been forced to suffer the revolting abuse of 'pathetic' far right trolls

I met Tracy Brabin in Parliament just as she completed her first 100 days as an MP. Actor, soap star and writer, Tracy is MP for Batley and Spen, elected following the brutal murder of Jo Cox.

Tracy has written TV episodes, including *Hollyoaks*, *Heartbeat*, *Crossroads*, *Doctors*, and acted on stage. Coronation Street fans would recognise her Tricia Armstrong character. Or the parts she's played in other TV soaps and dramas, such as *Peak Practice*, *Eastenders*, *Emmerdale* and *Midsomer Murders*.

Now she's playing herself. Unspun. In that great debating theatre that is the House of Commons. And getting stuck into the

job. The previous week she took part in the NHS day of action (her sister Maxine is a theatre nurse). Then she spent 24 hours with Yorkshire Ambulance Service paramedics, seeing the pressures under which they worked. She said:

"They didn't have one second spare. They answered call after call. There was a really difficult road traffic accident and I was so impressed by their slickness and professionalism."

Tracy is campaigning to halt the downgrading of Dewsbury hospital. An issue she's raised in Parliament in questions to health secretary Jeremy Hunt, at PMQs and in several other debates.

As a writer, she is able to

“
FOR ME
IT'S A
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PRIVILEGE
TO CARRY
ON JO'S
WORK
”

use her constituents' stories which are often 'compelling and heart-breaking' to bring to life the way the Government is savaging the NHS. She said:

"One told me how her gran needed a doctor's home visit and was told that there were 100 people ahead of her. Well if people can't see a GP, they will go to A&E. So there's no point telling them not to and blaming them if A&E is swamped. We have a real fight on our hands with this Government."

STAUNCH

Tracy is no stranger to campaigning. A staunch trade unionist, she has worked for refugees and victims of torture. She's a member of Equity, the

actors' union, and of the Writers' Guild. She has campaigned for equal representation for women, pensions for writers, and has spoken in the European Parliament about gender portrayal in film and TV.

Tracy explains:

"There may be lots of women in a production, but if all you see is the woman putting down the dinner in front of the man. Or, when two women are talking, all they are talking about is a man – that's just not good enough."

AMAZING

Tracy campaigned with Jo Cox in her home town in the 2015 general election. Both women came from the same area, had gone to the same school and shared common values. When Jo was murdered, Tracy was selected out of 70 candidates. She said:

"Jo was amazing and we were very lucky to have her. When I was asked to stand, I knew it was something I wanted to do. I wasn't afraid, although my mother and family were. For me it's a huge privilege to carry on Jo's work and an honour to work for constituents in my home town. But that by-election should never have taken place. My CLP is still grieving. A tragedy for us, was seen as an opportunity by many far right groups to spout their rotten views in a by-election."

Coming to Parliament was a 'shock'. The procedures, ancient traditions and the maze of the Palace of Westminster can be overwhelming. Tracy

had no buddy to show her the ropes. Her office is 7 minutes and 20 seconds from the Chamber. So she has just eight minutes to 'leg it' to vote. Early on, though, she found herself in the wrong queue. She said:

"I didn't recognise anyone, then realised I was in the wrong place. I had to dash through the Chamber, but was halted by the deputy speaker, who was on her feet, and ordered to sit down. I did so slap bang in the middle of the Tory front benches."

Tracy learned fast and is very 'switched on' now. But as she says, if no-one tells you, you won't know. She invited kids from her constituency to Parliament to show them that they, too, belong there; it's not just the preserve of the public school, Oxbridge educated elite. And she's working on a project for Labour on how to improve pathways into film and TV for working class kids.

AMBIITION

Brought up on a council estate, Tracy believes in the transformative power of acting and culture to provide ambition and opportunity and to build a more empathetic society. "A lack of empathy is what allows the kind of violence and abuse, particularly against women and girls, that we are seeing".

She's spoken out in Parliament about such violence, using her own experience. When she was abused on twitter, her CLP members cleaned up her time line by re-tweeting pictures of her day with the

“
MY
TWITTER
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IN THEIR
Y-FRONT
IN A
BEDROOM
IN THEIR
MUM'S
HOUSE
”

ambulance workers. She said:

"We should not let these abusers win. They are pathetic individuals hiding behind social media. We must call them out every time.

"99.9% per cent of my Twitter abusers are sat in their y-fronts in a bedroom in their mum's house. But we must call out all threats and violence against women. Take it all the way, involve the police. Don't let them get away with it."

Tracy feels she has achieved a lot and learnt a lot in those first 100 days. And her ambition for her next 'thousand days' is to set up a youth theatre in Batley and Spen - an apprenticeship institute that would help 'raise the bar of aspiration' and attract much-needed jobs in the film and TV industry to her area. ■

Curriculum Vitae

- Born May 9, 1961, Batley.
- Married to Richard Platt in 2005. Two daughters Nancy and Lois.
- Education: Heckmondwike Grammar School, Loughborough University, University of the Arts London.
- Career: Tracy has written episodes for TV soaps, including Hollyoaks, Heartbeat, Crossroads and Doctors. She has also acted on stage and played the part of Tricia Armstrong in Coronation Street. She has appeared in Peak Practice, Eastenders, Emmerdale and Midsomer Murders.
- Elected MP for Batley & Spen October 2016.

GIVING SOMETHING BACK

UNISON activist and grandmother Carol McGrath (right) has a tough job in social care, but still finds time for a wide range of other activities. **Ryan Fletcher** reports

“

I DO MY BEST, BUT I THINK I'M ONE OF MILLIONS WHO FEEL LIKE THAT

”

They say that music is food for the soul and as a choir singer one of Carol McGrath's responsibilities is to sing in unison with her colleagues to produce sounds that an audience can escape to and enjoy.

While singing in the Leeds City Council and the Holbeck Underground Ballroom choirs is a hobby for the 58-year-old, doing things that benefit others is not.

Whether in her role as a principal commissioning officer for adult social care, or as a UNISON learning rep and shop steward, Carol's objective is clear: She aims to help people.

"I do my best, but I think I'm one of millions and millions of people who feel like that. We need to make sure we don't lose that because we're getting to be such a materialistic society," says Carol.

"That message is so strong - it's everywhere you go, on television, in the media, just everywhere. We tend to forget that what really matters is each other."

Carol has spent nearly her entire working life caring for others in one form or another. It took determination and hard

work to get her foot on the career ladder she wanted, but Carol's husband Peter, who is a passenger transport driver for Leeds City Council, has been there over the years to provide support.

"We've been together 38 years," says Carol proudly, "I had a gang of friends. I was one of the girls and he was one of the boys. He sent his friend over to ask me to dance at a disco one night. We got married after that and had a family quite young."

After having three children - Rebecca, Daniel and Rory - Carol stopped working as a nurse to manage the family. In the end giving up her job was a relief, because nursing wasn't an occupation that she enjoyed. Says Carol: "I didn't like not having enough time to do my job properly and how nurses weren't always respected by doctors, but it was a long time ago."

Once the youngest child was born, however, Carol began thinking about what to set her mind to next. Following her humanitarian impulses, she signed up for a university access course and then began a social policy degree.

"When the kids were little I had part time work, but it was just make-do jobs. I worked behind a bar and

sorted and delivered parcels at the crack of dawn for FedEx. I'd walk out one door and Peter would walk in another," says Carol.

"I just felt that we were never going to get anywhere if I didn't make something better with my life. I started the degree when I was 26. I worked nights at a nursing home three times a week to bring some money into the house and did the degree during the day. It was the only way we could afford to do it."

DAMAGING

The days of juggling a young family, a job and a degree are now over, with Carol's subsequent career taking her through roles in the private and voluntary care sectors before she began working for Leeds City Council's social care services 12 years ago.

Since then Carol has seen huge changes to service provision, and while she is desperate to see the damaging cuts inflicted by the Tories reversed, her focus is on making sure the people under her care are looked after as well as can be.

"Unfortunately the negatives are outside of our control. You've got to make some really hard choices and sometimes you're pushed



Photo: Jim Varney

down a route you wouldn't want to go down. But I do see a lot of positives," says Carol.

"I enjoy getting to work on projects where reducing loneliness and isolation is a key driver: making sure that older people have the best life possible open to them. That's important to me because older people don't get a fair crack of the whip and they're often not appreciated."

In her capacity as a UNISON learning rep, Carol runs a book club for members. In general she likes the role because 'there are rewards in seeing somebody flourish and access opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have

“ OLDER PEOPLE DON'T GET A FAIR CRACK OF THE WHIP ”

had'. She has attended a number of UNISON courses herself, including classes on how to be a union rep and how to handle grievance and disciplinary procedures.

Carol decided to take up an active position within the union four years ago, after receiving support from her convenor 'during a very very difficult time'. She adds: Without that support I don't think I would have stayed in the job. I felt I needed to give something back."

Even outside work, where Carol enjoys knitting, leading a Brownie troop and spending time with her six grandkids, the union is still influential.

"As young as my grandchildren are, I let them know what I'm involved in, so they know early on in life. I tell them about responsibility, fairness and equality and about why I'm in a union. Listening to my UNISON colleagues, many of their families were involved in unions so they learnt from a young age," says Carol.

"Instead of coming to it later on in life, I wish I'd had that earlier. I'd have been a rep a long time ago and I would have gone as far as I possibly could with the union. So it's good that my grandchildren know about these things now." ■



Everybody's a 'deal-maker' these days, especially Donald Trump. But the US president's kind of deal is based on dishonesty, says **Peter Carroll**

If we wanted to bring the Sermon on the Mount right up to date, we would have to replace 'Blessed are the peacemakers' with 'Blessed are the dealmakers'.

Donald Trump, the world's most powerful man, proclaims his own 'greatness', saying it is based entirely on the brilliance of his deal-making.

Meanwhile back in Brexitland, our politicians rave about their newly acquired ability to cut stunning trade deals with the world's markets.

This view of politics and of life, that everything is about how good a deal you can get for yourself, your business empire or your country, is now the only show in town.

It trumps (I know) every

other imaginable skill that a person may have worked to acquire, from scientific knowledge to the ability to speak foreign languages.

And so it follows that these mavericks and hucksters must dismiss and ridicule 'experts' whose understanding of complex issues like climate change threaten the deal-making process.

Are we already dangerously close to destroying the planet, and our own future, because of the effect of fossil fuel emissions, as people like David Attenborough constantly warn us?

Well, no, because they are only 'so-called experts', possibly involved in a conspiracy to impede the billionaire backers of



NO DOUBT
HE WAS
ABLE
TO SELL
SNOW
TO
ESKIMOS



Peter Carroll

Trump - who make their vast fortunes from oil and coal - in their ravaging of the earth.

Speaking about his father, Trump said because he didn't have a degree he was in awe of people who did.

"In most cases they didn't deserve it. My father could run rings around most academics," he announced.

No doubt he was able to sell snow to Eskimos or sand to desert Arabs and all those other noble achievements of great deal makers and connen.

That is the highest virtue there is in their world and Trump himself has demonstrated those dark arts with chilling effect in the US elections.

We know now that he is prepared to forge ahead with



DEALS ARE
ALWAYS
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BECAUSE
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THE
POWER



new coal production and oil pipelines across ancient Native American land.

By these means he says he will make America great, inevitably accelerating the melting of the ice caps and throwing the delicate ecological balance of the planet into chaos.

And he is getting his message through. To my surprise I have had conversations recently with two different people who both repeated the argument that the world has always experienced major climate change and there is no connection between fossil fuels and global warming.

I honestly thought this view had been comprehensively debunked by scientists. We can see with our own eyes the collapsing ice flows and the rapidly rising oceans, at the click of a TV remote.

DISHONESTY

But despite all this clear evidence, the argument shamelessly promoted by the fossil fuel industry persists.

Could a deal be struck with the President which meant he would stop lying to the world about climate change?

Of course not. That's the thing about being a dealer like him. Deals are always on Trump's terms because he has the power. The other guy always gets shafted in his negotiations.

And appropriately enough for this former TV celebrity, his principles are reflected everywhere in popular culture.

Numerous shows like *Deal or No Deal*, starring Noel Edmonds, in what feels like his centenary year on our screens, gently hammer home the message that deals are what it's all about.

And in towns and villages up and down the land, we get to witness real deals taking place on our screens.

"You've got this Victorian card table here Eric," says the bow-tied buyer. "It's got a £250 price tag. Can I have it for £100?"

"I can't go that low. £200 is the best I can do."

"OK, what about £200 if you throw in these two Edwardian vases?"

"Ok, it's a deal."

Obviously they are both involved in outright dishonesty, the seller for heavily overpricing his wares, and the buyer for trying to pay less than he should, so he can make a bigger profit.

Depressingly, we will continue to be bombarded with the rhetoric of the big-shot political deal makers for years to come as Brexit

rumbles on.

The problem is that only a very few people are party to such deals and very few of us understand the details being agreed.

But we will all know, and soon, if, as has been reported, Trump is poised to do a deal with the Tory Government to sell off our NHS to US private companies.

Meanwhile back in the daily grind, I lost my electronic cigarette in mysterious circumstances and a friend offered to drive to a shop and buy a replacement.

I gave him £20 and when he came back I saw on the receipt it was £25 and offered him the difference.

"You don't need to, I said I only had £20 on me and he said OK, it's a deal," he told me.

Everybody's at it, and even though my mate saved me a fiver, and I am very grateful to him, I fear for a future where the deal is the only ethical component of world politics. ■



'The Donald'



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

Mirror political columnist

More to come from spiteful Tories

Imminent changes to union law will make life at work much worse. They are intended to tighten the legal straitjacket in which UNISON is forced to operate and drastically diminish the rights of members. Sadly there's almost certainly more of this to come. The union-hating Conservatives haven't finished yet



DOGS
BARK,
BIRDS
FLY
AND
TORIES
ATTACK
WORKERS'
RIGHTS



UNISON members rarely go on strike, and there's a good reason. Being in the front line of public service is both a privilege and a burden. It's not easy to walk away from the people who need you.

But the freedom to do that, when all else fails, is still an absolutely fundamental human right, a principle of British liberty, recognised in international law.

The Tories hate unions. But they loathe and detest strikers. Industrial action stirs an atavistic hatred of something they fear is beyond their control.

So their instinctive reaction is to repress. The new Trade Union Act 2016, coming into force soon, will require a 50 per cent minimum turnout of all eligible members in ballots for industrial action – or it will be unlawful.

The law will be even tougher in 'important public services', including health and the education of under 17s. It will also make 'check-off' of union dues harder and restrict 'facility time' for workplace union reps. New members will be encouraged not to pay the political levy.

These changes are not designed to make life at work better. They are intended to tighten the legal straitjacket in which UNISON is forced to operate and diminish the rights of members.

Some want to go even further. Croydon South Tory MP Chris Philp introduced a Bill to ban all strikes in public services, including the NHS, unless a High Court judge ruled

that they are 'reasonable and proportionate'.

The proposed law was thrown out when Scottish Nationalist MPs joined Jeremy Corbyn's Opposition to vote it down, 206-127. Labour's Kevin Brennan said: "Dogs bark, birds fly and Tories attack workers' rights."

One in three Tory MPs backed the proposed anti-strike law, and the odious Transport Secretary Chris Grayling says the Government is keeping trade union law 'under review'.

So, watch this space. The union-hating Tories haven't finished yet.

ENCORE FOR ED

There's talk of a musical starring Ed Balls after his huge success in *Strictly Come Dancing*.

I wonder what they'll call it? *Moulin Hugué*, maybe, or *Fatman Of The Opera*. Ed and the *Amazing Technicolor Waistcoat* would suit.

Whatever. I'd sooner see him back in Parliament as Shadow Chancellor than tripping the light fantastic on stage. Ed, *The Comeback Kid*!

OATH FIASCO

Just when you think the politicians can't get any dafter, they come up with something that's completely bonkers.

The Government proposed to make millions of people in public service swear an oath of allegiance to 'British values'. The scheme, aimed chiefly at migrants, was greeted with widespread derision.

My bet is it will never happen. Not least because the most British value of all is to resist bullying.

BOOZE BOOTHS

Like every hospital in the country, my local,





Airedale General near Keighley, was ordered by Public Health England to enforce a 'no smoking' ban.

And, like nine out of ten other hospitals, it can't. Designated smoking booths are provided on the fringe of the site.

I don't mind the fag addicts getting their due, but when will they provide a bar for us sherbeteers? The profits would boost NHS coffers nicely.

BLESSED THERESA

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, believed that the famous Cottingley Fairies were real. So did thousands of others.

But they were a fake, created by schoolgirls Elsie Wright and her cousin Frances Griffiths with a cheap box camera in their Yorkshire garden.

The centenary of their hoax falls this year, renewing interest in the story. Elsie eventually revealed that the 'fairies' were held in place by hat pins, clearly visible in the photographs.

Some people still want to believe they're genuine, but then, some people think the Prime Minister is Mother Theresa reborn.

HULL MAP SHOCK

Hull is this year's UK City of Culture. Never my favourite place, but still well worth a visit.

A new liner terminal is proposed, aimed at the Chinese tourist market. Council director of regeneration Mark Jones says cruise operators are 'excited', adding 'Hull is on the map'.

I have news for Mr Jones. Hull has been on the map since at least 1193 AD, after being founded by the monks of Meaux Abbey.

NICE LITTLE EARNER

Should hospitals in England charge for car

parking, or should it be free like Wales and Scotland?

Charges brought in £120 million last year, but they infuriate motorists and patients' organisations.

Across Yorkshire, routine charges raised £17.8 million. The biggest earner was Sheffield Teaching Hospitals, with £2.8 million, followed by Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust, at £1.8 million. Hull and East Yorkshire and Calderdale and Huddersfield both raked in £1.5 million, Mid-Yorkshire £1.3 million and Barnsley £1.2 million.

These are big sums. But if all parking was free, the spaces would soon be filled by commuters, shoppers, tourists and casual visitors, especially in cities and towns.

There has to be a practical compromise here. Staff, who matter most, should have parking permits, especially if the hospital is poorly served by public transport.

Registered disabled, parents of sick children staying overnight, relatives of critically ill patients and some cancer patients should also qualify, but the rest should pay reasonable charges.

The comparison with Wales and Scotland is false. Densely-populated England simply can't afford to throw open hospital car parks to Uncle Tom Cobley and all.

Hospitals would become a motorists' battleground, with staff on the receiving end. Charges are unpalatable, but practical.

NURSING SLUMP

Applications to study nursing have fallen by a fifth since the Government withdrew bursaries and forced students to take out loans for their £27,000 course fees.

Ministers claimed the move would create 10,000 extra training places. The opposite is happening, to the long-term detriment of the NHS. ■

Sell - Out

Pupil numbers are rising rapidly, and school places are under tremendous pressure.

So, what does the Government do? It cuts spending per child by eight per cent in real terms by the year 2019-20.

Education Secretary Justine Greening has ordered schools to make savings of £3 BILLION, inevitably bringing job cuts and redundancies in the classroom.

Even the Government's own National Audit Office thinks this plan is dangerous for kids, warning that it will 'put educational outcomes at risk'.

Ms Greening is a Rotherham lass, educated at a local comprehensive. She's obviously let power go to her head. Instead of fighting for people from her own background, she tramples on their hopes.

An object lesson in politics: you don't get far in the Tory Party unless you sell out to the hard-faced men of the Right.

YORKSHIRE RIP-OFF



Drivers could be paying up to 50 per cent more for car insurance because of the 'ethnic profile' of the region, says **Tom Jones** of Thompsons Solicitors

Motorists living in areas with higher proportions of ethnic

minorities, including Yorkshire and Humberside, are being charged more for their car insurance, according to data analysts Webber Phillips.

The findings were published last year in a report, 'Ethnic Penalties in Motor Insurance Premiums', commissioned by Thompsons Solicitors. They showed a strong correlation between higher than average car insurance premiums and the percentage of ethnic minorities in a given postcode. This 'ethnic penalty' is affecting all people in those areas no matter what their ethnicity.

The average car insurance premium in the UK is £552 but it goes up to £859 in Bradford, one of the highest premiums in the country where ethnic minorities make up 36 per cent of adults. According to Webber Phillips, this cannot be explained by other factors such as crime rates, accident claims rates, or relative affluence (and the value of policy holders' cars).

It is scandalous that drivers could be paying a penalty simply for their ethnicity or the ethnicity of their neighbours.

Other areas being hit include Halifax with insurance premiums costing

on average £789, Leeds where they are £761, Wakefield £668, Huddersfield £664 and Sheffield £605.

Insurers have failed to provide an explanation for this huge disparity. Instead, they maintain that insurance premiums are fairly calculated and have refused to examine the possibility of an ethnic penalty.

VULNERABLE

Thompsons Solicitors has repeatedly raised this issue with insurers and has referred it to the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Financial Conduct Authority, having found the Government to be uninterested. There is no suggestion that insurers are deliberately discriminating against communities based on residents' ethnic identity. But even if this is accidental, it is only right and proper that insurers demonstrate once and for all that there is no hint of racial discrimination in how they price car insurance.

The 'ethnic penalty' is part of a worrying trend that suggests the Government isn't paying enough attention to the impact of its policies on ethnic minority groups.

For instance in the impact assessment for the recently-proposed changes to small compensation claims, the Government admits that it has failed to fully assess the effect of the change on all legally-protected minority

“
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”

groups. It has only compiled data on two out of the nine minority groups involved.

The present system allows people to claim back their legal expenses for damages above £1000, but the Government is seeking to increase that to £5000. That would mean many people would be unable to secure legal support to pursue an injury claim.

This shows the Government is trying to advance a policy without knowing how it would affect some of the most vulnerable people in society.

PENALTY

Thompsons Solicitors is urging the Government to take the 'ethnic penalty' more seriously, bearing in mind it has a legal duty to consider any potential discrimination resulting from its policies. This is vital, as the Government says any savings from the new small claims limit will be given to motorists.

If the Government goes ahead with its highly unfair proposals, and ignores the 'ethnic penalty', it would mean any savings made would continue to be allocated according to the 'ethnic penalty', with motorists in Yorkshire facing yet higher premiums as compared with other parts of the country.

Potential discrimination should not be ignored any longer. ■



Tom Jones
Head of policy
at Thompsons

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